Branding and the creation of value
an exploration of artistic careers in the visual arts market

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BRANDING AND THE CREATION OF VALUE: AN EXPLORATION OF ARTISTIC CAREERS IN THE VISUAL ARTS MARKET

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King’s College London

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Thesis submitted for Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Management Studies
Abstract

In the case of artists, the product they create is inextricably linked to their career in terms of how the art is produced, presented, consumed and positioned and valued in the market. Therefore, this study draws on the careers literature from a marketing perspective by focusing on issues of branding. There has lately been an increasing focus on art enterprises as business organisations which firmly locates discussions of the artist and the art market within the business and marketing literature. However, in the existent literature the visual arts are predominantly researched from the perspective of their economic value or of consumption. Although artists’ careers are considered relevant to branding and marketing theory, identifying how these are constructed and managed, and identity negotiated through this process is an area that needs further development. This research therefore examines artists’ careers in order to understand how value is added to their ‘product.’ Branding theory is found to be a useful lens through which to shed additional light on this process. Qualitative analysis of artists’ career trajectories in both the London and Hong Kong art markets (providing the opportunity to compare an established and emerging art market) illustrates how value is co-constructed through relationships whereby artists can build up their social capital. Findings highlight the negotiated and socially constructed nature of authenticity in the arts market as well as the dynamic and unfolding nature of careers, taking into account chance events and the complexity of the influences on an artist’s career, demonstrating a need to consider the macro-level context in the creation of value. The need for marketing not just of the product but also of the artist themselves becomes apparent and the tension this creates is explored.
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1. Introduction

“How can anyone be so insane as to produce work that nobody wants and expect people to love them and admire them for doing it?” – Howard Hodgkin, 1981

How best to define art and how it is valued is a subject of constant contention that has preoccupied some of the greatest philosophical minds in history. Plato, Aristotle, Kant and Hegel, to name a few, have all set out aesthetic theories to try and answer these questions. It is no wonder that Theodore Adorno introduced his book *Aesthetic Theory* with the claim that “it is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident” (1998:1). A brief glance through the annals of art history makes it clear that even the basic meaning of the term ‘art’ has evolved through time, necessarily implying changes in what is valued as ‘good’ art. In fact, both the notion of ‘works of art’ as a special class of objects and the idea of the ‘artist’ as a creative individual are relatively modern terms stemming from the Italian Renaissance. Since then, as the institutionalisation of art has progressed, the strictures and definitions of ‘art’ have been continually stretched from the Impressionists rejection of the academies to Duchamp and the Dada’s refutation of all traditional notions of the identity of the artist and of art, complicating how art is both perceived and valued. More recently, the ‘institutional definition of art’ as set out by George Dickie (1971) has argued that ‘art’ is a sociological category and therefore anything art schools, museums and artists define as art is considered art regardless of formal definitions. Therefore objects could become ‘works of art' by being placed in the context of art (for example in an art gallery) as evidenced by Duchamp’s urinal and Warhol’s soup can paintings. In this process the object acquires all the associations that define art, and is valued as such both socially, culturally and financially. The arts market therefore depends on these socially constructed notions of ‘art’ and ‘artists’ in its construction and valuation. This is why there is a distinction made between the physical qualities of an art object and its identity-status as an ‘art work.’ So a painting by Rubens, for example, has a physical existence as an oil painting on canvas which is separate from its identity as a masterpiece ‘work of art.’ This is due to the fact that the values attached to the work come from its context in terms of the larger art movement, genre or artistic era and location as well as the artist’s whole oeuvre or ‘body of
work.’ How art works are defined as such and how they are valued is therefore a complex process involving a range of actors.

This thesis argues that the visual arts market therefore provides for an interesting analysis of value creation which the marketing literature has traditionally assumed to be a rather static and one-dimensional process. In fact, in order to investigate how art works are valued on the market and the intangibility of these values, it is argued here that it is necessary to look at the relationship between the product (the work of art), the producer (the artist) and the career (as the definition of an object as art depends not solely on the intention of its creator but also on other institutional actors who legitimise the artist as such). This is in line with Saren and Tzokas (1998)’s view of the ‘pluri-signified’ product, whereby value emerges from the interaction between the supplier, the object and the buyer, in a continuously negotiated relationship. This thesis provides a comprehensive account of artists’ careers in the visual arts sector in order to dissect the process through which value is attached to art works on the market, thereby following the product as it moves from its creation, with inherent aesthetic value, through to market and its final economic value where it can be consumed, thereby legitimising the artist.

The introductory quote above by artist Howard Hodgkin, reveals some of the problems associated with being an artist. This is due to this valuation process, depending on culturally and socially defined notions of creativity and authenticity. In fact, creativity itself implies notions of newness, innovation and invention. The product created by the artist is therefore one whose market is uncertain and perhaps even inexistent, it often has to be created by the artist or other art world actors. This study is designed to examine the process of career creation from a marketing angle by focusing on issues of branding and positioning to shed light on the link between an artist’s career and the product he/she creates in terms of the attributes attached to the work and the effect this has on its value. Previous marketing research on the visual arts tends to take these components of value as divisible and separate, investigating either works of art (see for example Goetzman, 1993; Velthius, 2005), artists (O’Reilly, 2005; Fillis, 2006) or their careers (Throsby and Thompson, 1994; Menger, 1999, 2001). Moreover, by focusing on the agency and careers of artists, rather than on structural accounts of creativity (Hirsch, 1972; Becker, 1974; 1982; Peterson, 1997; Caves, 2000), the study also attempts to fill a void of individual accounts of creative
work in sociological and organisational studies of art (Blau, 1988). There has also been a call for a broader perspective on marketing (Saren, 2006; Brownlie & Hewer, 2007), which this thesis addresses by providing an understanding of its social and cultural aspects in terms of the active construction of artistic identity and how this translates into social and economic value. Badot, et al. (2007) go so far as to argue for the replacement of the term ‘marketing’ with ‘societing,’ as markets operate within a societal context, allowing for a more dynamic perspective. This research is therefore situated within the critical approach to marketing as set out by Saren et al. (2007) as well as arts marketing more specifically.

While there has been an increase in research on artistic careers, this has tended to focus on the performing arts, for example in the film and television industries (Dex et al. 2000; Blair, 2001; Tempest et al. 2004; Antcliff et al., 2007; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2010) and theatre (Haunschild, 2003; Eikhof & Haunschild, 2006). This research is based primarily on semi-structured interviews with, and observation of, visual arts professionals in London, the centre of the UK arts market (primarily artists but also including curators, dealers, critics and collectors). In addition, data from Hong Kong, financial centre of the emerging Chinese art market is included to compare it to the established UK market. The thesis offers rich empirical evidence while revealing the structure of relationships embedded within the art market and how this shapes the field through the valuation process. This first chapter presents the main issues and concerns of the thesis, the research questions, intended contributions of the research and also provides an outline of the thesis.

1.1 PRACTICAL CONTEXT

As will be covered in the literature review (chapter 2) this is an interesting time to study the visual arts market. The past decade has seen significant changes in the arts market in terms of an increased shift towards art being described in financial and marketing terms and used as a financial investment due to an injection of wealth in the art market, primarily from new collectors from emerging economies (Robertson & Chong, 2008; Coslor, 2009). The rapid rise of these emerging markets has led to the expanding role and popularity of art from these markets, changing the global structure of the art world. It has also resulted in a massive growth in contemporary art’s share of the global art market. These dramatic changes have resulted in the
increased commodification and marketisation of artists, making the very concept of a career as an artist conceivable and leading to new roles and relationships between the actors of the arts market with critics, museums and dealers losing out to the wealthy auction houses and collectors (Moody, 2005; Jeffri, 2005). While these roles and relationships have never been clear and there has always been a significant lack of understanding as to how the art market operates and how art is valued; the need for research in this area is particularly pertinent now as the economic recession is forcing all actors of the art market to reassess their situation in order to find a new way forward. These recent developments within the sector constitute one of the rationales for my study, which is to provide a timely insight into the practical reality of the complex business relationships involved in the arts market, by looking at how and which art works are legitimised to achieve value in the market. They have also led to the focus of this research centring on the contemporary art market of the past decade and more specifically the British and Chinese contemporary art markets.

The choice of the UK and China is significant in that the initial analysis of artprice.com\(^1\) and artfacts.net\(^2\) shows that the most successful living artists, financially and critically, are currently from the UK and China (Artprice, 2010; Artfacts, 2010; Bull, 2011). Furthermore, the importance of London as a key ‘global node’ in the art market in terms of providing the networks, associations and facilities for emerging artworks has been noted (Montgomery & Robinson, 1993; While, 2003; Artprice, 2009). Over the past ten years the London market has grown rapidly concurrent with the change in London as a financial centre, so much so that it overtook New York as the leader on the art market revenue map in 2009 (Artprice, 2010; Griffin, 2008). The Chinese art market has also been chosen due to its rapid emergence in the past decade, providing scope for analysis as to which networks operate in the construction and legitimisation of new markets, in its annual survey of the art market, Artprice ranked it as the new global leader in 2010 with a share of 33% of global sales (Artprice, 2011). Due in large part to Hong Kong’s financial strength and its position as one of the world’s most attractive investment destinations, there has been an explosion in the popularity and value of Chinese art with the price index for Chinese contemporary art

\(^{1}\) Artprice.com is the world leader in art market information, which holds the largest database of auction results, price levels and indices covering 405,000 artists, showing the most successful artists in terms of economic value.

\(^{2}\) Artfacts.net rates 235,000 artists worldwide in terms of the critical attention they receive by focusing on how much they exhibit, an indicator of their social value.
rising 583% between January 2004 and January 2009 (“New markets,” 2009). The data collected for the Chinese art market therefore centred on Hong Kong which is considered the key hub for the Asian art market. This is largely due to the fact that it is the Asian base for both the major auction houses, Sotheby’s and Christie’s. Its position has been further reinforced since the arrival of the Hong Kong Art Fair in 2008, whose growth and success can be recognised in the fact that it has now been taken over by the Art Basel brand, which runs the most prestigious art fair in the world (Gerlis & Seno, 2011). Hong Kong was selected as a case study for two main reasons. Firstly, as the financial centre of the Chinese art market and its birthplace in terms of the contemporary Chinese art market (due to the political situation in the mainland, the art had to go through Hong Kong in order to reach the marketplace), it allows for a study of the rise of the Chinese art market (Joy & Sherry, 2004). Secondly, despite record-breaking auction sales, a thriving annual art fair and an increasing number of major galleries in the city, the local arts scene is still small and underdeveloped. Hong Kong artists have not reached the near-celebrity status of their mainland peers, and are still emerging within the wider Chinese emerging market. This provides the study with a comprehensive overview of artists’ career trajectories within an emerging market. Moreover, this is considered a crucial time for the growth of the Hong Kong arts scene as the government is planning to invest in its cultural industries, to try and make Hong Kong a cultural ‘hub,’ most notably with the building of the West Kowloon Cultural District (Spalding, 2010). By comparing the London and Hong Kong art markets, it will be interesting to analyse how the structure of the art market affects artists’ career trajectories and how their work is valued.

1.2 THEORETICAL CONTEXT

Concurrent with the ‘financialisation’ of the art world there has been an increased focus on art enterprises as business organisations which firmly locates discussions of the artist and the art market within the business and marketing literature (see Goetzman, 1993; Fraser, 2000; Florida, 2002; Rentschler, 2002; O’Reilly, 2004; Schroeder, 2005; Thompson, 2008; Bradshaw & Holbrook, 2008; Chong, 2010). DiMaggio (1994) notes a similar increase in the number of articles addressing cultural topics in the economics literature. This thesis is positioned within the field of arts marketing. Arts marketing came about due to a perceived failure in the marketing concept to explain the behaviour of small firms, non-profit and arts
organisations (Rentschler, 1998). The underlying concept of the customer and profitability found in mainstream marketing theories did not fit with the practical realities of these types of business. In particular, the notion of customer orientation is difficult to reconcile with the Romantic view of artistic production. Instead of viewing marketing as purely a transaction-based activity based on customer wants, arts marketing has moved on from simply imposing the marketing concept onto arts organisations, instead looking towards a longer-term relationship-building philosophy providing various publics with new markets (Rentschler et al., 2002; Rentschler & Radbourne, 2008). As a result of the new directions embraced in arts marketing in the past twenty years or so, valuable lessons have been demonstrated in terms of the role creativity plays not simply in the creation of the artistic product but on the business processes of a variety of organisations (Fillis, 2002; 2011). Moreover, as there has been growing interest on the relationship between art/culture and the market, there has been an acknowledgment of the complexity of these issues. These alternative marketing frameworks have informed both theory and practice within arts marketing in particular as well as the wider remit of marketing in general (Hirschman, 1983; Brown & Patterson, 2000; Kolb, 2005; Colbert 2007; O’Reilly & Kerrigan, 2010). In line with this, O’Reilly (2005) and Fillis (2006), call for more in-depth analysis of how creative entrepreneurial marketers at the individual level can offer alternative models of marketing, arguing that while rational, linear marketing decision making and strategy play a role, due to the imperfect knowledge and impaired views of the future on which these processes are based, creative, non-linear, managerial judgment also needs to be explored. This thesis takes this argument to heart, focusing on the visual arts market due to the fact that with a brief review of the literature, it became immediately apparent that the artist, career and product created are to a large extent inseparable in terms of how they are produced, valued, consumed, presented and positioned in the market. In order to examine this further, the thesis borrows from career theory to shape the investigation.

Artists’ careers are very much overlooked in the management literature yet they demonstrate some unique labour market activities: the overwhelming majority of artists have to balance multiple jobholding behaviour and sources of earnings, allocation of time and costs of producing their work; they must take personal control of their career management, where responsibility for career development lies with the
individual not the organisation, make continuous decisions as whether to follow the public or private market path and who to work with and sell to; have high levels of tolerance for uncertainty as there are no set career trajectories to follow and; as the economic situation of being an artist is generally unfavourable, have different ways of defining career success (Menger, 1999; Abbing, 2002; Jeffri, 2005). Terms such as ‘boundaryless career’ (Arthur, 1994) and ‘protean career’ (Hall, 2004) refer to different aspects of this apparently new phenomenon; the need for the individual to enhance their human capital by actively navigating their career, where the individual’s own personal career choices and search for self-fulfilment are the unifying or integrative elements in his or her life. Careers in this sense are reconceptualised as an accumulation of knowledge based on life-long learning (which includes social capital which is essential for artists’ careers and will be discussed below) rather than just as series of work experiences. There has been a call for further in-depth qualitative research on how individuals’ careers unfold in different types of organisations and industries (Eby et al., 2003). As Bridgstock (2005) points out, artists are an ideal group to study for research into this new pattern of career. Artists are also steeped historically in the values of communication, inventiveness and immaterial labour that Virno (2007) highlights in his account of how the world works today in the information, service and cultural economies that are distinctive features of contemporary capitalism. Moreover, this type of career means that any progression in the career is heavily reliant on self-marketing due to its emphasis on entrepreneurialism and networking as well as requiring flexibility for quick adaptation to the external environment to capitalise on any marketing opportunities. For example, Brown (2011) acknowledges the importance of marketing strategies in the cultural industries in general, focusing on the book business and the role marketing plays in the “manufacturing” of bestsellers. Similarly, visual artists must clearly position themselves and their work within the arts market in order to have their work valued. Insights from this study on the career of the artist therefore have wider implications, both in terms of sharing characteristics with academic careers and other service industry careers where there is a separation of value derived from individual skills and labour and for organisations negotiating the individual versus organisational identity tightrope.
Boundaryless career theory suggests that as traditional boundaries of hierarchy, function and geography are eroding, in their place has emerged a new set of boundaries which are more subjectively and psychologically defined, so a clearer sense of identity is necessary to navigate and shape the “boundaryless” career (Dobrow & Higgins, 2005; Lips-Wiersma & McMorland, 2006). It therefore emphasises pragmatic choice and the maximising of opportunities for personal fulfilment on the basis of subjective dimensions and the development of ‘Brand Me’ in terms of adapting one’s identity to achieve psychological success (Lips-Wiersma & McMorland, 2006). Lips-Wiersma and McMorland argue that qualitative narrative or biographical methods are necessary to understand these subjective objectives. Artists’ careers can provide a further understanding of this as they are caught between two worlds, the critical world from which they derive psychological success and the financial market from which they derive economic success; as they negotiate these two spheres, artists must create a brand image that embraces both the fulfilment of self and economic exchange (Joy & Sherry, 2003; Robertson & Chong, 2008). The tension between the artistic and commercial spheres is of long-standing interest to arts marketers (a recent example being Bradshaw, McDonagh & Marshall’s (2006) study of the notion of artistic alienation), as value is constructed through the interplay of both spheres it therefore necessitates a complex act of negotiation by the artist. While there has been an increased interest in the relationship between identity and consumption of symbolic products (Featherstone, 1992; Douglas & Isherwood, 1996; Goulding et al., 2004; Saren & Tzokas, 2010), this thesis examines the broader process through which symbolic products are created and how their consumption feeds back into the identity of the producer in an interactive loop, moving beyond conventional marketing models.

Goffman (1959)’s work has dealt with the dynamics of self-presentation and has paved the way in recognising the importance of image as a conveyor of an identity. In line with this, Plattner (1998) finds that some artists make work primarily because their identity and self-respect are defined by their work. Schroeder (2005) continues in this tradition, acknowledging the relevance of artists’ image management on branding theory and turns to artists for insights into brands, marketing and strategy in his research. However, there is still little research in this field and although Schroeder has demonstrated that artists are brands and that they successfully manage
these brand images, there is still little understanding of how these images are constructed and managed and identity negotiated through them. Svejenova (2005) finds that an artist must fabricate authenticity in his/her work through the duality of identity expression and image manufacturing, negotiating it through social construction and the influence of several ‘millieus’ such as careers, market and industry structure, amongst others. Several studies have acknowledged the importance of authenticity for careers but they have failed to specify the process by which authenticity-driven careers are shaped over time, and the manufactured, negotiated and socially constructed nature of authenticity. Hede and Thyne (2010) specifically suggest that there is a need for further research within the arts sector on the processes through which the authentic and inauthentic are negotiated by producers and consumers. The importance of understanding identity as the product of an unfolding, dynamic process has also been highlighted by careers researchers, and leader development (Hall, 2004). Furthermore, Hackley (2001) argues there is a need for greater acceptance of social constructionist approaches to marketing. This research also connects to the wider movements in economic sociology to analyse and construct organisational fields and address the social construction of markets of all kinds (DiMaggio, 1991).

There has been a growing interest in the role of social and business relationships within the marketing and international business literature in recent years (Batt & Purchase, 2004). In her discussion of the individual and situational antecedents of identity development, Ibarra calls for empirical, organisational research that investigates the connections between networks and identity (Ibarra 1999; Ibarra 2003). Bird also points out the need to investigate the way networks influence boundaryless careers (1994). Indeed, networks may provide a key means by which people can explore their possible selves and construct and develop their professional identities, acquiring the ability to process feedback about the self (Hall, 2002). Given that networks in the context of careers by definition unfold over time, the element of time necessarily plays a key role and necessitates a longitudinal view rather than a snapshot view of an individual’s network and professional identity at a single point in time, thus the necessity of looking at artists at different stages in their career trajectories; a critique of network theory will be discussed further in the literature review. The emphasis of this study will therefore be on the wider notion of
relationships rather than a static view of networks. This is in line with the current marketing literature, particularly Vargo and Lusch’s (2004) new dominant logic for marketing which focuses on the co-creation of value, relationships and networks. According to this, value is participatory and dynamic, defined by and co-created, rather than embedded in the output. Moreover, Vargo and Lusch also acknowledge an increased emphasis on brand identification, value perception and the role of social and relational norms in value creation. While the way in which art is valued can provide an example of this theory in practice, this thesis argues that the reality is actually more complex than this theory allows for and that service-dominant logic is still too consumer-centred. As Hirschman (1983) points out, the mainstream marketing concept is not applicable to artists because they do not bring forth products in response to the desires or interests of consumers but due to self-fulfilment of the creative process. Any analysis of the marketing of a work of art therefore needs to also consider the artist themself. Ultimately though, as Colbert (2007) states, the arts industry is “product-driven but market sensitive and customer oriented” (2007:ix) thus the need for a relational marketing perspective acknowledging the inextricable link between production and consumption delineating how value is produced interactively through this process; this thesis therefore adopts both mainstream and arts marketing approaches. Similarly, although cultural branding theory (based on Holt’s 2004 book) is found to be the most applicable to this research due to the complexity and contradictions particularly inherent to cultural products in terms of their historical and social contexts, mainstream branding is also used. In fact, the importance of abstract associations to brand identity central to mind-share branding, the emotional and rational aspects of branding emphasised by emotional branding and the fashion and trend-based nature reliant on contagion found in viral branding all play a part in how a work of art appreciates in value. By focusing on the interplay between the product, the career and the producer (the artist), this thesis aims at untangling the process through which value is created, co-created, experienced and consumed.

When the individual takes personal responsibility for their career development outside the traditional, bounded employment environment, the concept of social capital becomes important as it highlights the value of social relations and the role of cooperation to increase productivity which eventually translates to economic benefits (Bourdieu, 1984; Burt, 1992). Social capital, is defined by Bourdieu as “the aggregate
of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (1984:249). Possessors of social capital have advantages and therefore individuals deliberately construct their sociability in order to build up their social capital. This is not necessarily done consciously, rather, Bourdieu argues, it is a result of individuals’ habitus being enacted within a particular field. Habitus refers to the social context in which a social actor is socialised. Out of habitus comes field, the manner in which one integrates and displays their habitus. To this end, it is the social exchange and interaction between two or more social actors. So individuals accumulate social capital by involving themselves in a social network, adhering to the norms of that group, allowing them access to resources, for example social relationships, gained over time. This reiterates and reproduces the stratification of society, and social capital is therefore used to produce or reproduce inequality, demonstrating how people gain access to powerful positions through the direct and indirect employment of social connections (Bourdieu, 1984). While Bourdieu looks at this process in relation to the consumption of art, demonstrating that taste is socially constructed, it is also relevant to the production of art. As we shall examine in this thesis, issues of social capital, relationships and power are extremely important to artistic careers because of the network structure of the art world and the need to be socialised into it. Individuals in boundaryless careers must recurrently seek jobs and information regarding new job opportunities and so will often depend on their personal and professional contact networks for information about the next lead in their career trajectories (Menger, 1999; Bridgstock, 2005). Svejenova (2005) notes that this is particularly important in the creative industries where the creation of careers takes place in project networks and we must therefore recognise the importance of interaction between both the artist and audience and the artist and collaborators. Such interactions can have an impact on the artistic identity of the artist and the shaping of his or her career. Studies of how artists use their social and professional networks to develop their careers are not numerous, but there is some empirical evidence that artists’ social capital does have a strong impact on whether they continue to be employed in the arts and how successful they are in the field (Giuffre, 1999). Although “knowing whom” seems to be considered important, there are no studies to date on the source of this notion in the artist’s psyche and whether and to what extent they implement it in their personal career management, how artists accumulate and
utilise that social capital and indeed which other career skills they use in their personal career management as well as which sources of information they access to hone their skills.

A small number of authors (Menger, 2001; Fillis, 2004; O’Reilly, 2005) have recently suggested that career-management skills and competencies as well as broader aspects of the artist’s identity and characteristics will also have an effect on the artist’s career outcomes but there is still a lack of work that demonstrates the links between aspects of the artist and success. This thesis takes up Bridgstock’s (2005) call for research into the effectiveness of artists in navigating their boundaryless careers and accessing the market, a question that, as she points out, has yet to be examined in any systematic way. The research takes a processual approach in that it traces the product as it is valued on the art market in relationship to the career trajectory, addressing value as less static and more of a dynamic moving target than the existing literature in line with Fitchett and Saren’s (1998) suggestion that there is a need to reconsider the ways in which various “manifestations of value are constructed, produced and consumed” (333). While, as noted by Tzokas and Saren (1999), there is wide agreement of the centrality of value in the marketing concept, there has been little research investigating how it is produced, delivered, consumed and perceived.

1.3 The Research Questions

In light of such issues, this thesis will argue that there is an empirical, methodological and practical need for an improved understanding of how artists can manage and brand their careers in order to increase the value of their work. Thus, this thesis will work towards adding to the literature by unpacking what the underlying structure of artists’ career trajectories entails and how they access the market. As such, the overarching concern of the research presented in this thesis is as follows:

How do artists construct and manage their brand image? How is identity and authenticity negotiated through it to acquire value?

In order to address this, the research itself has been guided by three more explicit questions, which serve to operationalise the central concern of this thesis:

1. How are authenticity-driven careers shaped over time and how are artists legitimised?
2. How do artists define subjective career success in their brand image in order to negotiate between financial and non-financial recognition for their practice?

3. What is the relationship between an artist’s career and the product they create?

In order to respond to these three research questions, this thesis will argue that insight into these lines of inquiry is best achieved by using the sociological perspective on ‘career trajectories,’ borrowed from the Chicago School to address the process through which a work of art is valued contingent on access to networks. The thesis aims to combine and contribute to a number of different analytical fields that are rarely in mutual dialogue: the main focus being on marketing and management studies but also using theories from the sociology of work and cultural studies. This analytical perspective will be utilised to explore empirical data gathered from semi-structured interviews and observational methods with a variety of arts market professionals in London and Hong Kong.

This research looks at artists’ careers both on the macro political, economic, social and cultural level of institutional conditions such as the effects of the visual arts industry, media, coverage and government involvement, and also at the micro-level of interactions between individual artists, curators, critics and collectors. This complexity makes it inappropriate to apply only one methodology or research method. Thus this project adopts a multi-dimensional approach structured by a model with three dimensions: the first covers how artists ‘become’ artists and form their artistic identities on an individual level and how they position themselves as authentic on the market; the second follows how these identities are shaped by the relationships that structure the art market which endorse and legitimise artists’ work to give it value; and the third uses branding theory to explore the relationship between these identities and the international market as the art is consumed. How can the multi-platform approach outlined above be conducted? It is another important objective of this project to propose an appropriate research design to answer this question. Because the major goal of the study is to analyse art professionals own accounts of the art market (due to the lack of transparency in this area), a qualitative rather than quantitative research method is used as will be set out in the methodology.
1.4 INTENDED CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE RESEARCH

While it has been noted above that there has been an increase in literature about the arts from a business and marketing perspective, the visual arts are still predominantly researched from the perspective of their economic value or of consumption (Menger, 1999; Wijnberg & Gemser, 2000; Velthius, 2005; Kottasz et al., 2007). Moreover, as mentioned above there is little research focusing on artists’ careers. While entrepreneurialism (Fillis, 2004), social capital (Becker, 1982) and networking (Giuffre, 1999) have all been connected to artists’ careers in the literature, there is a lack of understanding as to how artists can use these skills to navigate their careers and access the market. Within the last several years, there has been a call for research that includes not only a subjective viewpoint of careers (Arthur, 1994; Hall 2002; Lips-Wiersma & McMorland, 2006) but also the extension of career research beyond the confines of a particular organisation (Arthur and Rousseau 1996). Thus the present research contributes both to marketing research by understanding how artists access the market and to careers research by exploring a subjective element of careers and the clarity of professional identity which transcends organisational boundaries in order to shed light on how this relates to artists’ positioning in the market. In addition, by critically examining artists’ career trajectories, this thesis will seek to provide a critique of boundaryless career research which will be applicable beyond the arts sector.

Although the significance of close relationships in the field has been noted in various studies (Jyrama 2002; Buck, 2004; Velthius, 2005; Chong, 2005), it is an area that needs further development, particularly due to the fact that because the art market is unregulated, the value attached to a piece of art and its artist is dependent on the endorsement of a series of experts. This thesis aims to contribute to the literature within the arts marketing field and, more specifically, on that which looks at the way artists and their artworks accrue value in the market through accumulation of social capital. In so doing, it offers empirical data on how art is valued and legitimised, issues of personal career management and an analysis that informs observations on such data, allowing for an in-depth understanding of how value is co-created and consists of social as well as economic factors. As a sector reliant on experts (artists, curators, academics, art teachers, critics, collectors and dealers), the process through which art is valued is an area that provides much illumination in a market whose
workings are considered impenetrable by outsiders to the field (Buck, 2004; Robertson, 2005).

This thesis also seeks to add to debates around branding theory by critically exploring the methods used in the research presented here and treating the issue of time and the manufactured and socially constructed nature of identity and authenticity in the construction of value. Moreover, it is also hoped that answers to the research questions might provide a better understand of both the relevance and value of some differing theoretical perspectives on arts marketing. There have been few empirical studies that explore how individual visual artists interact with their market, and the significance, if any, of marketing to individual artists. By taking the artist’s career trajectory as the focus of this research, the aim is to analyse the ways artists access the market and unpick the relationship between the product and the career in the creation of value on the art market. And finally, this thesis endeavours to contribute to the field by offering an examination of the emerging Hong Kong art market of which there is still little Western academic research. Given the fact that the models of the creative sectors in the literature tend to be applied and developed in a Western context, and research in non-Western or developing areas is relatively limited, comparing the developed market of the UK and the emerging one in Hong Kong, aims to give an original element to the research. However, before attempting to make such contributions, it is of utmost importance to establish knowledge of how value is attributed to art in the visual arts market. Determining this is the central goal of this thesis.

1.5 Structure of this Thesis

This thesis comprises of two main parts. The first is a comprehensive study of associated theoretical concepts, existing literature, approaches to the study of the arts market, an analysis of the current visual arts market and a detailed introduction of the methodology and rationale of the empirical research design. This set of chapters function as the framework for the second part of the thesis. The second part consists of the analysis of the data collected from the respondents, who were recruited to recount their views on how works of art are valued on the visual arts market. The four chapters in the second part of the thesis therefore offer a detailed examination and analysis of the meanings and significance of this data.
Chapter 2 of this thesis offers a review of a broad range of literature which is intended, firstly, to set this thesis within a theoretical perspective that places value on the significance of a network of experts in creating an endorsement process by which to value art, and, in particular, drawing on the work of Chong and Robertson (2008), Velthius (2005), Becker (1982) and Crane (1987). It also briefly surveys the current state of the visual arts market. Finally, through literature such as Giuffre (1999) and the Chicago School (Hughes, 1958; Becker, 1963 and Goffman, 1968), it explores the issue of time in network analysis in order to work towards the creation of an analytical framework for the thesis based on the notion of career trajectories. This includes relevant literature on identity construction and branding through which artists manage their careers (Holt, 2004; Fillis, 2004; Schroeder, 2005).

Chapter 3 specifies the methods of data collection employed in this research, both the line of reasoning for their use and the details involved in the process.

Chapter 4 focuses on artistic careers and the positioning of artists in the art world. By following artists’ career trajectories from art school to museum shows and sales, the chapter outlines the contingencies on which an artist’s success and status depends and how the artistic identity is formed, managed and maintained throughout the career. The issue of authenticity is found to be an integral part of an artist’s success and what exactly authenticity consists of in the art world is examined in detail. The chapter also explores the subjective elements of artists’ careers in order to understand the construction of their professional identity.

Chapter 5 examines the social relationships that underlie an artist’s career trajectory. By understanding the way social capital is accumulated through the endorsement process and untangling the web of relationships of which the endorsement process is comprised, we can see the underlying ideologies through which art is valued and how artists can manage this process. The chapter emphasises the importance of conceptualising value as a social phenomenon that exists with a historical and cultural context.

Chapter 6 looks at issues of branding and art works’ final value on the market. It investigates how artists work with other professionals to construct their brand, examining how the relationship between the product and the career is at the centre of how the brand is consumed and valued on the market.
Finally, chapter 7 discusses the work presented in this thesis. Firstly, it reviews and summarises the findings and observations offered which aim to provide answers to the research questions. In so doing, it begins to address the question of how artists construct and manage their brand image and how identity and authenticity is negotiated through this process to acquire value. Secondly, drawing on the observations of this thesis, it comments on the theoretical foundation of this research. Thirdly, in seeking to contribute to practice it looks at what both the theory and empirical observations of this research might have to say in regards to current practices in the arts market. In so doing, it is hoped that the work presented in this thesis might enable a better understanding of both artistic careers and their marketing practices and ways of studying such activity. Finally, it positions the thesis within the current marketing literature, suggesting further avenues of research and revisiting the methods used and to explore their strengths and weaknesses.
2. Critical Analysis of the Literature on the Visual Arts Market

As discussed in the introduction, recent research in arts marketing has embraced alternative, critical marketing models which pay more attention to issues such as relationships, creativity and enterprise than the mainstream model (Hirschman, 1983; Brown & Patterson, 2000; Rentschler et al., 2002; Kolb, 2005; O’Reilly, 2005; Fillis; 2006; Colbert 2007; Rentschler & Radbourne, 2008; O’Reilly & Kerrigan, 2010). This thesis is positioned within these new areas of research. The arts have been demonstrated to be an engaging area for new marketing research by exploring the aesthetic and philosophic dimensions of markets in terms of experience of consumption (Brown & Patterson, 2000; Fillis, 2002; Bradshaw & Holbrook, 2008; Brown). While the visual arts have been discussed in terms of the concept of value, this has been overwhelmingly from a perspective of financial worth or consumption, an overview of which will be provided in this chapter (Menger, 1999; Wijnberg & Gemser, 2000; Velthius, 2005; Kottasz et al., 2007). While this research acknowledges that the visual arts market has a complex and unique set of value systems, as will be explored in this chapter, taking into account a production perspective by looking at visual artists’ careers (something which is missing in the literature which is overwhelmingly focused on the literary arts or film and theatre) allows for a more nuanced view of value creation. The central concern of the research undertaken is to unpack artists’ career trajectories and more specifically, to examine how their work is valued in the visual arts market. This involves a detailed examination of how artists are positioned in the market both through their own self-marketing efforts and the activities of experts in the arts market, touching on issues of branding. As of yet the literature fails to take into account these marketing concerns. This chapter focuses on various methods and theories that might aid in doing so. Firstly, this literature review aims to unpack the complexity of the art market’s value system. In so doing, it sets the research presented in this thesis into a sociological framework that examines the endorsement process a work of art must go through in order to reach its final value. Secondly, this chapter will explore the underlying structure that characterises the art market. Thirdly, this chapter will consider current trends in the art market that shape this thesis and finally, it will end by reflecting on these theories to set out the analytical framework for the study. Arts marketing researchers such as O’Reilly and Kerrigan (2010) have highlighted the need for
researchers in the field of arts marketing to engage with literature from the arts field that they are researching, this study is therefore firmly located in the visual arts field and as such a range of literature from the visual arts, art history and the sociology of art is brought together in order to consider wider theoretical implications for the field of arts marketing.

2.1 The Art Market and Its Endorsement Process

Most studies of the art market begin by stating how unlike any other market it is, even when compared to other cultural markets such as the film or publishing industry (Hirschman, 1983; Velthius, 2005). Its value systems are complex and the evaluation process through which works of art are recognised has little or nothing to do with the materials or conventions used to construct them, their value is purely extrinsic. Despite the art market being an increasingly valuable sector in the global economy, estimated at €42.2 billion in 2008 (McAndrew, 2010), it is the least transparent and least regulated major commercial activity in the world (Buck, 2004). There is no required background, no certification or standard code of procedure among dealers; even in larger galleries the way that business is conducted is often surprisingly informal and written contracts are rare. This lack of accountability makes gathering information difficult and complex. This also explains why trust is one of the values that is accorded the most importance in the art world due to its collaborative nature (Buck, 2004; Velthius, 2005; Thompson, 2008). Since the 1960’s there has been a steady increase in the number of artists (Alper & Wassall, 2006) driven by the market opportunities discussed further below which include the rise of conceptual art whereby anyone, anywhere can be an artist regardless of technical skill and the high visibility of the most prominent artists who began to be seen as social assets rather than just bohemians (Zukin, 1982; Menger, 1999). The commercialisation of art and the subsequent professionalisation of the artist demonstrate a need to evaluate and differentiate artists in valuing their work through an endorsement process.

The endorsement process became increasingly important when the criteria of what constitutes an art piece moved from aesthetic to innovation in the 19th century, whereby anyone could legitimately expect to be an artist, making art more professionalised and democratised, opening art as a career (Wijnberg & Gemser, 2000). It is well documented that the number of people calling themselves artists has
vastly increased as the parameters of this identity have changed (Baumann, 2006). As a result of ever-increasing numbers of people calling themselves ‘artists’ and the lack of regulation in the art market, endorsement became increasingly necessary to filter the bad from the good (Robertson & Chong, 2008). It is also largely accepted and documented that recognition of art is a social process that cannot be reduced to a reflection of artistic merit and this recognition can wax and wane (Baumann, 2006). How art is legitimised, the process through which the new and unaccepted is rendered valid and accepted is concerned with how cultural productions are repositioned – both institutionally and intellectually through a consensus, judgment is a shared responsibility. Legitimacy, of course, is not a dichotomous variable, but rather can be present in widely varying amounts and among various constituencies so there may be varying degrees of legitimacy. Since the pioneering work of both Becker (1982) and Bourdieu (1993), we have understood that art worlds and cultural fields are sites of collective action. Therefore, in order to understand the nature of cultural production and evaluation, we need to analyse the institutional and social relations of the art world. Cultural production and reception are acts that are inherently collective, and the legitimation of culture is always achieved collectively.

The endorsement process comprises of a network of experts within both public and private sectors (artists, curators, academics, art teachers, critics, collectors and dealers) who make up a constantly shifting series of subgroups that negotiate the value of a work to decide whether it is worthy of a place in art history. In this sense the endorsement process structures the art market and can be considered an ‘organisational field’ (DiMaggio, 1991) which maps out the range of actors that take an art work from its inception to its final resting place. In an artist’s career, defined by Goffman (1968) as “any social strand of any person’s course through life,” these experts participate fatefuly in establishing (or equally fatefuly in not doing so) the artist’s success, occurring in conjunction with certain career contingencies such as getting a dealer, getting into a collection or a museum, getting a good review, etc. (119). As Giuffre (1999) discusses, artists’ careers are not fixed in status but are rather a series of transitions through positions in a larger art world network, which is continuously changing shape. This view is in line with the chaos theory of careers (Pryor & Bright, 2003) and fits in well with Bourdieu’s (1984) conception of an ‘artistic field’ as a network that is continuously changing shape as actors reposition
themselves relative to each other. Although this is acknowledged, there is no account of how things happen or why particular connections exist, this is why the thesis will use individual career trajectories to untangle how these relationships are commenced and managed and to acknowledge their unpredictable nature.

As Currid (2007) discusses, cultural value is not just an economic act but instead part of an intense social process of valorisation and legitimisation, as art is a taste-driven product it relies on subjective evaluation by gatekeepers (Jyrama, 2002). This relates to Hume’s (1961) discussion of the standard of taste where he argued that while what made art great was a matter of opinion, some opinions were better than others due to a greater awareness and experience of the works, conventions and genres in question. Legitimisation is particularly important when the product is innovative as is the case for cultural products (Elfring & Hulsink, 2003:410). Buck (2004) and Robertson (2005) agree that the most likely route for the endorsement process to take starts at art school. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) found that once a field becomes well established there is a push towards homogenisation to attain legitimacy as seems to be the case here where artists model themselves after others they perceive to be successful. As a result, since the 1960’s MFA degrees have become the first legitimator in an artist’s career (which itself is a sign of the professionalisation of the artistic occupation according to Abbott, 1988), followed by awards and residencies, representation by a primary dealer, reviews and features in art magazines, inclusion in prestigious private collections, museum validation in the form of group or solo shows, international exposure at well-attended biennials and art fairs, and the appreciation signalled by strong resale interest at auction. This chain of events creates a socialisation process which legitimises the artist (Hughes, 1958; Dowling and Pfeffer, 1975; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Galenson, 2005). Prices rise as you go up the endorsement chain, what you are paying for is not the art but the assurance of its quality. Economic value emerges from within the social system (Currid, 2007). While the artist is the most important origin of a work, the hands through which the work passes and this history of past relationships are essential to the way in which it accrues value and status. Indeed, provenance is everything in art: when it is lost or broken, the work’s status and consequent value are threatened.

The journey through this volatile process therefore begins with art school where the artist can attract the attention of art school teachers and peers as shown in figure
2.1 below. As Buck (2004) points out, the art school degree show is a crucial early showcase and may even be where the artist is taken on by a dealer. A dealer is considered critical for artists who want their work shown as a proactive dealer will expend considerable time, effort and resources in attempting to raise the artist’s profile in the long-term, both commercially among private collectors and at the many international art fairs, which form an essential international showcase and meeting point for collectors (Velthius, 2005). The dealer will also, critically, give the artist greater exposure to artist peers and art professionals who attend exhibitions at the gallery, the dealer is the artist’s springboard to joining the art community, the gatekeeper to collectors and also to critics and institutions (Jyrama, 2002; Chong, 2005). As Velthius (2005) sums it up: “art dealers actively stimulate critical acclaim for their artists by inserting their work into the art world’s taste-making machinery: they induce critics to write about the shows, they try to interest museum curators in exhibiting the artist’s work, and they ask influential collectors to recommend the artist’s work to others” (41). This explains why artists and dealers tend to have a highly personal relationship that extends far beyond the mere selling of work as explored by White and White (1965) in their sociological analysis and why the personal identity of the dealer is tightly interwoven with the identity and success of the gallery (Jyrama, 2002). This process also explains why prestige for the artist is defined in large part by the status of the gallery to which he or she is tied as representation by a high-status gallery is often the catalyst for other markers of success, such as notice by critics and acquisitions by prestigious collectors or museums (Giuffre, 1999).

The next step leads to further institutional recognition by a regional independently-curated gallery. An exhibition in a well-regarded public gallery is generally thought of as more significant for an artist’s career, and accruing more endorsement than a show in a commercial space. This is due both to the wider audiences attracted by public galleries as well as to the enduring reputation of these institutions as objective due to their being protected from the concerns of the market. The curator is the key player in a system that imbues art with aesthetic significance (Joy & Sherry, 2003; Buck, 2004). In the complex world of identifying and valuing cultural and artistic significance, it is the curator who filters through the ‘noise’ to uncover the hidden gems that are relevant, and then presents that information in a
meaningful way. Throughout this process, the artwork will generate a substantial trail of documentation in the form of exhibition catalogues, promotional and educational literature and critical coverage. Although not as overt as a few decades ago, the role of the critic is still an important one and reviews and profiles in the press are nonetheless a crucial part of the endorsement process (which is why dealers often encourage critics and journalists to review the work) (Joy & Sherry, 2003; Buck, 2004). Aesthetic innovations require critical writing to persuade viewers and collectors of their value. Criticism performs a gate-keeping function that evaluates art against what has gone before it and locates it within a specific discourse, protecting the art from becoming a commodity. Competitions and awards are also a part of the endorsement process and are an important form of recognition, helping artists gain visibility and reputation, clarifying their cultural worth, pointing to the potential for long-lasting greatness and raising the prices of their work (Joy & Sherry, 2003; Thompson, 2008; Thornton, 2008).

Inclusion in prestigious collections is also a legitimater in an artist’s career. Grampp (1989) identifies three reasons why collectors buy art: aesthetic values, social values (such as hoping to attain visibility in the group ‘owners of important art,’ a behaviour found as far back as the Victorian period (Reitlinger, 1961)) and economic values (investment). Artists’ reputations can be significantly enhanced or contaminated by the people who own their work (Moody, 2005; Chong, 2008). As Currid (2007) points out, while value for cultural goods is significantly controlled by quantity and access, who desires and is able to consume these goods is of particular importance. The British art magazine ArtReview concluded in its December 2002 issue that collectors Charles Saatchi, Francois Pinault and Ronald Lauder were the three most influential figures in the art world. This shows the importance placed on the art market’s consumers (Robertson & Chong, 2008). Important collectors can create an instant reputation for an artist. Indeed, these so called ‘supercollectors’ blur the distinction between patron, collector and dealer/speculator (While, 2003). Media articles, auction houses and collectors may describe a piece of art or an artist as ‘collected by Saatchi’ or ‘owned by Saatchi’. Each description is likely to drive up prices for the artist’s work (Velthius 2005). Saatchi is a relevant example for both the

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3 The recent Yves Saint Laurent Sale at Christie’s is a case in point. Achieving record results, the highest-ever single-owner sale has been dubbed the “sale of the century” and owed at least as much to the YSL mystique as to the decorative allure of the lots (Tully, 2009).
UK and Chinese art markets. In the UK he is widely credited with creating the market for the Young British Artists. If we take Art Basel 2010 (generally considered the most prestigious art fair) as a snapshot of the market, nearly two-thirds of the artists included in Saatchi’s ‘Sensation’ exhibition were listed in the fair catalogue, and are therefore still at the top end of the market, commanding high prices. In China, while he did not create the contemporary market he did lead to its explosion in 2005-6 with a US$ one million buy which cemented China’s importance on the international art market, leading to speculators following in his footsteps. It is interesting to note therefore, that to a certain extent Saatchi is responsible for both the contemporary British and Chinese art craze, and there are significant similarities between the two movements in terms of production (much of it mass-produced in studios by assistants) and in the marketing of it, something which will be explored in the thesis. However, no individual dealer, collector or museum garners anywhere near as much coverage as the big auction houses. The health of the entire art market is judged by how well the two major auction houses, Christie’s and Sotheby’s, do in their twice-yearly major evening sales (Velthius, 2005). Work by an artist selling in these evening sales is proof of their success.

The major characteristic that differentiates the art market from other products is that all who operate in the market regard the public museum as the ultimate resting place for the art they make, sell or buy. Once this happens, the artwork has reached the pinnacle of the valuation process and is given the highest accolade of ‘museum quality,’ resulting in an increase in its economic value as the work is now legitimised as part of art history, shaping taste (Buck, 2004; Robertson & Chong, 2008). This is because, as Velthius (2005) explores in his work, artists and dealers seek to repress the commodity status of art works and define them solely as cultural goods. This explains why dealers care so much about motives of collectors and make the distinction between collectors who buy for the “right” reasons (love of art, no resale, donations to museums) or those who buy for the “wrong” reasons (investment, for profit). Instead of raising prices, they pick and choose who to sell the work to, aiming not for profit but at promoting artists and safeguarding the long-run stability of their prices (Caves, 2000). Velthius’ exploration of art prices explains why the art market does not always seem logical economically; social, cultural and moral values are also at work and prices in the art world are part of a symbolic system that contribute to
establishing status hierarchies and structure the art world thus the need to consider social as well as economic value.

While the endorsement process tends to be described as a logical step from one endorsement to another this thesis argues that it is much more haphazard and complex than the literature accounts for. Figure 2.1 is proposed as a more accurate visual representation of the endorsement process and the various actors that compose it, allowing for a more cyclical process where endorsements tend to happen in conjunction with each other at certain times. This will be explored further in the empirical chapters by examining artists’ career trajectories.

![Figure 2.1: The Structure of the Endorsement Process](image)

2.2 THE IMPORTANCE OF NETWORKS IN THE VISUAL ARTS MARKET

As Wijnberg and Gemser (2000) found in their research, since the 20th century expert selection has dominated the visual arts as a result of Impressionist painters’ need to get value attributed to the innovative aspects of their style of painting. Experts now play an essential role, certifying the innovativeness of either individual artists or groups of artists. As they note, the fact that artistic innovativeness is a characteristic that is difficult to evaluate by the average person not only reinforces the position of experts; it also makes it more likely that group formation will become important to producers and experts alike. However, within this group of experts, there has been a shift in the power to influence trends in the art market; moving from the critic who could make or break an artist’s career at the beginning of the century, to the rise of branded dealers in the 1960’s and now, it is big-name collectors who have the most
influence, thus the need to consider the social context in which art is valued (Thompson, 2008).

The art market is therefore characterised by a dense network of intimate, long-term relationships between artists, collectors, and their intermediaries reflected in its network structure (Velthius, 2005; Chong, 2008). The networks are overlapping and range from small nets around one gallery to large, loose, international networks (Jyrama, 2002). The value of networks as an integral part of the explanation of entrepreneurial success is widely acknowledged (Elfring & Hulsink, 2003) and artists are no exception to this. Permanent access to information is key to survival and Klein (1994) emphasises that the social ties between the actors are social, intimate and binding in character. This is why the sector has such a wide range of social activities: exhibition openings, gallery dinners, after-show parties and all-day events. In this highly sociable environment, art melds with social life, important contacts are made and deals done in the course of what appears from the outside to be a purely social occasion (Buck, 2004). The social is the most effective way to translate, consume and legitimise cultural goods, and artists are aware of this and actively seek out these environs. These things happen in particular geographies, institutions, ‘scenes’. In other words, place matters to the value of culture because the social production system is so entrenched in the economic worth of art that they cannot be separated. While (2003) argues that the success of the Young British Artists is largely due to the role played by London’s extended art world in terms of providing the networks, associations and facilities, ranging from art schools and studio spaces to well-established (and internationally oriented) networks of critics, dealers and galleries. The importance of dense networks explains that a few cities such as New York, London and Paris are the world’s key ‘global nodes’ for art exchange and act as magnets for aspiring artists and dealers (While, 2003). Although art can in theory be made anywhere, the social production of art is a collective practice that depends on complex interactions between artists and a range of art world actors, or art markets, such as dealers, critics, gallery owners and collectors (Becker 1982; Bourdieu 1993; While, 2003; Chong, 2005). Becker’s (1982) sociological examination of art worlds describes the social production of art through networks of cooperation, providing a rich understanding of the ways in which systems of support, distribution, and criticism shape the experience and action of the producers of works of art. The importance of
proximity to dealers and critics in the business of art has undoubtedly increased since the 1970’s as value setting has become increasingly linked to market forces and media controversy has come to play a growing role in the international art world (Crane 1987; Stallabrass 1999; While, 2003; Chong, 2005).

Such constantly evolving social dynamics mean that arts value and perceived legitimacy and the ways its value is measured is constantly in flux, as are the gatekeepers, producers and consumers of its goods (Jyrama 2002; Currid, 2007; Schaefer & Kerrigan, 2008). Moreover, career posts are defined as relative positions in a structure made up of other artists and galleries and the relative relations between the actors shift over time (Giuffre 1999; Simonton, 1997). Elfring and Helsink (2003) find that in networks, weak ties are more important in sectors highly dependent on innovation (such as the art market) as endorsement by outsiders is important in gaining legitimacy. Giuffre (1999) conceptualises artists’ careers as transitions through positions within a constantly shifting web of relationships that are without a-priori hierarchical demarcations. Her network analysis of this shifting web from 1981 to 1992 supports Elfring and Helsink’s work, showing that artists who have had a long history of membership in loosely knit networks receive more critical attention than either artists who have had a long history of membership in tightly knit cliques or those with a history of sporadic connections to the art world. Therefore, different network shapes lead to different personal outcomes, an interesting fact to consider in light of the fact that in the art world, talent, as opposed to structure, is supposedly driving careers. Kerrigan and Freeman (2007) take this idea further and study international networks within the global art economy. Challenging the focus on the economic performance of artists, they take artists as their focus, characterising them as “active agents within networks” who need social and cultural capital in order to engage with the market. Managing this capital is found to be necessary for career success and developing artistic identities.

According to Thompson’s (2008) estimates, there are approximately 40,000 artists resident in London, and about the same number in New York. Of the total 80,000, seventy-five are superstar artists with a seven-figure income, providing support for Rosen’s (1981) superstar thesis whereby a few people dominate the industry. Below those are 300 mature, successful artists, who show with major galleries and earn a six-figure income from art. On the next level down are about 5,000 artists who have some
representation, most in a mainstream gallery, and who supplement their income through teaching, writing, or supportive partners. There are thought to be 15,000 artists walking the streets of London at any one time looking for gallery representation, and the same number in New York, demonstrating the excess supply of artists in the art market noted by Menger (1999). Whatever the number looking for representation, mainstream dealers generally pay little attention to those artists who knock on their door. Instead they search for new artists by visiting artists’ studios and art school graduate shows, or by following recommendations from current gallery artists, collectors or friends. From these sources and from cold calls, a gallery may see slides or completed work from a dozen new artists a week, but take on only one or two a year. This highlights the necessity of networks for the practical and creative development of artists’ work (Kerrigan & Freeman, 2007). Artists who are part of a dense network have easier access to sales networks, critics and important colleagues. This can enhance their visibility, reputation, legitimacy and therefore the price level of their work (Velthius, 2005; Jyrama, 2002).

However, the importance of networks is not restricted to artists. Giuffre argues that the emphasis art dealers put on their intimate social ties attest to the existence of networks that have a decisive and measurable effect on the dealer’s survival in the art market (Giuffre, 1999). Indeed, long-term power in the art world is measured by the names on your speed-dial and whether major collectors, dealers and artists return your calls. This explains why the Christie’s auction house doorman in New York, Gil Perez, could be one place behind Damien Hirst at number 50 in Art Review’s Top 100 of 2003 (Artreview, 2004). Like artists, galleries also have careers and a gallery may start by showing the works of relatively unknown artists whose increasing fame brings the gallery into the spotlight and makes it possible for the gallery to acquire representation rights for more lucrative artists (Giuffre, 1999). In her study of Manhattan galleries and dealers, Crane (1987) found that only a few galleries represented almost all of the most visible and most successful artists. In the UK, it has also been noted that there is a high level of overlap in terms of the artists nominated for the Turner Prize, those chosen to represent the UK at the Venice Biennale and the members of the jury for these prestigious awards. They represent a small inner circle of the UK art world, most of these artists exhibit together and have the same dealers,
with both Lisson and Chisenhale galleries accounting for many of the winners (Millard, 1997; “Everyone’s”, 2002; Gleadell, 2009).

For consumers, the penalties of not buying through traditional channels and going it alone can be high with the number of fakes and counterfeits in existence and so for them too, a trusted network is essential (Robertson, 2005). The significance of trusted networks in the art world is why Thompson (2008) suggests that the branding of certain artists, key experts or institutions make certain pieces of art more valuable than others, the brand becoming a substitute for aesthetic judgement. For example, a branded dealer gives his clients the confidence that neither the artwork nor its price need ever be questioned, in fact clients often buy the work sight-unseen, they have so much trust in their dealer. Trusted networks are therefore central to the working of the art market and its endorsement process.

While acknowledging the central place of networks in the valuation of art, network research as it currently stands is not considered relevant to this thesis as it only accounts for a snapshot of the market at any one time, denying any analysis from the complexity of temporal and social shifts in value. Instead, this thesis turns to career analysis to encompass this temporal perspective, which will also allow us to document the direct influence of peer and expert relationships on career development (something which Fisher and Stafford (1999) point out is not well documented). The art world is interesting because both the worker and the job are in a state of flux with regard to relative status. The status of the artists and the galleries are defined by the relative position of other actors to whom they are tied, both directly and indirectly (Giuffre, 1999). We will discuss this further when setting out the analytical framework for the thesis at the end of the chapter. Now we will turn towards an analysis of the art market as it currently stands to further understand its structure, the balance of power amongst its actors, how this bears upon artistic careers and influences the valuation process.

2.3 Current trends

In order to study the art market and the networks which compose it, a temporal perspective is essential to understand the changes that are currently afoot in the art market and how they affect the data collected for this thesis. The proliferation of biennales, art fairs and media hype, not to mention gallerists, curators, curator-dealers,
curator-writers, and celebrity collectors, predominates in a way that was inconceivable twenty-five years ago. The art industry impinges to an incredibly greater extent on how ‘art’ is viewed. The scale is such that the art industry can now almost be compared to the music industry or the film industry with branded galleries such as Gagosian and White Cube expanding around the world and branded auction houses Sotheby’s and Christie’s continuously setting record sales. In the past ten years, the art market has gone through a period of unprecedented expansion, with a record level of interest and appetite for contemporary art (Robertson & Chong, 2008).

The global art market, which includes auctions and private sales, grew 95% from 2002 to 2006, hitting a high of €48.1bn but after seven consecutive years of rising prices, the art market experienced a radical trend change in 2008, the sharpest contraction on the market since the 1991-2 meltdown (Artprice, 2009; Mehta, 2009). However, even with this contraction, the art market is still a picture of vitality, there seems to have been no freeze on art buying as there was in the 1990 crisis, partly due to its continuing expansion East which will be discussed further below (Artprice, 2010).

2.3.1 The Art Market

Looking back at the trends of the past decade, the 2000’s saw the rise of big art: big auctions, big art fairs, big artworks and big collectors opening their own big museums. They also saw the ascendance of the businessman-artist modelled after Warhol, in the form of Takashi Murakami, Jeff Koons, and, of course, Damien Hirst. Luxury-goods companies have started using contemporary artists to market their wares, anybody likely to be in the market for a Hirst or a Warhol, they assume, can also be expected to be picky about the cars they drive and the clothes they wear; Cartier was one of the first to capitalise on this with their Fondation Cartier but Prada, Vuitton, Rolex and others have all followed in co-branding initiatives, trying to tap high-culture cachet, exchanging financial capital for symbolic capital (Chong, 2008a; 2010). Contemporary art became the hottest segment of the art market fuelled by great amounts of money. The value of art often has more to do with artist, dealer or auction-house branding, and with collector ego, than it does with art thus the need to look at the whole value-chain rather than purely production or consumption. The value of one work of art compared to another is in no way related to the time or skill that went into producing it. The market is driven by high-status auctions and art fairs that become
events in their own right, entertainment and public display for the ultra-rich (Thompson, 2008). This can be seen in a shift in popularity from art magazines such as ArtForum where collectors used to form critical opinions on art, to a preference for Bloomberg and ArtTactic where the emphasis is on monetary valuation as well as the growth of art investment funds (Joy & Sherry, 2003; Buck, 2004; Velthius, 2005).

As a result of the rise of the art market, marketing has become increasingly important for an artist despite the fact that research has shown that for the great majority of artists, peer group approval matters much more than commercial success (Hughes, 1958; Hirschman, 1983; Joy & Sherry, 2003; Buck, 2004). Artistic identity is extremely complex and often has to be distinguished from economic identity (for more on artistic identity see Frey and Pommerehne, 1989; Throsby and Thompson, 1994; Schroeder, 2006; Kerrigan and Freeman, 2007). Bradshaw, et al. (2006) explore how the Romantic ideal of artistic alienation necessitates a complex balancing act between art and commerce by artists who despite having a negative predisposition to marketing have gradually accepted that it is necessity in today’s arts business environment (Fillis, 2004; Lehman, 2009). In fact, Lehman (2009) has empirically investigated the applicability and usefulness of the concept of self-marketing for the individual visual artist and found that marketing was seen as almost a fact of life by many of the artists interviewed and suggests it is a fruitful avenue for further research especially when looking at emerging artists.

Parallel to this boom or ‘economisation’ of the art world is the ‘culturalisation’ of the economy, cultural values are becoming essential to businesses in terms of branding, image and identity. As a result of these changes, art and artists are now starting to be discussed in terms framed by economics, business and marketing (Velthius, 2005; Buck, 2004; Thompson, 2008; Goetzman, 1993; Florida, 2002; Bradshaw & Holbrook, 2008) as well as the historical cultural (‘art for art’s sake) and more recent social imperatives (as a driver for regeneration, see Landry & Matarasso, 1996; McCarthy, 2006; Kay, 2000; Cameron & Coaffee, 2005). Current research is focusing on entrepreneurship and the value of innovation on business, identifying artists as their own micro businesses that can convert creative value into commercial worth by going beyond simple notions of production and positioning of products in order to see how these products are infused with meaning (Buck, 2004; Fillis, 2004) and looking at the way this work accrues value through relationships with various art
world experts (Wijnberg and Gemser, 2000; Velthius, 2005; Thompson, 2008). This boom in the art market has therefore caused a shift in power from the critical to the commercial which in turn has changed the underlying power structure in the market. It is therefore worth looking a little more closely at the impact of some of the more significant recent changes.

**Auction houses move into the primary market**

As new wealth has flooded the art market, the role of auction houses in the art market has changed significantly. While a couple of decades ago, high-priced art would be sold by dealers; now much of it is done by established auction houses. Shopping mall mogul Alfred Taubman bought Sotheby’s in 1983 and luxury goods magnate Francois Pinault bought Christie’s in 1998 and both took an aggressive, retail approach to art. Auctioneers starting putting out glossy catalogues and throwing parties to attract Wall Street wealth and new money and media-driven financial speculators flipped art at auction, driving prices up. Neal Meltzer, art dealer and former head of Christie’s contemporary art department, says the emphasis on marketing to high-end new buyers, along with financial guarantees, attracted trophy seekers and took business away from the private market: “new wealth was more comfortable bidding in the auction room, fighting it out in that arena, rather than buying from dealers” (Thompson, 2005). Moreover, the auction catalogues that favourably describe the art work and its provenance, create an illusion of knowledge with their scholarly tone, a form of intellectual marketing that allows the collector to feel they are a part of the art world. This is very much an example of Veblen’s (1994) ‘conspicuous consumption’ whereby status is derived from the judgements other members of society make about an individual’s position in society, and this position is established through a display of wealth. Buying the latest Hirst or Koons, whose artworks are easily recognised brands, is a way for new wealth to acquire status and a position of esteem in the social hierarchy. Zukin (1990) demonstrates how auction houses act as democratic spaces that offer cultural capital anyone can ‘buy into’ without knowing the rules (art fairs, discussed below, work in a similar manner). As well as the art market being much more global than it used to be, the costs associated with art business are greater than ever before. Auction houses have taken advantage of this with their international distribution networks. The result is that today auction houses have edged out the dealer to become the natural ally of the collector (see Van
Heck, 2000; Ash, 2007; Wiser, 2000; Joy & Sherry 2003; Robertson & Chong, 2008). In fact, they are now considered marketing platforms by the supercollectors, as a good price at auction leads directly to further increases in value.

The advances and guarantees offered by auction houses until the recent economic crash made it unlikely that any dealer had the capital to compete. Indeed, in 2008, together, the two auction houses generated 73% of global Fine Art auction revenue from only 16% of global transactions according to Artpiece’s annual analysis of the art market (2009). Although dealers are claiming that with the recession their time is back, only the mega-dealers such as Gagosian have anything close to the market power of the auction houses. Auction houses also have an advantage in new markets which is what is currently driving their business, new buyers from these markets do not necessarily trust private sales or dealers, they like the transparency of the auction (Martinez, 2009). Both Sotheby’s and Christie’s have acquired galleries recently: Sotheby’s purchasing Noortman Master Paintings in 2006, one of the world’s major dealers in Old Masters, and Christie’s purchasing Haunch of Venison, a major contemporary gallery, in 2007. The result is that both auction houses now have the precedent to apply for admission to art fairs. In gaining admissions to fairs, Christie’s and Sotheby’s have overcome the dealer’s last major defence to auction house inroads. Christie’s is now firmly ensconced in the primary market for contemporary art and both auction houses now work directly with artists (“Is the”, 2008; Robertson & Chong, 2008). Buying dealerships proved to be a prescient move for the auction houses as they are increasingly relying on private sales to survive the downturn. (Martinez, 2009; Mehta, 2009).

Dealers see this move from secondary to primary markets by auction houses as extremely damaging to the market, especially with young artists whose careers are fragile, where high prices at auction may damage their long-term sustainability as they become defined by their price tag. Moreover, although within the industry most people know who bought what at auction, only the auctioneer knows who made the underbids and what those bidders are interested in buying. A dealer armed with such inside information has an obvious advantage over competitors (Cumming, 2008). The danger for artists is that the main difference between auctions and dealers is that dealers are an active part of the support system of the art world whereas auctions are not (Velthius, 2005). In response, the mega-galleries have been expanding, spreading
across the world creating ‘franchises’ to try and lead demand, catering to the tastes of super-rich collectors. However, the role of dealers also seems to be changing as they are acting more and more like agents. While dealers used to buy a collection outright then sell it, taking on more risk; now they often work on commission following the auction house model (Mehta, 2009). The distinction between dealers and auction houses is diminishing and becoming limited to the distribution method they use.

One of the many outcomes of the new alliances between auction houses and collectors is that the artists can now bypass the gallery or dealer, as well as reducing the time between a work leaving the studio and popping up at auction (Joy & Sherry 2003; “Is the”, 2008; Thompson, 2008). Indeed, there seems to be a growing sentiment on behalf of artists who want to take control of their work. This is seen in the rising number of artists taking agents and selling directly at auction (Robertson, 2005; Buck 2008; Russeth, 2010). Damien Hirst’s 2008 auction at Sotheby’s, when he cut out his dealers and sold almost $200 million in new work, being the most notorious example of this. Supercollector Charles Saatchi has recognised this and recently set up Saatchi Online where artists can sell their work online. Saatchi says the forum serves to bring artists and collectors together because many artists are not represented by galleries and many starting collectors/potential collectors cannot afford the 50% gallery mark-up. This is another way dealers are losing power at the hand of collectors (Johnson, 2009). While dealers are still considered an essential part of the endorsement process, these new platforms on which artists can sell work offer significant potential threat to their business. Coslor (2009) finds that the increased transparency and press coverage as well as the variety of price data indices reporting auction prices achieved, has also impacted on the practice of dealers who had previously had more freedom in setting prices without buyers knowing how these prices related to others in the art market. There is now an increased pressure from collectors for transparency in prices. The increased importance of auction houses, coupled with the decreasing importance of art critics, means that the market plays a greater role in defining the cannon and therefore what is of value.

The rise of art fairs and their effect on consumer behaviour

Dealers, needing some other competitive advantage to set against the glamour of auctions and the wealth of auction houses have turned to high-level art fairs as a
strategic example of how dealers can band together to compete with auction houses. Amy Cappellazzo, who is in charge of contemporary art at Christie’s boasted that: “we’re the big-box retailer putting the mom-and-pops out of business.” Fairs give the little dealers conglomerate muscle (Schjeldahl, 2006). In the past decade, art fairs have proliferated, much as biennials did in the 1990’s. This is also reflective of a shift of power from curators with institutional clout to collectors with vast amounts of money as the arbiters of contemporary art. The work offered at the best contemporary fairs equals in quality and quantity that offered by auction houses in an entire selling season. There are now four international fairs whose branding adds value to contemporary art: the European Fine Art Foundation fair, also known as ‘Maastricht’; Art Basel; Art Basel’s spin-off, Art Basel Miami Beach; and the most recent addition, London’s Frieze. These are the fairs where dealers match auction houses in quality and speed of the sale and payment (Buck, 2004; Robertson, 2005; Thompson, 2008). They feature superstar dealers who come because the best fairs draw the best collectors and the collectors visit because superstar dealers are showing. It is what economists call a virtuous circle or network effect; leading to a self-perpetuating oligopoly among a few top fairs (Thompson, 2008). Significant art fairs act as a dealer filter mechanism, inclusion in a prestigious event like Basel, for example, acts as the market’s stamp of approval. In fact, these selection committees have in the past decade, become one of the new powers in the art world (Robertson, 2005; “Is the”, 2008).

The fairs are extremely important to dealers, many dealers say that 40% of their annual sales are made in the 11 days of Maastricht; some claim 70% (Thompson, 2008). However, they are not only about selling as much art as possible, they are also major meeting and operating points for collectors. They provide an invaluable opportunity to advertise and showcase galleries and their artists in a location where they can reach large numbers of existing and new buyers in a short space (Buck, 2004). This is especially important for lesser known, smaller galleries as New York gallerist Marian Goodman says: “fairs are important for big galleries, for small galleries, they’re vital.” (Schjeldahl, 2006). Non-participation can be suicidal, risking losses not only of revenue but of artists whose loyalty depends on how well they are promoted. Dealer Brooke Alexander points out that, “the art world is so event-driven these days that if you don’t take part in the major fairs you almost don’t exist in the
public mind” (Schjeldahl, 2006). However, the fairs are also changing the culture of art-buying which presents other dangers for dealers. Collectors love them because they are convenient for time-poor high net worth individuals who like to consolidate research, search and purchase in a single location. The fairs replace quiet discussions held in the gallery with an experience akin to the shopping mall, blending art, fashion and parties in one place. Collectors become shoppers who acquire impulsively, mimicking the behaviour of the herd and usually purchasing only one work by an artist, resulting in more buyers but fewer collectors who are more detached from the art market and only infrequently set foot in a gallery. They may never visit the gallery of the dealer from whom they buy at a fair.

Critic and curator Okwui Enwezor has argued that that art fairs have changed the critical context, making people pay more attention to the market than to artistic practices. Unlike biennales, where some kind of relationship is conceived by the curator, at a fair you’ve got two or three thousand objects never intended to be seen together (Griffin, 2008). Fairs are the logical result of a market economy based on uprooting, media dependency and the general dominance of finance. For art, this means a no longer negligible significance of global networking strategies, as well as the dominance of the supermarket principle, and the acceptance of the supremacy of a culture of events and spectacle (Politi, 2009). It also has an effect on the work sold, as Thompson (2008) points out: when a gallery sells at four fairs in three months, artists are inevitably required to churn out repetitive work. One of the reasons that dealers space major shows for an artist at intervals of 18 to 24 months is that it takes that long for the artist to develop the next stage in their body of work. With a demand for new work every few months, the evolution may not happen. Moreover, there is an emphasis on recognisability, the art work has to be instantly recognisable amongst the thousands of other works in order to be bought. It can be assumed that this will filter down in terms of what is bought, shown and therefore made, affecting which artists work is valued on the market.

4 It is interesting to note that while in the 1980’s and 1990’s retail was adopting the ‘white box’ design of art galleries, galleries are now using retail strategies in the presentation of work to ensure sales (Manuelli, 2006; Politi, 2009).
An emerging trend noted by many art market commentators is that the roles of publicly funded and private gallery are becoming increasingly blurred as public galleries try to raise more money and private galleries try to increase their public presence (Buck, 2004; Chong, 2005; Robertson & Chong, 2008; Rush, 2009). Museums having embraced contemporary art since the 20th century, find that they now need to cultivate relationships with galleries, which often represent the world of the living artist whom the museum wants to exhibit or the estate of the deceased artist who is of interest. A recent strategy has been for public galleries to enter into partnerships with commercial dealers in mounting exhibitions. The public gallery is able to mount a more ambitious show than its budget would otherwise have allowed, and the commercial gallery receives a valuable public endorsement of its artist’s work.

In an article in *The Observer*, art critic Laura Cumming (2008) notes that a number of public directors and curators have left their high profile jobs to enter the private sector and contends that this is “a brain-drain with frightening implications for the integrity of British museums.” She goes on to say that the “entire industry is forming and reforming by the day like some monstrously engorged digestive tract, in which public and commercial are mulched”. As examples for this she mentions Francois Pinault, the French billionaire who restored the Palazzo Grassi in Venice as a public museum for his private collection and is also the owner of Christie’s International; the Albion gallery that has retained David Ross (of the Whitney Museum and MoMA) and that now creates art projects in tandem with MoMA and Tate; and even Tate Modern that rents out wall space to Swiss Bank UBS to display its private collection. Lisa Dennison, Sotheby’s chairman in North and South America points to major shows organised by Gagosian, L&M Arts, Haunch of Venison and, of course, her own firm’s Steve Cohen “Women” show as evidence that museums are now “in crisis,” in part because galleries and auction houses have the resources, connections and expertise to do what non-profit institutions do, only faster (Rosenbaum, 2009).

The recent controversy caused by New York’s New Museum illustrates some of the problems public museums currently face. The *New York Times* cited a belief among critics that the museum now maintains “a dizzyingly insular circle of art world insiders” (Sontag, 2009). According to critic Jerry Saltz (2009), the circle looks something like this:
Joannou, a New Museum trustee, is friendly with Lisa Phillips, the museum’s director. Her curator, Massimiliano Gioni, has worked previously with Joannou, and he oversaw the current three-floor Urs Fischer show. Urs Fischer has curated shows for Joannou; Joannou also owns a good deal of Fischer’s work. Fischer’s art dealer is Gavin Brown, who also represents Elizabeth Peyton, Jeremy Deller and Steven Shearer, all four of whom have had solo shows at the New Museum since it re-opened less than two years ago [his emphasis]. Still, when you add in Koons as the curator here [Joannou holds more of Koon’s work than any other collector] the whole thing just breaks down.

Although museums have always depended on the kindness of collectors to show their art, the lack of transparency in this case and the fact that the museum’s curators are not the ones curating the show makes a public museum seem more like a private club that validates the spending habits and taste of collectors, indicating that someone’s access to large amounts of money is as meaningful as a curatorial staff’s expertise (Saltz, 2009a; Green, 2009). On the other hand, however, as Saltz points out “as it is, private collectors now have far better collections of contemporary art than places like MoMA or the Whitney”. The art boom simply made new art too expensive for institutions, and the slump of the last year has had a major effect on museum donations. “Museums are in deep trouble, and will be for a while so they have to be creative” (Saltz, 2009). The recession and public cuts across the world has made it even more difficult, and aggressive commercial measures are becoming more widespread. For example, the Louvre is evaluating proposals, one of which is licensing its name to Swiss luxury watch manufacturer Breguet (Caravajal, 2011). Advertisements for Chanel on the D’Orsay museum facade are another strategy, signifying that the gap between art and commerce seems to be narrowing. This raises important questions in terms of how art is valued, traditionally this has been the domain of the museum, sheltered from the commercial but these changes seem to imply that museums must relinquish such status with far-ranging effects on the art market as noted by Chong (2008a).
2.3.2 Contemporary Art

As noted, contemporary art has evolved to be the hottest segment of the art market, the contribution of living artists to Fine Art auction sales jumped from 7.9% in 2000 to 17.6% in 2005 (Artprice, 2006). Worldwide auction sales of contemporary art grew more than eightfold between 2003 and 2007 (Reyburn, 2010). In May 2007, Christie’s and Sotheby’s in New York achieved the two highest auction totals in history for their prestigious evening contemporary art sales, the previous record for the most expensive post-war work was broken four times within twenty-four hours (Artprice, 2009). Even during the recession, contemporary art sales have continued to increase (Artprice, 2010). Artprice’s annual Top 10 artists index, which ranks the artists according to their annual sales revenue, has seen a significant “juvenation.” In 2008, the inclusion of British artist Damien Hirst and German artist Gerhard Richter demonstrated that for the first time living artists had revenue totals as high as those generated by the grand masters of Modern Art (Artprice, 2009). In fact there seems to be an intensified interest in the form of ‘new’ product in the art market with an emphasis on ‘emerging artists’ (itself a relatively new term that became widely used in the increasingly professionalised art world of the 1960’s) (Davis, 2011). In the UK, Saatchi was pivotal in being the first major collector who changed the focus from recent but already historical art (such as that by Lucian Freud, Howard Hodgkin, Frank Auerbach) which was what the contemporary galleries were focusing on and instead buying work almost at the moment of its happening in art schools. As will be discussed in the empirical analysis, this has had an impact on artist’s careers in that there is increasing pressure for them to be on the market while still emerging whereas previously they would have had much longer to develop their artistic identity.

Part of the reason for this is the unstoppable trend by which great works of art are becoming more and more expensive. This is the result of accumulation of capital all over the world, and a decreasing number of great works of art available (“Is the”, 2008). Contemporary art has achieved its current importance in resale markets in part because the best examples of other schools of art are disappearing from the market, and are never again likely to appear for sale. For example, when Le Bassin Aux Nymphes, a Monet considered a prime example of high Impressionism and a painting that had only been seen once in 80 years came to the market in 2008 it led to a fierce bidding war. Art experts declared that it was the first time in twenty years that a
painting of that importance came onto the art market in Europe and the sale smashed previous records, doubling the previous record for a Monet. Christie’s estimated it at 18 to 24 million pounds but it sold for 41 million pounds during a period of economic gloom (Collett-White, 2008). Critic Souren Melikian writes that “in Impressionist and Modern masters, the art drought is such that setting out to build up a significant collection, even with hundreds of millions of dollars in the bank, is no longer a realistic prospect. The truly great works of Impressionism are gone” (Melikian, 2009). The reason for the shrinking supply of traditional art is due to the worldwide expansion of museums as donors seek immortality and cities seek respectability and increased tourism. Most art hung in museums is never to return to the market (Hope, 2005). The past twenty-five years have seen a hundred new museums around the world, each intent on acquiring, on average, 2,000 works of art. As awareness of scarcity grows, both museums and private collectors face a ‘last chance’ situation every time a major work comes up for sale. Fearing they may never have another opportunity to add a certain artist or period to their collection, they purchase without consideration of past prices.

There has been a parallel expansion of private collections. Over the past fifteen years the number of wealthy collectors has multiplied twenty times, and many of those collections will end up in museums rather than be resold. The recent boom in contemporary art is also thought to be due to the arrival of many more art buyers who want to be part of the lifestyle, part of the power game of art: buying contemporary art is about going to the most prestigious art events: Basel and Frieze art fairs, the Venice Biennale, and of course, the evening auctions in New York. (Robertson, 2005; Velthius, 2005). Currently, many new museums are being opened by billionaires to reflect their own taste in art, or to immortalise the family name. While this is not a new phenomenon, in terms of sheer numbers, what is happening in the first decade of the 21st century is unmatched (Thompson, 2008; Thornton, 2008). Official reasons are philanthropic but it has more to do with marketing, the work of living artists needs to be promoted if it is to generate consensus and gain in value. A result of this is that all art museums face an acquisition crisis as budgets fail to keep pace with escalating prices on the international art market (Thompson, 2008; Thornton, 2008). As contemporary art becomes more popular on the market, there are more opportunities for artists to make a living out of art which may explain the increased popularity of
artistic careers. The injection of wealth in the art world as a result of these new collectors has led to what Coslor (2009) calls the “financialisation of art work,” that is the rise in art being used as a financial investment. This has resulted in a demand for numbers within the art market as well as increased transparency and a number of art price services have been created to cater to this demand such as ArtNet, ArtPrice and Art Market Research. Although limited to auction sales, these services have become new and important institutions in the art market, disseminating previously hidden or difficult-to-find information about prices of artwork at auction. As art is increasingly considered in terms of economic investment, again, this may imply a shift in how it is valued as collectors with little art history knowledge become more powerful than critics or curators. Another key into understanding the demand for contemporary art comes from new buyers from emerging markets, to which we turn to now.

2.3.3 Emerging Markets

Globalisation is one of the most important phenomena in the history of recent art (Robertson & Chong, 2008; Chong, 2010). In the years since 2000, a more global form of demand has appeared with the emergence of wealthy new collectors from Asia, Russia and the Middle East. This new generation of collectors has focused much of their cash on the most speculative contemporary signatures of the moment. The most dramatic art trend in recent years is the expanding role and popularity of Chinese art, where the price index of contemporary art rose 583% between January 2004 and January 2009 as noted in the introduction to this thesis. Over the period 1996 to 2006, the number of Chinese to have entered the Artprice Top 100 contemporary artists, ranked by sales revenue, has grown from one to twenty-five. In 2001, only Cai Guo-Qiang held 59th position with an annual sales revenue of 207,000 dollars, in 2006, Zhang Xiaogang made it to the second position, ahead of Jeff Koons, with a total sales revenue of 23.7 million dollars (Artprice 2002; Artprice 2007). Indeed, speculation on Chinese signatures and the astonishing auction results subsequently generated, largely contributed to the growth of contemporary art’s share in the global art market (in the over $100,000 segment). In India, the situation has been even more extreme with a 957% increase in the price index between January 2004 and January 2009 (Artprice, 2008; “new markets”, 2009; Vadehra, 2011). This explosion of interest in certain national markets been fuelled by specialised sales (national focus sales) by market leaders such as Christie’s and Sotheby’s, Government officials being
increasingly likely to stress the importance of the art market as a status symbol and
that it has become more fashionable for the nouveau-rich to buy art (Vine, 2008;
Degot & Yinhua, 2008; Artmarketinsight, 2008). Some of the supercollectors of the
art world have also turned to these emerging art markets, including Charles Saatchi,
Francois Pinault and the Mugrabis, all market makers in that they have the power to
create or destroy artists’ careers (“who is buying”, 2009). Art fairs are also growing in
these areas, capitalising on these new collectors, in India, the Indian Art Summit has
become the new centre of the Indian art market and Hong Kong’s art fair has become
one of the top art fairs in the world, especially since, as mentioned in the introduction,
it has been bought by the Art Basel brand. Another indicator of the growing
importance of these markets is their integration into the collections of the world’s top
museums including, for example, Tate Modern (Kalra, 2010).

There is hope in the art world that the new arrivals to the market may keep the art
market’s momentum going as Europe and America suffer from the recession. Indeed,
there are signs that the net flow of money from these areas has boosted the art market
significantly. New museums such as the Louvre and the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi are
also expected to inject money into the art market as they buy collections. However,
this injection into the economy is largely limited to the higher end of the market
(Azimi, 2008). Although, as we shall see further on, the bubble has burst, these
emerging countries continue to be significant players on the world art market. China
especially remains among the world’s most attractive investment destinations, and the
art market will continue to parallel this direction. Proof of its strength came in 2009,
when, for the first time ever, the total auction revenue from contemporary art in Asia
was greater than the total of the US according to Artprice (2010). In the past couple
of years, the international art media has been saturated with articles about the
dramatic success of recent auctions in China, and the growing influence of Chinese
collectors. This globalisation of the art market may have long-term implications as to
how art is valued. As we have discussed, the valuation process is socially constructed
and as new markets become increasingly important it can be hypothesised that they
will have more of a hand in deciding what is valuable. Due to significant cultural
differences this may be very different from the current Western conception of what

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5 For example while Christie’s Americas’ sale at the end of 2008 was down 1% on 2007, the Asia and
Middle East sales were up 81% (Azimi, 2008).
constitutes a great art work. This is why this thesis has chosen to compare the UK art market to the Chinese one.

2.3.4 Effects of the Recession

Various studies have shown a link between the stock market and the art market, and indeed, the recent success of the art market has been proved to be a direct result of the bubble in financial sector bonuses (Goetzman, 1993; Robertson, 2005; Ash, 2007; Thompson, 2008). As Goetzman’s (1993) analysis shows, when investor wealth grows, demand for art increases. However, as the economy suffers, changes in the art market are becoming apparent, when stocks are down people are less likely to indulge in an expensive work of art. The speculative bubble reached its peak in 2007, with the autumn 2008 auctions signalling a change in the art market as many lots were bought in. According to Artrprice, contemporary art lost 34.4% of its value in 2008 (Mehta, 2009). Compared to 2008, by April 2009 the world counted 300 less billionaires according to Artrprice, an enormous volume of cash that was fuelling the market disappeared as the new ultra high net worth individuals in Russia, India and Turkey saw their fortunes substantially diminished and the banks stopped financing acquisitions of art works: giant UBS for example, closed down its art advisory service dedicated to buying and selling artworks. Annual sales of contemporary art slumped 75% at the two largest auction houses’ evening sales in 2009 (Reyburn, 2010). As vendors suffer from the volatile environment and the guarantee culture has been eliminated, the auction houses suffer from lack of material (Bevan, 2008; Art Market Insight, 2009; Tully, 2009a; Tully, 2009b). Many of the new art investment funds that were growing so rapidly during the upturn are now failing to achieve targets too, this may be not only due to the recession but also to the fact that art by its nature is a negative-carry investment: you have to pay for it, pay the transaction costs and insure it but it pays no dividends, throws off no cash-flow and most art will not appreciate demonstrating some of the problems with art-as-investment (Artinfo, 2009). Artrprice’s dollar-converted global price index showed a severe price correction of -30% in the global art market by the end of 2008 and a further 10% drop in the first quarter on 2009 (Artrprice, 2009; “first quarter”, 2009). The effect of the financial crisis on the US art market was particularly brutal. In 2008, Fine Art sales in the US generated a billion dollars less than in 2007. This dismal performance knocked New York out of its habitual leader position on the art market revenue map with ‘only’
35.6% of global art revenue. The result being that London whose annual total increased to 35.7% of global Fine Art Revenue, took first place (Artprice, 2009). During the last art market crisis in 1991, the very top end of the market (i.e. museum quality works) was severely impacted. However, the top end of the market (above $100,000) risks an unprecedented correction because in 2008, contemporary art works accounted for 19.5% of the works sold in this range, a proportion that was unimaginable just three years earlier when the proportion of contemporary works was only 8%.

The result of this collapse implies a much greater degree of selectivity on the most volatile sectors of the market: post-war and contemporary art, particularly on the ‘emerging’ Asian markets (Artprice, 2009). The first signs of the global financial crisis on the art market were during the Hong Kong October 2008 sales at Christie’s and Sotheby’s which had record bought-in rates. November and December 2008 sales confirmed the contraction of demand, showing a sharp correction of the Chinese market. Collectors are now being extremely selective and many works by stars whose prices rose too high are now being sold below their low estimates or bought-in. Gill (2009) writes about the creation of an Art Beijing Fund by the local government as a result of the closure of numerous galleries and the recent lacklustre sales by Chinese auction houses. This turn of events was not entirely unpredictable, indeed many critics say they thought a collapse inevitable as prices rocketed in the past decade without a sophisticated market mechanism in these countries, coupled with rampant fake auction transactions (Seno, 2008; Gill, 2009; “new markets,” 2009). Morgan (2009) goes so far as to suggest that “media manipulations of cultural marginality, for example, as selling point have come to override questions about the actual quality of the work” and welcomes the downturn which calls for a return to connoisseurship. Indeed, the performances of Asian artists made a significant contribution to inflating contemporary art prices and the price drop was also dramatic, in the first half of 2008 the average price of contemporary works sold in China was $65,500, however, in the first half of 2009, this average dropped to $26,800 (“Contemporary art”, 2009). The story is much the same for Indian art. The Chinese art market, however has also been the first market to show signs of recovery (Artprice, 2010).

Despite the doom and gloom there are several good reasons why the contemporary market may not suffer a disastrous crash. New centres such as Hong
Kong that encourage free trade, together with the internet and art fairs, diversify the market, so insulating it from what might have been a worse downturn. Another factor is the boom in museum purchases in emerging economies as discussed above. These museums will focus on branded artists, expensive but needing less justification to boards of directors and the news media than work by unbranded artists. The number of wealthy collectors now is probably twenty times larger today than it was before the 1990 crash and the circulation of art is increasingly global. In the UK and USA, the share of income held by the top 1% of the population has doubled since the start of the 1980’s. In Italy and France, the income share of the top 1% has tripled, in Russia, China and India, the share may be 50 times higher. At the end of the 1990’s, when the dotcom bubble burst and share prices fell, everyone assumed that contemporary art would crash. Instead, prices increased as people shifted money from the stock market into art. Auction houses and dealers are drooling – and opening new offices in the Emirates. Finally, as noted above, supercollectors drive the contemporary art market as never before. Fifteen years ago it was Charles Saatchi who could make or break an artist. Now, along with Saatchi, it is David Geffen and Steve Cohen and Adam Sender and fifty others (Thompson, 2008). Although the bubble did burst somewhat, it looks increasingly clear that the art market reached its low point at the end of the first quarter of 2009 (“A hesitant”, 2009).

The consequences of these events is that buyers have the upper hand and are sticking with artists they know, while relative unknowns are becoming tougher to sell (Steinhauer, 2009). This highlights again the importance for artists to be branded. Collectors have become more risk averse, with speculators gone and only the connoisseurs remaining; at Art Basel 2009, New York dealer David Nash reported that: “people are looking to buy things they know things that are proven,” provenance of work is more important than ever (Pollock, 2009). Dealers, art fairs and auction houses have all had to re-think their strategies. Galleries are showing more affordable work mixed in with high-end pieces and dealers are by no means the only ones who have had to react fast to survive. Frieze Fair organisers responded to a rather large number of cancellations from galleries who could no longer afford to attend (camouflaging the weak market and fewer exhibitors) by transforming a selection of the fair into ‘Frame’, a platform for younger dealers showing cheaper art by less well known artists (Pollock, 2009a). As the biggest beneficiaries of a decade of double-
digit growth, Christie’s and Sotheby’s stand to lose the most and early 2009 saw both major auction houses completing restructuring programmes to cut employee numbers following financial losses. Auction houses have shown significant shifts in strategy such as grouping together traditional sculpture, artefacts, and painting with offerings of modern and contemporary art for emerging markets sales such as those of China and India (Millar, 2009; Jentleson, 2009; Martinez, 2009). It is therefore an interesting time to look at the art market and how these changing conditions are affecting artists and the value of their work. However all signs seem to signal that these changes are slight and do not as yet herald any major changes in the discourse of the art market. In fact, since the drop at the end of 2008, prices at auction have been steadily increasing and 2010 total sales figures for Christie’s were a record 3.2 billion pounds compared to 3.1 billion in 2007, partly due to surging demand in Hong Kong (Reyburn, 2010; Tully, 2011). Global expansion of the art market has seemed to prevent a steep decline in the art market.

2.4 TOWARDS AN ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Analysis of the current conditions of the art market therefore points to an increasingly global and commercial art world. This is relevant to this thesis because it provides the backdrop in which the actors who control the value process work and therefore necessarily impacts how these values come about in terms of what is considered ‘valuable’ and ‘authentic’. It also signals a growing chasm artists need to negotiate between market place requirements (for example creating a recognisable brand) and the values authenticity is based on, which as we shall examine currently focus on ideas of creative freedom. Moreover, it provides the economic background as to how the very concept of a career as an artist has become a reality for a growing number of people, thus the need to examine it, while also entailing a need for marketing for these artists to differentiate themselves from their peers and have value attached to their work.

Taking into account the literature covered here and the current state of the art market, it is necessary to articulate a theoretical framework for the thesis. Taking as a starting point Velthius’ (2005) study of the art market, which was significant in taking both a sociological and economic perspective on the values attached to contemporary art, this study aims to incorporate a temporal context which Velthius does not
consider. Plakoyiannaki and Saren (2006) emphasise the importance of incorporating time into the research to explain and comprehend organisational processes that depend on interaction and relationship marketing, which, as we have established, the art market does. Furthermore, Velthius takes art dealers as his unit of analysis in his study of the market. While representation with a dealer is still considered important for all professional artists, Velthius fails to consider that the relationship between galleries and their artists is a symbiotic one whereby a gallery cannot exist without artists. This study takes as its focus the artist, the producer, who although at the bottom of the hierarchical structure of the field (Becker, 1982), provides the material on which the industry survives. Chong (2000) suggests that there is a need for further research examining the insights of artists to understand the complexity of the contemporary art market and the complex relationship between the arts and management. By taking the artist as the main unit of analysis it will be possible to see which values are attached to the art at its conception and how this changes throughout the endorsement process and the increasingly essential role marketing takes in this process.

As discussed, in order to investigate the endorsement process which art follows in going to market, it is necessary to look at the networks that form the art world. The contemporary area of network analysis has been formed through a cross-fertilisation of work from several different disciplines with different empirical and even theoretical aims. We can identify at least three sources for network analysis: empirical work in social anthropology (e.g. Bott, 1957; Mitchell, 1969; Kapferer, 1972), the practice of sociometry (Moreno, 1951), and more abstract mathematical models and theory such as biased net theory (Rapoport, 1957) and graph theory (Harary et al., 1965). This diversity of origins continues in the present diversity of subjects of empirical research and structural interests (e.g. network structure as an independent or dependent variable). As noted in the introduction, there has recently been a growing interest in the role of social and business relationships within the marketing and international business literature as career patterns have changed to become more ‘boundaryless’ (as people move among firms for projects based on prior performance and networks of professional contacts) because of downsizing, restructuring and subcontracting (Jones & DeFillippi, 1996; Batt & Purchase, 2004). Such developments have drawn attention from fields such as organisational studies, human
resource management, sociology and the creative industries (see Blair & Rainnie, 2000; Grabher, 2004; Grabher & Ibert, 2006; Gill & Pratt, 2008; Gill, 2010). However, much of this research takes an economic and acontextual methodological approach. Velthius’ work differs in that it focuses on the social context of economic acts and is critical of mainstream economics’ disregard for the effect of social influences on economic actions (Velthuis, 2005). However, as mentioned previously, most network analysis tends to view personal networks as static, just showing points and links, failing to treat the issue of time and Velthius himself provides a cross-sectional view of the arts market, neglecting the role of time. In line with calls for research to further evaluate how network content, governance, and structure emerge and develop across network tie relationships over time (Hoang & Antoncic, 2003; Jack, 2005), this research argues that the art world networks are constantly shifting, in line with Giuffre’s (1999) study and Bourdieu’s (1993) notion of the ‘art field.’ Moreover these networks are conceptualised as complex ecosystems that work at various levels in a more three-dimensional, spherical way than a cross-sectional, network-view. This research therefore builds on the Chicago School’s conception of ‘career trajectories’ following on from Hughes (1958), Becker (1963), Strauss et al. (1964) and Goffman’s (1968) studies on group formation and communities in order to look at network structure within the arts market. This combination of a network and sociological perspective will allow for a holistic, temporal overview of artist’s careers taking into account their successes and failures, something which is currently lacking in the literature on the art market. Indeed, Fillis (2011) specifically recommends the use of biographical and narrative methods to examine entrepreneurial marketing and Menger (1999) notes that the one of the most striking feature of artists’ careers is their temporal aspect. Goulding et al. (2004) successfully take this longitudinal life-passage approach to examine the career of ‘collectors of tattoos,’ identifying the process of getting a tattoo as a social act that depends heavily on building relationships built on trust. In line with this, characterising the career as a series of statuses or phases which provides artists with their identities will allow for a better understanding as to how an artist is legitimised by the art market and the structure of the networks that perform this function.

It is argued that a return to the Chicagoan concept of status passage and career, married with an understanding of the fluidity and temporality of the art market (which
is why timing is so important for collectors when deciding when to buy and sell) will allow for a theorisation of the induction and patterns of behaviour of the artist along a social career path within the art market. The concept of ‘status passage’ or ‘career contingency,’ Glaser and Strauss (1971) suggest, originates in the anthropology of Arnold van Gennep (1960), where it is used to signify the passage of an individual through various stages in a life course (such as shifting from being unmarried to married). However, this concept has been expanded greatly within sociology to incorporate the study of occupational and organisational mobility, and the process of socialisation and career progression. Status passage, and specifically the consideration of a social career, Goffman (1968) suggests, are concepts that have been most closely linked to studies of individual (and collective) development within a formal organisation, and, most frequently, within a rigid occupational structure. However, Goffman continues, careers need not necessarily be viewed as solely occupational, but can also constitute any form of (often mundane and everyday) social progression. This follows on from Mead’s (1934) anthropological approach to identity which views it as constituted through the projection of the self onto others. Identity development is therefore an active process through which individuals process feedback about the self (Hall, 2002). For example, Glaser (1968) offers a consideration of the status progression of medical interns, while Becker (1963) famously charts the careers of marijuana users and dance musicians, while Goffman (1968) presents a consideration of the (moral) career of ‘mental patients’. For Goffman (1968:119), the career of the ‘mental patient’ is a moral one as it involves a development of an individual’s identity and “entails [changes] in the person’s self and his (...) framework of imagery for judging himself (...) and others.” Goffman finds the concept of career most useful in considering the changes in identity of ‘mental patients’, as it allows for a two-sided view of this process, where “one side is linked to internal matters (...) such as self and felt identity; the other side concerns official position, jural relations, and style of life.”

Indeed, identity is made up of a collection of sub-identities of which work identity is one central aspect of the sense of self (Hall & Schneider, 1973; Nicholson, 1996; Ibarra, 1999). This is why some of the boundaryless career literature suggests that people’s core identities may be enlarged by incorporating a commitment to their ‘life’s work’ (Hall & Mirvis, 1994). This thesis will argue that it also works in the
opposite way, whereby the core identity can be constrained by the career identity. Careers are highly interdependent upon communication processes, notably as negotiation of joint plans of action and of identity, role and status. Careers, work, and identity are seen as interrelated aspects of the self as a social object (Strauss et al., 1964). Hence, the concept of a career is based upon what Galtung (1966) refers to as both ascribed and achieved status or, as Goffman argues (1968:119), it “… allows one to move back and forth between the personal and the public, between the self and its significant society”. Crucially, then, the concept of a career ties in both elements of structure and agency, ascribed and achieved status, exploring the interdependence of individual roles and identity as well as institutional positions and expectations.

Moreover, although as Hughes (1968) suggests, career paths and structures can be quite rigid and persistent in their structure and form, in some organisations and ‘communities’ these may be (what Hughes refers to as) “disordered” (17). This research extends this to include fluid and temporal as is the case in the art market. Detailed studies of occupations and professions, their ideologies, cultures, and institutions, their effect on lifestyle choices, and their influence on personal identity and self-image formation, maintenance and reproduction therefore have a well-established place in the sociological research tradition (Simpson, 1981; Coxon & Davies, 1986; Allen & Wolkowitz, 1987; Pringle, 1989; 1998). Taken together, this research on work has revealed the profound influence of distinctive occupational cultures on how people perceive, define and evaluate themselves and interact with their peers. Work, whether interpreted in conventional economic terms as paid employment or interpreted more inclusively as a broad range of activities above and beyond waged labour, is a central and defining feature of contemporary society. Waged work can be a principal source of individuals’ self-confidence and self-fulfilment, while it can also be crucial to the establishment of their standard of living and to their status as citizens. That the activity of work is central in understanding how people choose to identify themselves is unsurprising, particularly considering that when most strangers meet, the question ‘what do you do?’ is a standard form of conversational introduction. Work is therefore one of the more important parts of an individual’s sense of self and that work plays a vital role in the narratives that individuals weave about their lives.
Bain (2005) investigates how artists construct their career identity and finds that due to the limited means of clearly distinguishing between professional and amateur and the lack of recognition attributed to artistic labour as ‘real’ work, professional status comes largely from drawing on a repertoire of shared myths and stereotypes to help create an artistic identity and project it to others. The career therefore depends partly on being able to market oneself as ‘an artist’ and the work as ‘art’ in line with notions of authenticity (of central importance to current definitions of value in the art market yet glossed over in the marketing literature). Indeed, this thesis seeks to investigate this further by using marketing to look at how value is attached to the art work through use of these identities and myths. Artists must feed into these popular myths to reinforce their occupational authenticity, exaggerating and exploiting their individuality for success on the market. Cultural branding (Holt, 2004) is therefore thought particularly fitting for this research, as it argues that the power of myth is not only in its interpretation of reality but also in creating and recreating reality by groups seeking legitimacy. The branding literature will be explored further in the third empirical chapter.

Hence, this thesis suggests that it is the adoption of a loosely defined career structure and process of induction into the market, coupled with an understanding of the fluidity and temporarily of many groups and ‘communities’ in the arts market, that offers the most profitable theorisation of how works of art are valued. This theorisation has a number of advantages over typologies or non-career based continua set out in many existing conceptualisations of the arts market. It allows for an understanding of an artist’s position within the arts market as the product of both ‘achieved’ and ‘ascribed’ status and hence as a product of both ‘agency’ and ‘structure’. It recognises the fluidity and temporality of the ‘communities’ within the arts market, how an individual’s position in this can change over time, and how they can belong to numerous ‘communities’ and groups, which they move in and out of as well as how, in line with Becker (1963), an artist’s identity and work is articulated in and through this social interaction. This research argues that an artist’s career is not a fixed linear trajectory but evolves based on career contingencies within constantly changing networks. Fluctuations in these networks parallel the current changes in the arts market discussed in this chapter. Previous analysis of the arts market, including Velthius’ study, do not convey that this fluidity (and therefore fragility) is one of the
most important features of the arts market. Moreover, this theorisation recognises that the attributes and progression of an artist’s career is unlikely to be uniform, and individuals occupying a similar career position may demonstrate different characteristics in their patterns of behaviour vis-à-vis accessing the market, which provides a framework for understanding why career trajectories are not exactly repeatable and how relatively minor changes in subtle variables can lead to major changes in career path. Finally, as noted throughout the literature, the notion of ‘career trajectory’ or ‘career development’ has become inextricably linked to marketing in the arts market as, in order to progress in their career trajectory, artists must market themselves either by their own means or through other actors such as dealers. Indeed, it has been argued that in boundaryless careers, individual marketability is an important criterion of career success (Eby, et al., 2003). Therefore, this theorisation will demonstrate the relationship between career development and marketing in the arts market as well as how these depend upon certain key competencies in terms of career management.

After emphasising the importance of the social context, it becomes essential to consider cultural differences as well. As noted in the literature, the art market is becoming increasingly international and most studies of the art market now consider an international perspective essential (Crane 1987; Jyrama 2002; While, 2003). However, although the media have taken an active role in analysing the newly emerging markets, particularly China and India, there is very little academic research on emerging art markets. By taking an international perspective and comparing the UK art market with the emerging Chinese art market, this study will identify whether artists are legitimised and their work valued in a similar manner in both regions.

2.5 Conclusion

As has been articulated throughout this chapter, the purpose of this literature review has been fourfold. This first part has intended to unpack the complexity of the way in which art works are valued in the art market through the endorsement process using a sociological framework. It has also aimed to explore the social structure of the art market, and in so doing, has suggested that while networks are essential to understand the art market, network theory is considered too static to encapsulate the workings of the art world. In fact, while the current literature on value in the art
market covers both the endorsement process and its network structure (recently for example: Jyrama, 2002; Elfring & Hulsink, 2003; Velthius, 2005), issues of temporality, relative status of the various actors in the market and how authenticity is defined have been neglected, ignoring the institutional theory of art. Recent arts marketing research has examined the artist as an entrepreneur and the relevance of branding to the art market (Fillis, 2000; Schroeder, 2005; Chong, 2008), emphasising the importance of marketing in attaching value to the art product. Again, though, the relationship between brand image and identity to the sociological construction of the artist and the product as ‘authentic’ is overlooked. In order to be successful, marketing of the arts must be in line with the prevailing notions of authenticity and therefore this thesis argues that an analysis of value in the art market must take a wider, holistic view by looking at the relationship between product, producer and career. Looking at the visual arts market through a career lens is one way of doing this as we can follow the product from creation to consumption. Thirdly, an overview of the current state of the art market has underlined a shift in the underlying framing discourse used towards economics and marketing. As new distributional arrangements are emerging and new audiences for art created, the very possibility of a career as an artist is becoming increasingly sustainable. Visual artists’ careers have traditionally been neglected in the marketing literature yet a careers perspective allows us to examine the socially constructed nature of value and its inherent volatility. A career perspective also allows us to take a temporal perspective on marketing, and to look at how marketing intersects with identity issues. Finally, an analytical framework for the study has been developed combining the sociological and network theories and taking an international perspective. In so doing, it has been argued that one of the intended contributions of this thesis is to augment the existing body of research on how art is legitimised on the art market by providing an overview of artist’s career trajectories through time both in the UK and China. In order to conduct this research, it is necessary to examine the art world in a certain way. The following chapter will set out the methodology that has been chosen for this study, arguing that a qualitative research process combining observation and interviews is the most suitable for an examination of the dynamic and fluid nature of career trajectories.
3. Methodology

As was identified in the introduction to this thesis, the field of research on the art market suffers from a lack of detailed knowledge about how artists can construct and manage their careers through positioning and branding in order for their work to access the market and acquire value. This chapter offers insights into examining this. In particular, this chapter aims to explicate and rationalise the choice of the data collection methods and their modes of implementation. In so doing, it argues for the use of semi-structured interviews and observational methods to collect data about the art market and describes the actors under study as well as the specific details of the data collection. Following on from the review of the literature in the last chapter, we will start by looking at previous studies of the arts sector to determine the various methodological approaches that have been taken previously in order to situate the study within the wider field of research. We will then proceed to determine the scope of the data collection and discuss how the data was coded and analysed. An example of the way in which the data was analysed will allow for an understanding of the symbolic interactionist methodological approach this thesis puts forward.

3.1 Methodological Approaches taken to Studies of the Arts Sector

The network scope under examination in this research is the sector-wide art market. This is achieved by investigating and looking at the internal dynamics of the relationships of the arts market. However, as the art market operates in rather an open system, and there is a mixture of industry actors involved (Currid, 2007), it is necessary to determine a reasonable network boundary for this study. As established in the literature review, the artist is regarded as the focal point of the networks under study (differentiating the research from most other studies that take dealers as their primary focus e.g. Velthius, 2005), from which the network scope of the market starts expanding. This is because the artist is the producer of the work on which the industry is based and the first person attached to a work of art. An understanding of the internal dynamics of the network is therefore achieved by focusing on how the artists and the network gatekeepers of the arts market (dealers, critics, curators and collectors) interact, so as to legitimise a work of art and change the values attached to it. Now that we have decided on the scope and focus of the research it is necessary to decide on an approach.
Most previous studies of the art market have been oriented to analysis of historical records (Reitlinger, 1961; White & White, 1965; Montias 1982, Ehrlich 1985; Warnke 1993), auction records and census records (Throsby & Thompson, 1994; O’Brien & Feist, 1995; Alper & Wassall, 1998; Galenson, 2000; Smith, 2000). This is due to the lack of empirical data in the art market, these are the only avenues for large quantitative sets of data but lead to a well noted bias in terms of the definition of professional artist and how the occupation is determined: only the most successful artists being represented in auction transactions and limitations in terms of variations through time and the classification of ‘chief job activity of business’ in most census data which does not account for the multiple job-holding behaviour of artists (Menger, 2001). This is why while this study did look at auction data, especially to determine trends in the art market, this is only used to supplement findings from qualitative data collection methods.

Instead, this thesis follows Plattner’s (1998) study of the art market which argues for an ethnographic study of a sample of artists’ careers to examine causes of artistic as well as commercial success, how artists situate themselves along the dimension from identity- to profit-oriented producer and how the social mechanisms used to authenticate value change in different contexts. Miles and Huberman (1994) have summarised the strengths of qualitative data in terms of realism, richness and longitudinal perspective, locating the meaning of experience within the social world. In other words placing the phenomena within its context. The choice of qualitative methods is derived from the need for a comprehensive understanding of the real practices and characteristics involved in artists’ careers. Since the interpretive research process offers an open, flexible and experiential approach, it is thought that the examination of dynamic nature of the career trajectories and relationships can be more effectively achieved with this approach, especially since they mostly occur through human interaction. Furthermore, according to Kvale, the qualitative research interview attempts “to understand the world from the subjects’ points of view, to unfold the meaning of peoples’ experiences, to uncover their lived world” (1996:1). Qualitative research therefore allows for the development of concepts which help us understand social phenomena in natural settings, giving due emphasis to the meanings, experiences and views of the participants. Therefore, the choice of qualitative methods is considered the most appropriate for this study, as the research objective
demands in-depth and comprehensive insights into an understanding of the art market to uncover the social structure of the art market through which art gets valued which is a complex web of dynamic processes. In some ways, this research combines what Silverman (2005) suggests as being the emotionalist model and the constructionist model of qualitative research. The former aims to obtain authentic insights by focusing on the perception and meaning of the research subjects, while the latter addresses the behaviours and interactions of research subjects, with the aim of examining how phenomena are constructed.

Another of the more common qualitative methods seen in research of artistic careers comes from surveys of artists (Frey & Pommerehne, 1989; Throsby & Mills, 1989; Bielby & Bielby, 1989; 1993; 1999; Throsby & Thompson, 1994) which allows for self-definition of the artist as compared to census data. The advantage of this is that it encapsulates a temporal dimension of occupational commitment, since artists may, at times, cycle between jobs or experience sectoral mobility and yet continue to think of themselves as artists. However, the difficulty with this approach is that it does not work as a market test. As this study is focused on the art market, self-definition was not enough in selecting the sample of artists interviewed, this is why other criteria were used in selection, most notably galleries and prizes as will be detailed further on. In fact, it is important to note that the very definition of the artist as well as the orderly course of an artistic career in the literature is dependent on variables in terms of how highly competitive and contestable labour and product markets are characterised as, and how they operate and evolve. This is teased out further in the analysis of the data in terms of the temporal nature of what is considered authentic in the art world. Aside from definitional issues, there are few studies of the art market that account for a temporal dimension. Two exceptions are Rengers (2002) who used surveys to follow a group of artists in the Netherlands for six years after graduation and Alper and Wassall (2002), who followed the same panel for more than twenty years. Rengers’ study is limited in that six years is a relatively small number of years making it difficult to observe and examine the artists’ career trajectories. In the case of Alper and Wassall, while covering a longer period of time, the survey was not specifically designed to examine issues unique to artists as it was designed to represent the general population and therefore includes relatively few artists. Moreover due to the methodological limitations of surveys, these studies cannot probe
further into the issues around artists’ careers that are revealed and are therefore somewhat superficial. In comparison, this study focused on interviews and observational methods as presented above, in line with more sociologically-oriented studies by Becker (1982), Moulin (1987), Velthius (2005) and Robertson (2005) allowing for more in-depth analysis. Although the study is limited temporally due to the fact that it had to be completed in three years, the temporal dimension was touched on through its cross-sectional approach, selecting artists at different states in their career trajectories. Moreover through interviews, the researcher was able to tease out the longitudinal aspect of this research by asking the respondent about their career histories in order to identify career contingencies (or lack of them). This follows on from previous research (e.g. Cohen and Mallon, 2001) that suggests that by recounting their own experiences, individuals can provide rich insights about their working contexts, their role within these contexts, and how the two interact.

The reason for adopting semi-structured (in-depth) interviews rather than structured interviews or surveys is their less rigid style. This not only allows interviewees to express their opinions in their own words, but also allows for two-way communication, based around a predetermined topic. In this case, as the main unit of analysis is the artist’s career trajectory, semi-structured interviews were considered necessary in order to understand what the interviewee viewed as important in explaining and understanding events, patterns and forms of behaviour. Although this may not lead to objective information, it does capture the subject’s views in order to get a sense of their identity and the reasons behind their behaviour and relationships. As Esterberg (2002) suggests, although interviewers typically start with an idea about what the interview will cover, and therefore conduct the interviews in a guided conversational manner, it is the interviewee’s responses that “shape the order and structure of the interview” (87). In addition, this interview style enables new questions and themes to emerge as a result of the discussion, so as to enable the interviewees and the researcher to explore topics in further detail. The main limitation of this methodology is that much of the information on the workings of the art market emerged spontaneously from the interviews, rather than being elicited through direct questions. Also, the same questions were not necessarily asked of all respondents. This makes the results valuable as unforced views of the respondents but it also means that it is not always strictly comparable between two cases.
Another feature of most studies of the art market is that they tend to focus on one particular group of actors in the art market, usually dealers (Joy, 1996; Velthius, 2005), or on the audience to look at consumption (Andreason & Belk, 1982; Holbrook & Schindler, 1989; Caldwell & Woodside, 2001; Rentschler & Gilmore, 2002). This research instead, follows Becker’s (1982) lead, in line with Joy & Sherry’s (2003) push for a holistic view of the art market, examining the operation of all aspects of the value chain in the art market. As generally considered appropriate for qualitative research, potential respondents for this study were identified through purposive sampling (Silverman, 2001) to represent as wide a range of hierarchical and functional positions within the arts market as possible (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). In order to increase objectivity, a range of other art market professionals were therefore interviewed, not solely artists. This data allowed for a comparison between artists’ individual perspectives which inform their career trajectories and the realities of the structure of the art market.

In addition, data was gathered through observation to further unpick any biases by triangulating this data with that gathered from interviews. Observational methods are a way of distinguishing whether what participants say in interviews reflect what they do in reality (Silverman, 1997). The main advantage of the method is its immediacy, instead of asking questions about behaviours, the researcher systematically observes the research participants in their natural settings, gaining a greater understanding of everyday behaviours and relationships. This is particularly useful for this study as artists tend to underplay their marketing behaviour as this tends to be viewed negatively in the art world, moreover artists are not always self-aware of this behaviour and may not characterise it as such. Observation from fieldwork therefore enhanced and further-contextualised my understanding of the practices and structure of the art world and the roles and interactions played by artists as already revealed by the interview data. The remainder of this thesis will seek to reveal the value of such an approach to the study of the art market as a way to develop an understanding of how artists access the market.

3.2 Details of the Data Collection

In terms of the primary data collection methods applied in this study, they include the following: a) collection of relevant literature: policy documentations,
official statistics, trade reports, news reports from the art market press, and papers; b) semi-structured interviews and c) observations.

The empirical research was based upon the following six steps, undertaken from August 2009 to February 2011:

**Step 1: Review of the Secondary Data**

The secondary data of this research was collected through a review of related government documentation, research papers and press and internet materials concerning the art market. Particular attention was given to the materials concerning the endorsement process in the arts market. However, the data was limited and fragmented; therefore the pilot study (step 2) and sector-wide study (step 3) were applied to the fieldwork.

**Step 2: A Pilot Study through interviews**

A pilot study was conducted in London between October 2009 and December 2009, by undertaking small scale semi-structured interviews with five private gallerists, five public gallerists, four artists and four curators. The purpose was a) to empirically verify the relevance of my research issues concerning the contemporary arts market; b) to gather arts professionals’ interpretations about the importance of networks in the art market and how they affect value and c) to fine-tune the data-collection methods and questions. The pilot study was helpful, as the interviewees highlighted three points: a) the importance of career contingencies and relationships in order for an artist’s work to become legitimised, b) the uncertainty inherent in artistic career trajectories and c) the method of initial e-mail contact and the face-to-face semi-structured interviews was found to be effective, as they tested out the relevance of the research topic to these practitioners, and produced rich first-hand data.

When this research was started, the major objective was to identify how networks affect artists’ career trajectories. However, based on the findings of the pilot study, the research focus shifted to examining how artists construct and manage their identity and branding to access the market. This was due to that fact that the findings revealed that artists themselves seem to have very little knowledge as to how to access the market and that this process is wider than solely networks. Following career trajectories by examining issues of artistic identity as well as relationships allows for
a more holistic view of the art world and understanding of how art is legitimised within it.

**Step 3: Face-to-Face Semi-structured Interviews with Artists**

The first tier of the primary data was collected following seventeen face-to-face semi-structured interviews with artists in London. The interview process involved the following: 1) the interviewees were firstly filtered through lists of artists selected for certain prizes or collections that are considered key contingencies by the endorsement process (Turner Prize, Venice Biennale, Tate and British Council collections for established artists and New Contemporaries, Zabludowicz and Saatchi collections for mid-career and emerging artists). These filters were used following an initial series of informal discussions with key art market figures as well as a review of the visual art press. Interviewees were then further filtered down by career age. In order to draw out the cross-sectional aspect of career trajectories, three groups of five artists at different career stages were decided on: emerging artists who graduated from art school in the past five years; artists who have been working professionally for 6-14 years and; established artists who have been working for at least 15 years. While the terms emerging, mid-career and established are widely used in the art market there are no set boundaries as to how these are defined. The time periods used here were decided on in conjunction with key art market professionals and artists and serve as a baseline for the study, however it is important to remember that status comes from key contingencies such as solo shows, museum shows, etc. rather than being calculated based purely on years in the field. The empirical analysis will discuss these career levels further. 2) A snowballing technique (Malhotra et al., 1996) was employed to gain contact with potential interviewees and/or key informants and 3), as artists are rather elusive, they were initially contacted by email, with an interview invitation letter covering a brief background to the research and key interview themes.

The aims of conducting these interviews with artists were: 1) to gain a broad understanding of their perspective on their career trajectories and artistic identity; 2) to identify which groups of the art market they network with and the degree of their involvement in these groups and 3), the values they attach to their work and how they perceive other members of the art market to value their work. A final step was to gather exhibition reviews and catalogues about the artists interviewed in order to
compare artists’ own perspectives on their work with how they are contextualised by other art market actors, specifically critics, curators and dealers as well as auction houses for the most established artists. This analysis revealed underlying tensions between artists’ personal artistic identities and how they are viewed in the art world.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee (pseudonym)</th>
<th>Career Stage</th>
<th>Sex</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>emerging</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lily</td>
<td>emerging</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexander</td>
<td>emerging</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theo</td>
<td>emerging</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>emerging</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>emerging</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>mid-career</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>mid-career</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faye</td>
<td>mid-career</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diana</td>
<td>mid-career</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry</td>
<td>established</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William</td>
<td>established</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jasper</td>
<td>established</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin</td>
<td>established</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elliot</td>
<td>established</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jude</td>
<td>established</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erin</td>
<td>established</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1: Artists Interviewed in London
Step 4: Face-to-Face Semi-structured Interviews with Dealers

Subsequently, the second tier of the primary data collection in the UK was carried out by conducting another twelve, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with dealers in London. Obtaining representation is an important step in an artist’s career and affects the perceived value of their work as demonstrated in the literature (Velthius, 2005). Moreover, since both dealer’s and artist’s success in the art market are inextricably linked it is important to understand their relationship. Therefore, interviewees were selected by the same process as in step 3 in order to get data from artists and dealers who work within the same networks. Dealers in both the public and private sectors were chosen in order to provide a more holistic view of the different sectors of the art market, public generally representing critical acclaim while private signifying economic success, generally a mixture of both is necessary for lasting success in the market (Velthius, 2005). All the dealers interviewed were selected due to their prominence in the London art market as evidenced either by their participation in the major international art fairs (Frieze and Basel) or the success of the artists they represent in terms of the national prizes and collections referenced above (Turner Prize, Venice Biennale, Tate and British Council Collections). The purpose of these interviews was: 1) to gain an understanding of their decision-making in choosing which artists they represent, 2) to examine which networks they participate in and whether they enable artists to access them and 3), to ascertain how dealers enhance the value of the art they represent and how they price the art.
Table 3.2: Dealers Interviewed in London

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>Public/Private</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Richard</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andi</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoe</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rob</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethan</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucas</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xavier</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ewan</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabriella</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isabelle</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Step 5: Face-to-Face Semi-structured Interviews with critics, curators and collectors

Finally, another seven interviews were conducted with various arts professionals in London, including critics, curators and collectors all of whom are a part of the endorsement process, contributing to the value of artworks and the direction of an artist’s career. These interviewees were selected by the snowballing technique through the first two sets of interviews with artists and dealers in order to further examine the network actors with which they work. The objective of these interviews were: 1) to identify the relationships these actors have with artists, 2) to gain a better understanding of how these relationships contribute to the value of an artwork and 3), to understand how they select which artists they buy from / work with.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>Curator (public)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ella</td>
<td>Curator (public)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sebastian</td>
<td>Curator (public)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molly</td>
<td>Curator (private)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte</td>
<td>Collector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>Collector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audrey</td>
<td>Critic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.3: Other Interviews in London

*Step 6: Face-to-Face Semi-structured Interviews in Hong Kong*

As discussed in the introduction, one part of the objective of this research is to examine how artists operate in the emerging Hong Kong art market in order to analyse whether their career trajectories have the same structure as in the developed UK art market and assess how the networks of the art market function on a global scale. In order to do this, a further seventeen face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were conducted in Hong Kong. These again included artists, dealers, curators and critics. They were recruited in much the same manner as UK interviewees. Primarily, selection ensured that the participants have achieved a high level of international prominence as they have either been sold at two of the most prestigious art fairs (Frieze and Basel) or represented Hong Kong at the Venice Biennale, thereby allowing the research to examine how their networks operate on a global level. Due to the small size of the Hong Kong art market, the snowballing technique allowed for further interviews with less established artists and galleries allowing for comparison between the broader and more successful Chinese art market and the local Hong Kong art market. The purpose of these interviews was: 1) to identify the structure of artists career trajectories in the Chinese art market, 2) to understand the structure of the Chinese art market and how work is valued on it and 3), to examine how the Chinese art market was constructed in the past ten years.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Interviewee (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>Career Stage</th>
<th>Sex</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Artist</td>
<td>Bruce</td>
<td>established</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artist/curator (public)</td>
<td>Stephen</td>
<td>established</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artist</td>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>established</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artist</td>
<td>Leo</td>
<td>mid-career</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artist</td>
<td>Pacey</td>
<td>mid-career</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artist</td>
<td>Kai</td>
<td>mid-career</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artist</td>
<td>Oliver</td>
<td>mid-career</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artist</td>
<td>Milo</td>
<td>emerging</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curator (private)/artist</td>
<td>Iris</td>
<td>emerging</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dealer (private)</td>
<td>Emilia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dealer (private)</td>
<td>Louise</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dealer (private)</td>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dealer (private)</td>
<td>Victor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dealer (private)</td>
<td>April</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curator (public)/critic</td>
<td>Amy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultant/critic/collector</td>
<td>Anthony</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist for auction house</td>
<td>Debbie</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.4: Interviews in Hong Kong
### Table 3.5: All Interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of Interviewees</th>
<th>Number of Interviewees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Artists (UK)</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dealers (UK)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critics, Curators &amp; Collectors (UK)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total UK Interviews</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artists (HK)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dealers (HK)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critics, Curators &amp; Collectors (HK)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total HK Interviews</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Interviews</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One of the major difficulties in the data collection process was the recruitment of respondents due to the high level of competition and secrecy in the arts market especially concerning galleries and their fierce control of access to their artists, making it harder for the researcher to contact artists directly. In order to recruit more interviewees, as discussed above, snowball sampling was adopted. One advantage of snowball sampling is that the researcher can gain access to respondents’ networks by gaining access to one respondent then asking for recommendations for other people that they know, a process called “networked interviewing” (Rubin & Rubin, 1995:68) or “cumulative interviewing” (Zuckerman, 2003:380), proposed by Rubin and Rubin (1995) as a useful means of gaining access to otherwise difficult-to-access groups. In using this method, a more holistic view of the networks in which interviewees are operating was achieved.

### 3.3 Supplemental Data

In order to obtain information about the arts market and gain a sense of the environment, the researcher also got a significant amount of information from observational methods in attending arts events such as auctions, art fairs, biennales
and art openings and watching artists at work in their studios and galleries as well as participating in ‘crits’ (critique sessions, generally considered the most important form of formative assessment) at art schools. Prolonged engagement in the field is usually necessary to learn about the setting and the people involved, with time needed to progress from unstructured observations, to the more specific actions and events, and understanding what data is significant for the research, and what is relatively unimportant (Sacks, 1992). In this case, the data comes from a variety of sources outlined above during a period of two years, namely June 2009 to June 2011. There are two main categories of observational methods, unobtrusive and obtrusive, in this case unobtrusive methods were used. Generally, unobtrusive methods (e.g. field observation) are those whereby data is gathered with minimal impact upon participants’ experiences. Unobtrusive methods are used when the researcher desires to preserve the naturalistic features of the environment to the maximum extent possible and to obtain results that are minimally affected by the researcher (Silverman, 2005). In the case of observational study, observation involves making sampling decisions in where the researcher decides to focus and as such, observations made are incomplete records of the actual activity, only a portion of that which is actually going on. What is recorded in field notes influences the types of findings and inferences that one is able to make during data analysis and is therefore not neutral. This is why it was important to make sure to cross reference any findings from observational data with information from interviews and the secondary data in order to neutralise any personal influences (Silverman, 2001).

3.4 Ethical Considerations

During recruitment, interviewees were provided with a research proposal indicating the purpose of the study as well as the information sheet regarding ethical clearance and considerations. Participants were merely invited to participate after explaining the study and the information sheet. They were also told that they did not need to participate if they felt uncomfortable with participating in any way and could withdraw at any time before the cut-off date. All participants were fully informed before taking part as to how the data was to be collected, stored and used. The interviewee was asked to sign the consent form before the commencement of the interview. The information sheet confirmed their right to withdraw before the data was prepared for analysis. If a participant wished to withdraw from the research, the
data related to that individual and all records were deleted as long as the cut off date had not passed.

Interviews usually lasted between one and three hours. In order to observe the environment in which the arts market takes place, interviews were conducted at interviewees’ place of work (i.e. studio, gallery, museum). Semi-structured interviews were either formal, recorded interviews or informal conversations extensively recorded in field notes which were written up during and immediately after the conversation or event. Legard, et al. (2003) believe that one of the fundamental principles of semi-structured interviews is to listen to what the respondent is saying, trying to understand the subtext of what needs to be explored. To allow the researcher to have full attention and to capture the language of the interviewee, they argue, audio-recording should be used (with the consent of the research participant) to provide an accurate record of the interview for analysis. A potential limitation of this approach is that the respondent will not speak freely when recorded, this is why the information sheet was important in notifying interviewees as to how the data would be managed and stored as well as ensuring their anonymity and confidentiality. In line with ethics regulations, anonymity was necessary and established by using pseudonyms. This also meant severely restricting the amount of information given about each participant in terms of the details as to the genre and style of their work, work history and people and institutions they have worked with. However, due to the nature of the analysis of artist’s careers, it may be possible for the reader to identify the artist discussed due to references to certain institutions they have showed in. In these specific cases, permission was secured from the respondent. If the respondent refused to have the interview recorded, detailed notes would be taken instead, although none of the participants in this study refused. Once transcribed verbatim or written up, the interviews and field notes were stored using NVivo 9 and then coded by hand using an iterative technique (Wolcott, 1990; Richards, 2005). The ethical guidelines for research concerning anonymity and confidentiality were applied throughout the collection, analysis and presentation of the empirical data.

3.5 Data Analysis

The overall concern addressed in this thesis seeks to unpack artists’ career trajectories to understand how they are legitimised and their work valued. It has been
argued throughout this chapter that such a pursuit necessitates interviews and observational methods. In addition, the specific methods of data collection have been presented in detail. Thus, having substantiated the methods selected and used in collecting the data, this chapter now turns to explicating the analytic orientation employed to answer the research questions. Here, methodological considerations will be discussed with a particular focus on notions of theoretically and empirically driven coding.

As the semi-structured interview and observational data forms the bulk of the empirical data in this research, this qualitative study is characterised by an interpretative, subjective analytical orientation. However, the interpretative approach to qualitative research bears the burden and potential of subjectivity (Holliday, 2007). Therefore, an awareness of taking a step back was present throughout the research, so as to achieve a mutual co-construction of meaning in the real world, and especially, to show how the research is constructed in relation to the research setting, to ensure its cultural and ideological appropriateness. The interpretative approach taken for the data analysis in this research can be said to consider both deductive and inductive dimensions, yet it is more inductive than deductive. Firstly, the collection and analysis of the empirical data aimed to acquire first-hand knowledge of the phenomenon under study, from the individual actors involved, through to a more inductive exploration, so as to allow implications, meaning and patterns to emerge (Holliday, 2007). Such an inductive and interpretative approach involves “the constellation of procedures, conditions, and resources through which the reality is apprehended, understood, organised, and represented” (Gubrium and Holstein, 1997:14). Secondly, this research provided both theoretical and empirical inferences, so as to explain the real circumstances and to develop generalisations and implications for the research topic.

*Development of the coding schema and coding procedures*

The researcher must attempt to make sense of the data using a particular perspective or set of perspectives. For the research presented here, qualitative observation offered a valuable lens for viewing the data. Qualitative observation is typically associated with a form of analysis whereby researchers find meaning in the data (typically considered as a ‘bottom-up’ approach) rather than using theory to make sense of the data (typically, ‘top-down’) (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Silverman,
2001). Yet, as will be described, in this research, the observational data were coded systematically, using a coding schema developed in a series of iterations wherein theoretical codes were supplemented by those emerging from repeated analysis of the interview transcripts (Miles & Huberman, 1994), combining existing theory with empirical observations to make sense of the activity occurring. A provisional list of codes was defined before the coding process began including items derived from the researcher’s conceptual framework, research questions, existing hypotheses, etc. (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Codes which emerged from the data, using the bottom-up approach, were then added to the overall list of codes. The coding scheme therefore reflected both the researcher’s theoretical understandings and biases, and observations emerging from the data itself. This theoretically and empirically driven approach was used to inform what possible trajectories an artist could take to access the market, receive endorsement and add value to their work.

A set of eight criteria emerged from the literature review and the pilot study, suggesting that for an artist to become successful in the art market one may expect them to go through the endorsement process of: art school, artistic identity construction, self-marketing, dealer representation, gathering critical reviews, exhibition at museums, inclusion in significant private collections and resale at auction. Creating a coding scheme that was informed by these categories ensured that the analysis explored the extent to which these steps are (or are not) necessary for access and success on the market and how the actors involved interact to create the structure of their career trajectories, thereby assessing the applicability of the propositions developed in the theoretical framework. Thus, in order to answer the research question, a coding schema of both theoretically and empirically driven codes was used as the interview transcripts were systematically coded. Although NVivo was used for storing the data, it was rejected as a tool for coding because it was considered too laborious for the context of this research. Validity was also strengthened by means of triangulation, a method whereby multiple data sources or multiple theoretical approaches are used to research similar phenomena and examine similar dimensions (Silverman, 2005).
Multiple Levels of Analysis

The research is also structured by the fact that it consists of three interrelated levels of analysis from the individual, to the personal relationships between actors of the art market, to the consumption level of analysis, operating internationally, between large groups of people. The individual-level analysis aims to understand how the perceptions, attitudes and concerns of artists influence the value of their work in the art market. The relationship-level analysis continues to be an examination into the internal process of how artists interact with other network agents as their work goes up the endorsement chain, how they are placed and contextualised in the art market and how value changes throughout this process. At the consumption level, the research looks at how the art (and artist) is branded and how this brand is consumed. The findings from the individual-level data will guide the analysis of the higher-level data, and consequently, the exploratory approach will allow comprehension of artists’ careers in a more holistic way from the producer’s point of view. As is the norm for qualitative research, data was collected until a point of data saturation was achieved (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Analytical Process

As this study calls on approaches that discourage a priori assumptions, it is difficult to outline an analytic strategy. A research agenda would undermine the concern for discovering what interviewees take to be important (Psathas, 1995; Schegloff, 1996). Instead, the research began with what might be described as an ‘unmotivated’ look through the data for issues which catch the eye, a method borrowed from conversation analysis:

The variety of (...) phenomena available for study are not selected on the basis of some preformulated theorising, which may assume specific matters of greater or lesser significance. Rather the first stages of research have been characterised as unmotivated looking. (Psathas, 1995:45).

Of course, it is impossible to be entirely unmotivated: something will often have driven the research, and one will have knowledge of the types of issues that have proved interesting in the past and might warrant further exploration. Making detailed transcripts and coding them allowed the analyst to perform an inductive data-driven
analysis aiming to systematically find recurring patterns of interaction. As the analysis evolved, and a growing number of fragments of transcripts were analysed, a set of issues emerged as particularly interesting, it was then possible to return to the main collection of data fragments to gather more data that appeared relevant to the further development of some of these identified issues. The next stage allowed me to see whether the fragments contained phenomena that made a case for, developed or allowed argument against the issues. Some of these issues found their way into the thesis, others touched off further issues and some were left out for more pertinent ideas. Based on this analysis, the researcher could then develop a rule or model to explain the occurrence of the patterns which were generally built up through time. Gradually, the initial, ‘unmotivated looking’ transformed small parts of the many hours of gathered data into rigorously studied fragments relating to interesting issues that were then developed further.

In order to more fully describe this analytical process, an example of a few selected fragments will be analysed below:

*I suppose I kind of thought that I wanted to be an artist when I was about 13 or 14 (...) it felt pretty natural.* [Theo.1]

The fact that the artist describes the decision as a “feeling,” brings to the fore notions of vocation and identity, reinforced by the fact that it was “natural” to him. More evidence of this was found in other interviews:

*And I knew in my heart.* [Sarah.13]

This raises issues of an artistic career being a way of staying true to oneself and fulfilling deep-seated personal needs. Rational decisions do not seem to come into the decision-making process, highlighting the emotional discourse that is traditionally used in describing artists. The myth of the Romantic artist sets up the artist as emotional, pursuing art for art’s sake rather than for any commercial reasons. This leads us to considering the interplay between society’s stereotypes and myths about artists and artists’ own conceptions of themselves. The data pointed out that there was indeed significant interplay between the two but that this changed over time:

*In other words I was trying to be a genius in a ridiculous way, with all the stereotypes, dirty, smelly, staying up all night, not getting anything done,*
pathetic, so embarrassing, but anyway but I think doing what you want to do is incredibly difficult and really I think I devoted the rest of my life to trying to do that. [Henry.30]

This fragment shows evidence that while artists’ start out their careers and build their artistic identity in line with the societal perceptions of artists which is based on the notion of ‘authentic’ creative artists and that this changes over time. Temporal changes are therefore another issue that could be teased out of the data and something worthy of further investigation in the core data. The fragment also takes us back to the fact that the career comes from a sense of identity as an artist, the word “devoted” signifies giving oneself entirely to the work as well as a certain faithfulness, loyalty and perhaps even sacrifice. In fact the data pointed to the fact that practicing art was a necessary condition of the artist’s being:

*As long as I’ve got white A4 paper and a few felt pens, I’ll survive.* [Martin.18]

The career in these examples seems to be an extension of the identity. Work is created which leads onto a career. The central place of the work to the sense of self therefore comes through:

*But as I’m not doing it at the moment... I’m at a total loss, I don’t know what to do with myself.* [Jasper.15]

Again, implying that the artist’s core identity comes from the work itself. This close personal relationship between artist and work was evidenced further in their selling behaviour:

*I was thinking it was kind of like selling my soul because it was all my soul records, it was kind of an embodiment of my soul, all these objects that make me who I am.* [Chris.19]

The use of the term “soul” indicates a central and integral part of the artist, again taking us back to the notion of a vocation, something close to spiritual which animates the artist. It therefore follows that how the work is received by others will impact on artists’ sense of self.

*So yeah I think success is getting good feedback and people responding to it positively (...).* [Alexander.7]
This fragment uncovers subjective notions of success at the heart of artistic careers. Success is not defined by economic worth but instead relies on the discourse of work, positive feedback implies the work is communicating to others and as such is important. This is repeated in the following fragment:

[Success:] it’s several levels, one of which is critical recognition where whatever one is doing is seen as part of a conversation. [William.21]

This complicates notions of success which rely on more than just feedback, highlighting the need to look at other definitions of success in the data set. However, for the moment it again underlines the importance of others’ opinions in career success. However, the “people” referred to here is more specific than in the previous quote, it is not just about recognition but “critical” recognition, art world opinions seem to take precedence over outsiders. This raises the issue of the critical context in which the work is created, in turn showing a differentiation appearing between definition of oneself as an artist and definition of oneself as a ‘professional’ artist. Being a professional artist implies being recognised as such by the artistic community as implied in this fragment:

If I hadn’t achieved these shows this year I was going to stop. (...) I had to break through a certain level, I would have stopped. [Sarah.22]

Exposure in order to accumulate social capital and be valued is therefore crucial to the career and failure to get it could possibly be a reason for leaving the career. This opens up a new avenue which will need further analysis: what causes artists to exit the career trajectory. The notion of “break through” implies a progression from outside into the inner circles of the art world implying a socialisation process in order to become a professional artist. This was picked up in further fragments underlining the insularity and network structure of the art world:

And well I guess I met artists, (...) and then eventually got into the system.
[Elliot.8]

The “system” is the art world. In order to be a professional artist it is necessary to be a member of this world and to position oneself within it. Failure of acceptance into the art world therefore implies failure as an artist.
(...) and then I got a bit depressed after that because no one came. [Sarah.52]

This fragment brings us back full-circle to the relationship between the career and personal identity in terms of self-worth. Failure in achieving exposure and resulting critical recognition affected the artist psychologically, she became “depressed.” This suggests further that artists’ sense of success both as an individual and in their careers comes from how their work is consumed, directing further analysis as to how production and consumption influence each other and how artists must construct an artistic identity that encompasses both the career and the product, operating much like a brand in terms of the intangible values attached to it.

Figure 3.1 A visual representation of the analytical process, whereby fragments are grouped together under key issues (such as emotional drive, personal identity, etc.) which can then be analysed in relation to each other (so, for example, personal identity and professional identity feed into each other in a cyclical process) and further developed.

As we can see from the fragments above, issues regarding how artists define themselves as such, how their professional identity is developed through socialisation into the art world, the relationship between professional and personal identity and definitions of success all emerge as interesting issues, and consequently these are
some of the issues that are explored further in the thesis as subthemes. More generally, the themes of authenticity, the social aspect of value and the use of branding emerged as key in the data and as such structure this thesis. Indeed, the data revealed the centrality of the concept of authenticity in the art world and in the final value of the product; the importance of social capital in the valuation process; and the need for artists to consider a variety of conflicting and interconnected aspects in their marketing activities which branding theory can shed a light on.

3.6 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to present the methods of data collection used in this thesis. It has argued that given the nature and overall concern of this thesis, to identify how artists construct and manage their careers and how within this process value is attached to the art work, interview and observation methods of data collection are warranted in order to get rich first-hand data given the lack of previous research in this area. It has then detailed the specific methods of data collection. Finally, the chapter has also offered an argument for the analytic method used in this thesis, suggesting that theoretically and empirically driven coding enables the data to be classified for analysis within three levels of analysis. Once classified, rules or models could be gradually developed through rigorous and systematic study building up the issues that are discussed in this thesis. The following three chapters will focus on these issues, analysing the empirical data gathered. The first will look at how artists position themselves in the art world in order to be legitimised as ‘authentic’, focusing on the individual level outlined above. The second will focus on how legitimisation leads to an accumulation of social capital which is at the basis of the valuation of works of art, allowing for a widened perspective and revealing the structure of the art market. Finally, the third empirical chapter will examine issues of branding and consumption in the market, providing an understanding of the constructed nature of artists’ careers and the relationship between the product created and the career.
4. Artistic Careers: Authenticity and Positioning

“Rather than having professional development modules, we had a ‘life after art school’ lecture that lasted half an hour and we were just told that statistics prove that 7 years after art school you have as much chance of making your money from being a truck driver as you do from being a professional artist, and that was it, at least it was honest.” - Thomas, 16, established artist

So far we have set up the context for this study, providing a snapshot of the current contemporary art market and the need for a better understanding of the issues central to it, especially in terms of the valuation process which structures it. We have also set out a methodology to do so, in order to build up a rich, qualitative analysis. To do this we now turn towards the empirical evidence. It is proposed here that in order to look at the valuation process that structures the art market we must start with an overview of artists’ careers allowing for a temporal analysis of how value is built up (or lost) throughout the career. Moreover, the perspective of the artist, as noted previously, is lacking in the literature. This chapter sets the ground for the rest of the thesis in terms of looking at definitional issues, how artists define their career identity, how they differentiate between being professional and amateur and how they define success and value. These are all found to be multi-dimensional definitions which change throughout the career as the artist becomes socialised into the art world moving from outsider to insider. Moreover, the notion of authenticity is highlighted, it is found to be at the basis of how value is attributed into the art market, and is also socially constructed and therefore can shift through time. This chapter therefore presents an analysis of artistic careers, building up a picture of the possible career trajectories in order to better understand the career contingencies in terms of both progression and exit from the profession.

While the chapter is structured somewhat chronologically in terms of progression from emerging to established status, the conclusion makes clear that there is no such straightforward career ladder. In fact, these career trajectories are found to be extremely fluid and irregular, peaking at certain points and then tapering off, demanding constant management. What control there is for artists is to be found through strategic positioning and exposure in the market which in turn depends on a clear notion of the artistic identity. Analysis of the empirical data makes clear that the most significant career contingencies are due to meetings with key art market professionals which highlights the importance of relationships to the career, which
will be the focus of the following chapter. This chapter is composed of three main parts: the first provides an analysis of why and how artists choose to pursue an artistic career, demonstrating the career to be vocational and providing us with an understanding of the early construction of an artistic identity; the second part follows the main contingencies involved in the career as the artist moves from emerging to mid-career to established, demonstrating the necessity of constant management of the career through careful positioning as well as the insecurity associated with this fluid career structure; and finally the third part summarises what an artistic career entails and starts to define the relationship between the career and the product.

4.1 ‘BEING’ AN ARTIST

Why do artists decide to pursue a career characterised by insecurity and very little in terms of financial rewards? Answering this question will allow us to understand some of the values attached to the work during its production, while financial value is still non-existent at this point, other values are already apparent. Becoming an artist is less about ‘becoming’ one and rather more about ‘being’ one. According to their retrospective accounts, from an early age, artists ‘knew’ they wanted to pursue an artistic career although they may have had very few ideas as to what exactly that entails. A typical comment, for example:

*I suppose I kind of thought that I wanted to be an artist when I was about 13 or 14 (...) it felt pretty natural.* [Theo.1]

This conception of a career as an artist as the ‘natural’ course to take was the standard response to questions as to how they started their careers. Making art is characterised as something they either “always did” [Faye.1] or, it became “increasingly inevitable” [William.3]. Already, we can see, being an artist is more than just a job, it is an important part of the individual’s character and a way of defining themselves. This is highlighted by the difference between being an artist and the ‘normal’ careers that other people have. Many of the artists interviewed sought to differentiate themselves from the status quo:

*I was offered jobs at 17 (...) things like financial pr and various things, I had a Godfather that was (...) all ready to take me under his wing and really work me from 16 to sort of 50. And I was almost prepared to do it until something sort of.*
said ‘no, that’s not me actually’ (...) I think by 17 I was fairly aware that there was a, there was a sort of very certain path that people seem to take through their life, (...) and I was not interested in that. (...) I think, you know, if you’re kind of prone to over-analysis of things which I definitely am, you kind of see this kind of thing spiralling into a sort of miserable life (...) I just think that the idea of this self-honesty thing is important. [Theo.21]

I never had any doubt at all, I had one moment actually where I wanted to be an architect and I went to work as an architect’s company for one month one summer and solved drainage problems somewhere and that was it, I never went back so, no. [Erin.2]

In this first rather rose-tinted view of what a career as an artist entails, it is described as separate from the practicalities of life, drainage problems do not have to be considered, and creativity does not have to be limited. In fact self-honesty seems to derive from the freedom to be creative which will become an intrinsic part of the artistic identity as it develops. In the few cases where they did try another career, they realised pretty soon that they weren’t “functioning to [their] full capabilities” [Sarah.12]. Making art is characterised in this discourse as “fulfilling,” so the career is essentially a conduit in order to achieve a way of life [Henry.1].

In terms of how the interviewees came to be aware of the possibility of an artistic career, the crucial factor seems to be having an example to follow, thus we can already highlight the importance of relationships to the career. This example is often a family relation, in a few cases as close as a parent, but otherwise an aunt, uncle or godparent. This allows the artist-to-be to gain an understanding of the art world and start the socialisation or induction process which will shape the career trajectory:

So from quite a young age I knew what conceptual art was for example, it wasn’t just about Picasso, he would take me to shows and I’d get to understand what art could be. [Alexander.1]

This shows them that such a career is ‘possible’ and offers encouragement. It is interesting to note in passing that this means that most artists therefore come from relatively wealthy backgrounds, at the very least middle class with generally supportive parents who understand the value of an arts education and career. For
individuals from the working class, getting this sort of access to the art world is much more difficult and the few that do make it mention the importance of a mentor figure who took them under their wing and cultivated their professional identity.

As discussed in the literature, there is no set definition as to what constitutes a professional artist, theoretically it can be anyone who says they are so. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization’s (UNESCO) International Art Association, for example, has produced an all inclusive definition of the artist that includes:

Any person who creates, or gives creative expression to, or re-creates works of art; who considers his/her artistic creation to be an essential part of his/her life; who contributes to the development of art culture; and who asks to be recognised as an artist, whether he/she is bound by any relations of employment or association (Burgoyne, 1990:29).

Self-declaration and self-appointment as an artist however, is effectively an empty claim without societal acknowledgment of that chosen identity which comes from acceptance by other professionals and practitioners in the art world. Thus the importance of mentors, usually found in the form of a professional artist who suggests the possibility of art school as a way of infiltrating into the art world; both the artists from a working class background who were interviewed, started their careers in this way, with art school being a way of understanding and learning the rules and norms of the art world, the first part of their journey to ‘becoming’ an artist:

*He [professional artist] said ‘have you heard of the Slade?’ and I thought it was a pop band or something and he said, ‘actually the Slade is an art school and you should think about doing an MA’ and that was, I hadn’t even thought of an MA, I hadn’t thought of art, (...) and that really sort of changed my life, that conversation. [Sarah.13]*

Indeed, while a diploma from an art school is not considered an important career contingency in the trajectory (much like awards as we shall examine later), its importance is not in practical training but in terms of ideology, learning the necessary discourse in order to infiltrate into the art world and buying into its endorsement process, in other words gaining the required cultural and social capital to enter the art
world. Indeed, throughout this study, a symbolic interactionist analysis is taken, which considers that human beings interpret or ‘define’ each other’s actions instead of merely reacting to them. Therefore their ‘response’ to these actions is based not directly on the actions themselves but on the meaning which they attach to these actions (through the use of symbols or by interpretation). So as we shall see, acceptance by peers, for example, is seen as a career contingency by artists precisely because it symbolises inclusion to the art world. This is similar to Becker’s (1963) findings when examining jazz musicians as a professional group. His study demonstrates that these musicians define themselves in relation to their artistic ‘gift’ and shared value system which defines them as authentic ‘insiders’ against the non-authentic, outside, commercial world. This ties in with notions of subjective success which we shall turn to shortly. This social background will also eventually feed into the career trajectory as the artists coming from backgrounds where they have no experience of the art world are much more likely to be intimidated at art openings and less confident in their transactions with art professionals which will hamper the speed at which they gain exposure:

I’m working class, (...) and that’s been a major reason why it’s taken me quite so long because I feel working class, it’s about confidence. (...) I’m going to feel, not comfortable. (...) Most of my family haven’t even been to a gallery so yeah. [Sarah.23]

This thesis is not focusing specifically on issues of class, gender or race although it must be noted that the vast majority of established artists that fetch the biggest sums at galleries and at auction are white, middle-class males suggesting a powerful argument for further study into these intersectionalities (Alper & Wassall, 2006; Pollock, 2010). The purpose of discussing class here is to note the importance of mentor figures as a career contingency as well as demonstrating that success in the art world is as much about attitudes and skills such as self-confidence (which relates to class as we have seen above) as artistic talent.

So the decision of becoming an artist is characterised less as a choice but more of a necessity based on personality and deep-rooted needs. Looking back, one of the artists interviewed said that:
So many [artists] give it up and I don’t blame them really, but I think the ones that don't are the ones who just don’t know what else they could do. [Diana.21]

In that sense, an artistic career is much more about personal development than it is about making a living. Hence, perhaps an artistic career can be considered a vocation or a ‘calling’ as it is fulfilling a psychological need, at least at the start. Lips-Wiersma and McMorland (2006) argue that the concept of vocation complements and enhances career theory in giving meaning and purpose to it. However to access the market, which is the issue that is examined in this thesis, the artistic career must be considered in terms of a profession that requires expert knowledge as to what is considered ‘authentic’ art, thus the necessity of the socialisation process we shall analyse in this chapter to position yourself as an ‘authentic’ artist producing an ‘authentic’ product.

In accordance with the way in which artists describe why they wanted to be artists, as they develop their professional identity they have to simultaneously develop subjective notions of success that they will return to throughout their careers. Because there is so much competition for so few monetary rewards (Alper & Wassall’s 2006 study of census data found that there was a large earning penalty to this career choice), artists must form other motives to sustain their careers: “I didn’t become an artist to make money, I did it because it’s a part of my life” [Iris.15]. The most important of these is, again, based on an in-grown need to fulfil personal criteria in terms of creativity, authenticity, and personal development: terms such as ‘integrity’ and ‘honesty’ came up in discussing success. These notions will be discussed further in this chapter as ultimately they are socially constructed in line with the underlying norms of the art world. However, according to the rhetoric of the artists interviewed, it is not about succumbing to others’ views of what is valuable, whether this be the audience, the collectors, the critics or the dealers but rather:

Improving the work all the time, you know, constantly, achieving, creating greater work. And kind of, exciting myself, staying as excited myself by the work, you know, that’s the most important thing, it’s exciting for you and then you hope it’s exciting for others. (...) So, yeah just to keep going but to keep pushing it, success for me is an intimate relationship that you have with the work, that’s when a work succeeds. [Elizabeth.10]
Of course, as we will see, artists do adopt certain strategies, conventions and practices in order to fit into the art world, and therefore the influence of these other parties is important in their career trajectories but when discussing their core values, the issue of freedom to fulfil their own creative potential is seen as primordial. The art market is characterised as imposing limitations on this freedom of creativity (in terms of gallery influence, sales, etc. which will be discussed later on), from which comes the long-lasting conflict between art and commerce. Throughout their careers, artists must negotiate between the creative sphere and the economic one and although, like in any other career, economics is a necessity for survival, there is still a strong feeling that being too commercially successful can be dangerous to the authenticity and therefore integrity of the work. Therefore the emphasis has to fall on the work itself, as one artist describes her definition of success:

*I think it's managing to go on developing and the potential of work being realised.* [Erin.20]

The fact that authenticity is aligned to the anti-commercial (which we will explore in more detail further on) and that artists internalise this in their own self-image and identity as an artist, means that the institutional structure of the art world continues to leave artists at the bottom of the hierarchical pile, artists are unwittingly trapped through this discourse.

Although being an artist is a business decision amongst other things, in order to construct their sense of success both in line with the norms of the art world and their own perception of themselves as an ‘artist’ from birth, not just as a result of art school or their first professional experience, artists focus on the work they make:

*I can’t just think of it as a business because I make work and I’m passionate about my work and if I do something that I think is really good I don’t want to sell it, I just don’t want to sell it, well actually that’s really bad for business.* [Victor.11]

The art work is more than a mere product, it is an intimate relationship that involves taking a risk and seeing where it takes you, one artist even defined it in terms of “catharsis,” and ultimately reaching some kind of audience which can then secure the potential for a long-lasting place in art history [Theo.35]. The work of art becomes the
embodiment of the artist’s identity. Financial impediments are not seen as a barrier to authenticity, in fact in some ways financial impediments are characterised as a positive in forcing the artist to be more creative in terms of materials used and construction [Elizabeth.6]. Therefore the very act of making work can be considered a contingency in the career trajectory, due to the importance placed on it and investment made into it by the artist. However, the definitive end result of the creative process that all professional artists aim for is to show the work:

*I think there’s no point doing it if you’re not going to show so I guess, you know, having an exhibition of work that you’re pleased with is success in a way.*

[Diana.15]

Despite the focus being on personal development, getting feedback from showing work is one of the ways in which artists evaluate the success of the work, thus the importance of the first time the work is shown within the art world context, in cementing the status of ‘artist’ as we shall see further on. This is in line with Menger’s (1999) notion of “psychic income” whereby non-monetary rewards are an essential dimension of the work.

Now that we have examined the core attitudes and beliefs that constitute the artistic identity we shall look at how these are constructed, shaped and manipulated throughout the career trajectory by certain key contingencies. These contingencies revolve around meeting key people and being in key places which then serve as platforms for advancement. By following the career from emerging to mid-career to established we can unpick exactly how these work and what effect they have on the artist’s work and career.

4.2 **THE CAREER TRAJECTORY**

4.2.1 **Emerging artists: from outsider to insider**

*Socialisation Process: learning the ropes*

Now that the decision to become an artist has been made, it is necessary to find the routes by which to achieve this and become a member of the art world. There are many ways of achieving this but the main thrust of it is to spend time with other artists and art professionals, participating in art world activities whether this is
through art school or working in galleries, art fairs, etc. The starting point is, again, following on from the people around you:

*When you’re 17-18 you have no idea of the context of the contemporary art world nor is it even relevant and you just do what you have to do. (...) I think the idea of being a portrait painter was very sort of, it seemed to me the most logical way of making a career work at the time, because I seemed to be around people who had done this.* [Theo.4]

Participating in an art world context, even if it is not as an artist as such, allows for a taster as to what the profession involves and the beginnings of acquiring the language, values, skills and behaviours that are necessary to progress in the art world:

*Also I worked for some galleries through college and worked in Frieze Art Fair as an assistant on Frieze Projects so I was meeting kind of proper, international, professional, exciting artists and that kind of gave me a taste of what it was like so it wasn’t so scary afterwards.* [Alexander.2]

As the artist starts to integrate into the art world they become an ‘insider’ which is characterised by the fact that others recognise them as such:

*You suddenly realise that the art world is 6 or 7 hundred people which is, you know I’m (...) not outside of any more (...) you suddenly realise that it’s very small and you suddenly realise that people probably might know who you are.* [Theo.30]

As established in the literature, one of the early ways in which to get endorsement is by becoming part of the critical context through peers who can act as champions for emerging artists (Galenson, 2005). In this sense then, peer relationships are crucial in artists’ career trajectories. Starting at art school, it is peer relationships that inform an artist’s conception of what is authentic and inauthentic and what a successful career is:

*Going to that college and meeting people (...) who I really admired and then the peers who were there were really helpful so it changed the way I thought about making work, so that was a really pivotal point in how I went about making
everything and that was a social thing because there were 3 or 4 peers who were a great influence. [Alexander.5]

In fact knowledge of what is considered authentic (and is therefore valued) on the art market is the currency of competition, therefore artists with this knowledge can be more strategic about their careers as we shall see in the next chapter. These peer relationships can therefore be a crucial influence in terms of the direction the work goes often in the form of collaborations. Again and again in the interviews, artists mentioned how the friends they met at art school became long-term collaborators:

I really value some of my peers, some of my friends that I met at college and who I then went on to collaborate with a bit. [A sound artist] is a good friend of mine and now for the first time I am incorporating a sound track in my work. [Elizabeth.5]

Peers provide the context in which the artist operates and early on the artist must contextualise themself within the art world, in order to enter the market artists have to establish their position within the art historical discourse, this is so that they can be priced and categorised in relation to other works (as we have seen with work such as Velthius (2005) price does not come from merely objective criteria such as size or media but on shifting notions of what is considered ‘authentic’ art). One of the main ways the artist does this is by working with groups of other artists, forming clusters according to the genre informing the work. Artists then use their positioning in the art world as the basis of their artistic identity by defining themselves against other groups, whether it is commercial or institutional, realist or abstractionist, etc. This is why in choosing a gallery to be represented by after art school, artists highlighted the most important factor as which other artists are in that gallery:

The most important thing for me is who the other artists that are represented by the gallery are, you know, how I would kind of sit with other artists, because that’s who you are kind of associating with. [Elizabeth.3]

Artists usually form their artistic identities in opposition to the mainstream in order to carve out a place in the art world in accordance with their notion of authentic work, trying to establish a new counter-movement by forming a group or collective of like-minded artists. This is due to the current conceptualisation of authenticity on the art
market, as established by Wijnberg and Gemser (2000), which correlates authenticity with notions of originality and innovativeness rather than beauty which was the criteria used before the 20th century. Merely imitating predecessors is not considered to be of value, artists must be able to stand out in the market. Wartofsky (1980) in his analysis of the institutional theory of art argues that the problem of defining art is a historically new one which contemporary art poses since the 19th century in the form of an art of protest in which the artist deliberately strives to challenge all previous standards or criteria of art. This process as set out by White and White (1965), began in the 17th century when the artwork began to become a commodity produced not for a patron but for a market. The work was no longer defined by commissions, but in a riskier and wider way, as a product for sale to a new class of buyers, through intermediaries who acted either as agents for the artists or for the buyers of art. Thus, the gallery or the salon developed as a marketplace, the locus of a new social formation of the art world. The artist was therefore free to produce their own work which previously had been forced to remain at the margins of the art world. Moreover, the new system no longer focused on paintings as isolated items by themselves but on the artist in terms of their production over a career. This change in focus was complete by the 19th century, whereby the artist could be defined as a free agent or entrepreneur, from which derives the Romantic theory of art as the result of a uniquely gifted, creative individual expression. This makes the artist an “outsider” whose entry is mediated by the art-marketplace. Only under these market and social conditions, Wartofsky (1980) argues, could the main movements of the 20th century: The Salon des Refusés, the Armory Show, Dada and the Fauves have arisen in violation of the traditional criteria for status, the canon. This very violation paradoxically gave them status as innovation became the primary criteria for legitimacy. So the question “is it art?” is a relatively new one, the question of status arises because artists find themselves forced into insurgency as a condition of aesthetic or artistic creativity, it is the way they get their work valued. To achieve status, the artist has to raise the question of status, being rejected is the grounds of acceptability.

The definition of originality, however, is by no means clear-cut and it varies through time. For example, while notions of originality used to be based on the artist actually physically creating the work, the unique hand of the artist, it is now common
practice for work to be created by assistants. Instead, the central idea has become the product in some ways, the uniqueness is no longer in the hand of the artist but in their mind, it does not matter who actually makes it in its physical form. Due to this shift, in line with the commercialisation of the art world (as shall be discussed further), collecting and consuming the product therefore also involves symbolically collecting and consuming the artist, or at least their artistic ideas and inspiration. The Turner Prize for example, is given not for being a good painter, or an accomplished filmmaker but for being an ‘artist,’ it is awarded not for a set of interesting works but for an overarching sensibility. This links to Benjamin’s (1968) concept of ‘aura,’ something unique to each work of art, inaccessible and elusive but highly valued. Although Benjamin argues that this was lost with the advent of new technology such as photography which replicates work so that there is no original, in fact, the notion of originality is still central to notions of authenticity despite a change in production processes, due to the way art is consumed as a reflection and embodiment of the artist. The very notion of innovativeness is therefore also a modern art construct, perhaps more of a concession to marketing concerns than an actual standard for judgment as all art is derivative in some sense, no form of art can be said to be truly, totally innovative or original or innovative, it will always follow from some prior work whether consciously or not. Originality is subjectively defined by the art world in a somewhat circular process according to how value is judged in the art world which we shall discuss further in the following chapter. For now, however we will define originality as a work that is determined (by the gatekeepers of the art world) to be going beyond customary levels of achievement either by refining existing ideas/formats or moving beyond these existing formats.

Legally, there have also been definitional issues in terms of what is and is not considered art, and what is and is not considered original. Trials in which the meaning of art is in dispute are rare as both legislatures and courts are understandably reluctant to make aesthetic judgments. One notable exception is the 1928 trial of Brancusi vs. the United States in which Constantin Brancusi successfully established before the US Customs Court that his *Bird in Flight* was a sculpture and could therefore be imported into the United States free from import duty. Brancusi’s sculpture had been classified under the category of ‘Kitchen Utensils and Hospital Supplies’ the objects of which it had been made. In the trial, expert witnesses persuaded the court that it should
recognise this non-representational art work as a work of sculpture. The court said that, “[w]hether or not we are in sympathy with those newer ideas and the schools which represent them, we think that the fact of their existence and their influence upon the art world as recognised by the courts must be considered” (McClean, 2009). More recently, works by light and video artists Dan Flavin and Bill Viola have been classified as “not art” but rather as “wall lighting fittings” or “projectors” by the European Commission, resulting in a 20% rather than 5% VAT rate (Adam, 2010). This demonstrates that, in fact, legal definitions of what does and does not constitute art are not always in line with the prevalent definitions of the art world as the legal framework lags behind that of the art world. The art world’s definition is therefore what counts for artists.

Therefore, joining peer groups can provide artists with the platform on which they can construct their career trajectories and position themselves within the art world. Simpson (1981), reporting on artists in SoHo in the late 1970’s suggested that artists come together in order to learn about new work, less to be influenced by it and more to make sure that what they are doing is truly innovative. One established artist interviewed discussed how his whole career was based on his disillusionment of the mainstream in art school:

*I did feel after [art school] that I had to, one of my tasks (...), was to work out who was my list for 20th century art, which was an alternative list to the official mainstream one. And eventually, that formed itself into, perhaps too polarised a view but I felt there was a particular corner of renewed figuration in the 20th century and even now I still think that (...). Anyway, so that was my platform you might say, it remains so. [Henry.7]*

For this artist, it was about “forming my own art world” in opposition to the mainstream abstractionism of the time [Henry.14]. His artistic identity and body of work is therefore based on this ideology in which he places his sense of self-worth. So although being an artist comes from a very personal conception of oneself, the career trajectory very much hinges on the social relationships the artist makes in terms of how they situate themself in the larger art world context. This is due to the process of socialisation through which the artist can (often unconsciously) absorb the structure and key concepts on which value in the art market is based, namely the authenticity of the art work. O’Reilly (2005) also found this symbolic identity important in his
research on visual artists, discussing the notion of a ‘tribe’ as one way in which artists construct their own individual brand identity.

The importance of peers is particularly evident in the case of Hong Kong artists. As the Hong Kong arts scene is so recent, the avant-garde artists were working in the 1980’s (compared to the early 20th century in the West) it is relatively straightforward to trace its development in the past three decades to demonstrate how an art world can be created and how this may then eventually become a market. Four generations of artists can be outlined: the first (referred to here as generation 1.0) set the scene up politically for the second (generation 2.0), who actively took on a role as leaders or mentors, enabling the third (generation 3.0), to become the first generation of full-time artists; and the fourth (generation 4.0), are currently emerging, proving to be more international than their forbearers. Examining this in more detail allows us to see how the artistic career has emerged in Hong Kong through careful positioning.

Hong Kong contemporary art can therefore be traced back to generation 1.0 who realised that they had to get involved in arts policy if they were to establish a space for contemporary art: “it took a battle to break that conservatism in art” [Stephen.4]. This generation therefore shaped the scene for future generations, carving out a place for contemporary art in Hong Kong. However, they themselves had few opportunities to show their work and were limited to fighting an ideological battle, constantly forced to defend their position as contemporary artists. Generation 2.0 therefore tried to establish themselves within this new acknowledgment of contemporary art. As there were no galleries showing contemporary art, and the Hong Kong Museum was extremely conservative, the artists had to set up their own artist-run spaces in order to establish the critical context needed for contemporary arts to flourish. The first space that was set up (and it is still one of the most important contemporary art spaces in Hong Kong) was Para/Site. It started with a few artists grouping together to try to find a physical space where they could create work, allowing them to put on solo shows and start generating interest in the local community, eventually opening a permanent independent arts space with a year-long programme. This was very much a conscious effort to fill the gap of what was lacking in Hong Kong, one of its founders, Bruce describes it as a “band-aid” [Bruce.4]. It allowed the artists to work together in order to contextualise, socialise and theorise their work, at first curating their own exhibitions and then inviting curators to work
with them. As such it was extremely formative in terms of starting to generate attention for contemporary art. As young artists they wanted to talk about their work and so organised talks and forums, creating a supportive arts community and starting education activities. Para/Site is now Hong Kong’s leading non-profit organisation dedicated to contemporary art and is the conduit through which many of the now established Hong Kong artists emerged: as one dealer argued “Para/Site nourished local artists” [Emilia.5]. The artists who set it up benefited individually from Para/Site as it served as a platform to work with others and get exposition. In fact, Bruce was the first Hong Kong artist to break out internationally in the mid-1990’s and reach outside Hong Kong through residencies as well as being the first ‘professional’ artist in Hong Kong to survive entirely from income generated by his art work in the early 2000’s [Leo.8]. The turning point came in 2001 when Hong Kong exhibited for the first time at the Venice Biennale. The push came from Hanart’s director Johnson Chang, one of the pioneers of the Chinese art market, who curated the show and invited Bruce to exhibit [Bruce.15]. This is an important marker for Hong Kong artists as it gave them a platform to display with the mainstream and it generated them a lot of international business, providing a lifeline for their careers. As we will discuss later on, international exposition and having a promoter with an international network is essential for success for Hong Kong.

As contemporary art in Hong Kong started to gain in exposure, opportunities started to arise for younger artists, (generation 3.0) mainly through the concerted efforts of their older peers who were teaching at art schools, actively influencing emerging artists and encouraging them to think about their careers seriously. Following on from their lead, more and more artists tried to make a career out of art in the 2000’s, grouping together to get studio space in the industrial centres, usually close to their professors and these hubs gradually started attracting the attention of the art world. Although a few of the artists of this generation can now sustain themselves through their art work, none of them thought they would be able to do so when they started: “I didn’t know what a professional artist was and never thought I could be one” [Kai.5]. Here we see that much like in the West, as will be noted further on, the notion of ‘professional’ is related to making enough money from the practice to survive as an artist full-time. It was only in about 2006 that a few artists, notably Chow Chun-Fai, pushed the commercial side of their practice and became full-time
artists instead of having to put their practice on the backburner. This was the result of government funding and opportunities to show in shopping malls, design cafes and commercial projects catered to a mass market providing the finance necessary for the practice. Again, Para/Site was pivotal in giving these artists international exposure and providing them with opportunities to show early on, leading to collaborations in Europe and United States. However, this came as a surprise as “even our professors didn’t expect their students could be full-time artists, the education system didn’t prepare us to do this” [Oliver.2]. So it was very much about learning for themselves what it meant to be a full-time artist as there were not really any other artists to ask, which in many cases meant making mistakes in their career management, for example in dealing with galleries which one artist described as “like punching into wood” [Oliver.3]. Therefore artists such as Chow are extremely important in serving as role models for the artists that are emerging now, (generation 4.0), they have had a massive psychological effect on young artists’ identities in terms of legitimising the idea of a career as an artist: “it was an important moment for young Hong Kong artists when Chow became a full-time artist” [Leo.5]. This generation is therefore the marker for a shift from amateur to professional artists in terms of the career:

Until about the year 2000 if you polled arts students at MFA level asking ‘how many of you plan to be artists?’ perhaps one person would raise their hand in the class whereas now students can admit they want to be fulltime artists and sometimes even expect it. My generation has set the example. [Kai.3]

The speed at which the Chinese contemporary market has picked up has been remarkable and of course, this has not gone unnoticed by Hong Kong artists:

In 2002 when I graduated there wasn’t much chance for me to have a show in a gallery so I went to London to do an MA. In 2006 when I got back there were lots of opportunities both public and private. [Oliver.4]

The significance of the market has been most noticeable in terms of the raising the quality of the galleries in Hong Kong, “before it really wasn’t happening” [Leo.3]. The first gallery to focus exclusively on Hong Kong artists opened in 2001 and it was an opportunity for local artists to get representation early on in the career trajectory [Oliver.8]. A few other galleries have followed suit, specifically aiming to support young, local artists. Although most of these have little in terms of resources, some of
the most established galleries such as Osage (their first show with Hong Kong artists was in 2007) have started collaborating with emerging artists and they have dedicated resources towards promoting artists education. Due to these new outlets and funding opportunities it has become relatively straightforward for emerging artists to get by and have a studio, another marker of the status of ‘artist’ (as discussed further on). There are currently about ten young Hong Kong artists who are considered full-time artists, most teach or do freelance work on the side but they are still considered full-time as they spend more than 50% of their time on their practice [Victor.5]. Although this does not seem like a huge number, it is more than there has ever been before.

There are now four universities in Hong Kong that have arts programmes and a few hundred graduates a year (including design), so careers in the arts are becoming more commonplace, purely in terms of numbers there has been great progress. This generation of emerging artists are in their late twenties, early thirties and are starting to branch out in terms of using new media and installations, they also tend to be more conceptual and more international (that is less specifically Chinese or post-colonial in terms of their references) [Victor.1]. This is largely thanks to their peers who built up a space for contemporary art in Hong Kong art world. These artists are extremely aware of the international arts scene and actively trying to place themselves within it as they are aware of the limitations of the Hong Kong arts world.

In order to establish a space for themselves in Hong Kong and then internationally, contemporary artists had to group together and help each other, and as a result, the social structure of the art world in Hong Kong is extremely close-knit as will be discussed in the next chapter. While on an individual basis, ‘authenticity’ relies on the notion of originality and innovation as in the UK (more on this below) [Peter.25], this rhetoric is often glossed over or taken for granted, the emphasis being placed on the ‘Hong Kong identity’ and subjective value coming from contributing to this identity in line with the need to push Hong Kong into the art world. A real sense of community and belonging comes through in the interviews, for example one artist who showed a piece at the Venice Biennale got an offer from an Italian collector to sell the piece. The artist was conflicted as, although he needed the money, he “felt it was Hong Kong’s work, that people in Hong Kong could benefit from it as we are underdeveloped arts scene” [Peter.17]. All the artists interviewed create work that deals with cultural identity issues and identity politics, one artist describes his role as
a Hong Kong artist as “mediating between China and the West” [Pacey.1], this is also noted as a consideration of the avant-garde mainland artists by Joy and Sherry in their research (2004). As an emerging market and as the poorer peers of mainland artists, there is a need for recognition and, to achieve this, the artists are actively working together to promote their arts scene. The low status of contemporary art in Asia which will be discussed further later on in the chapter, makes the artists take even more solace from their identity as ‘outsiders’ to the ‘real’ art world. It appears that while all artists necessarily deal with identity issues, in an emerging market these issues become much more important and in fact, defending the identity becomes the raison d’être in terms of inspiration and subjective notions of success. We see here how social structure and status feed into issues of identity which in turn have an effect on the work being produced, something which will be explored further in this chapter.

Returning to the socialisation process more generally, ‘becoming’ an artist involves a shift in perception, in terms of a new conceptualisation of the art work. In many cases the MFA is pivotal in this process as the beginning of the socialisation process:

*I applied for the Slade and I did, I got in. And then I became an artist (...) and that was amazing, brilliant and just wonderful. And left an artist, signed on, but left as an artist. And I knew in my heart.* [Sarah.13]

Again we see the emotional language that is used, becoming an artist is seen as a central moment that defines the rest of her life, it is not limited to the career, it becomes part of her own self-worth. The work is central to this process as the production of a coherent body of work is perceived as the start of the career as a professional artist:

*So I kind of went into the Slade (...) I was really uncertain about what art was and what the point of art was and yeah how it relates to life and all this stuff. So then I end up making this work (...) and that kind of started a whole body of work which then kind of led onto the career.* [Chris.24]

The quality of the work itself is not considered very important at this stage, the essential thing is the idea that has led on to the body of work:
Suddenly the idea of idea-based work being the most important thing and everything that you do going towards that idea suddenly made complete sense to me. [Theo.10]

Each artist has different ideas but it is the development of the original idea that underscores the entire career and is often the central thread that ties the artist’s entire body of work together. Again, we must look at the current, constructed nature of how authenticity is formulated in the art world in line with originality in terms of there being a single work of art that could only be the product of a certain artist. However, authenticity also involves other criteria such as innovation (as we have seen) and the non-commercial which is seen as incompatible with artistic creativity and innovation. This is in line with Hede and Thyne’s (2007) research which suggests the need to examine the multi-dimensional characteristics of authenticity. The sacred nature of art presumes a denial of monetary value. Meaning in the art world and therefore in the career, comes as a result of the work being considered ‘authentic,’ as explored in the context of the visitor experience of museum presentations by Fitchett and Saren (1998). This definition of authenticity is the result of a shift in the valuation of art from technique to innovativeness which will be explored further on. According to Abbott (1988), jurisdictional definitions becoming more abstract is a sign of professionalisation as it allows for greater control of who can and cannot enter the profession (thus the importance of learning these notions of authenticity to enter the art world). Therefore authenticity is the way the art world is structured, those who control how authenticity is defined are the gatekeepers and differentiate between insiders and outsiders. DiMaggio’s (1987) sociological study of the art world supports this, he finds that social groups use distinctive forms of cultural expertise to define themselves and to recognise members and outsiders. This changes through time due to power struggles which is why there have been shifts in which groups of the art world are its gatekeepers (again this will be expanded upon in the next chapter). Conceptual art which has its roots in Duchamp’s ready-mades at the beginning of the 20th century is an example of one such shift. As a result of this transformation in what is an artwork (anything the artist decides it to be so) the artist’s ideas have become the currency of the critical sphere of the art world and therefore the development of these ideas are considered by the artists themselves as the root of their careers but also of their wider artistic identity, so they ‘feel’ that they are now an artist. It has also
opened up art as a career as anyone, anywhere can legitimately expect to be an artist. Therefore developing this central idea from which the future body of work will depart is one of the major career contingencies, much more central to the artist's identity than awards, good reviews or gaining representation for example (more about this later on). We will return to this notion of the central thread on which the body of work and therefore career is based in a later chapter by using branding theory to look at how the brand image affects the value of the work.

**Authenticity defined**

We have started to form an understanding as to how authenticity is defined in the art world; fundamentally, it is linked to the creative sphere, in opposition to commerce and centres around the concept of the Romantic artist (to which we will return to at the end of this chapter) fulfilling their creative potential by creating one-off original pieces of art. Moreover, as noted, it is socially constructed and therefore temporal. Most of the literature on authenticity is to be found in the anthropology of tourism as well as in museology and sociology. Beverland and Farrelly (2010) follow on from Leigh et al. (2006) to look at the consumption of authentic objects, arguing that consumers draw different identity benefits (control, connection and virtue) from authentic objects. Unfortunately, like much of the literature that touches on authenticity, how they define what is authentic is unclear, what it means is taken for granted. In the art world, authenticity is linked primarily with the object (indexically) which has to show proof of originality and innovativeness but is also linked to the authenticity of the artist and the career (iconically) as judged (primarily) by art professionals using their lenses of personal experience, so an object may be dismissed if its creator is considered too commercial for example. Much as Leigh et al. (2006) found in their study of authenticity in MG consumption, the object is necessary but not sufficient for legitimisation as the object is not the sole source of meaning derived by the subculture, role performances also hold importance so artists can be labelled as authentic on the basis of their ability to successfully perform a subcultural construction of the ‘artist’ identity (thus as explored further on, the power of certain artistic stereotypes). Inauthenticity threatens the art world because it threatens

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6 Indeed, until recently fakes were readily accepted into museums (Trilling, 1981) and it a relatively modern phenomenon for artists to seek to differentiate themselves from others, previously artists taught and trained others to work in similar styles (Hope, 2005).
communal boundaries, destroying status hierarchies which is why artists have to group together in movements in order to change underlying notions of authenticity. Status in the art world is therefore achieved through a collective challenge to the current definitional boundaries of authenticity.

While much of the literature looks at authenticity from the point of view of the consumer, it is also of importance to look at how authenticity is defined and communicated by the producer on an individual level (rather than on a general managerial level in terms of large companies). While Beverland and Farrelly (2010) find that consumers actively seek authenticity to find meaning in their lives, in the art world artists also seek authenticity (both internal or intrapersonal and external or interpersonal (Leigh et al. 2006)) as part of their self-identity and their definition of authenticity becomes one of the central parts of their artistic identity (a process which Wang (1999) refers to as existential authenticity). Hede and Thyne (2010) focus on the authenticity of the ‘self’ in consumption situations and suggest that this is a need for further research in this area. This study demonstrates that the authenticity of the ‘self’ is central to an artist’s identity and therefore how this is communicated, which eventually translates to acceptance (or rejection) by the art world and negotiation of value. In fact, all the identity benefits associated with the consumption of authentic objects by Beverland and Farrelly (2010) can also be found in the production of art works. Artists seek control over their environment by controlling how and when they produce work in order to reaffirm their identity as professional skilled individuals (as will be explored further on); they seek to be connected to the art world community for a sense of belonging and shared norms and values (thus the importance of movements in establishing themselves as part of the longer art-historical tradition), defining their authenticity through peer relationships; and finally they seek virtue in terms of ‘purity of motive’ or morals, finding their authenticity in notions of integrity and honesty in opposition to the commercial. Furthermore, just as consumers actively consume authenticity, giving precedence to certain cues while downplaying or ignoring others (Chronis & Hampton, 2008; Beverland & Farrelly, 2010; Fitchett & Saren, 2011), artists also actively create (or define) authenticity in line with their personal biases to benefit their careers in terms of how they are perceived both internally in identity construction and externally (thus the importance of positioning), so how they define and assess authenticity is dependent on their perception of the art world and their
relation to it, which shifts through time as they become socialised into it. Chronis and Hampton (2008) go further than this, arguing that authenticity in tourism sites can be staged through constant monitoring and editing, indeed the same proves to be true for artists who, as we shall explore in this chapter, must continuously manage their positioning in order to be valued.

Hede and Thyne (2007)’s study of authenticity in literary heritage attractions builds upon Chronis and Hampton’s (2008) suggestion that tourism experiences are co-constructed by consumers to argue that consumers co-construct the brand through their experiences. Moreover, they find that authenticity can be transmitted despite objects being museologically inauthentic, thus the importance of the brand manager allowing visitors to construct their own experience. This demonstrates the importance of artists positioning themselves as authentic vis-a-vis their consumers and goes some way to explain how certain objects are considered ‘art’ although they may be mass-produced and untouched by the artist’s hand. Again, this is because, as is widely accepted in the literature (Rose & Wood, 2005; Beverland, 2006; Chronis & Hampton, 2008; Leigh et al., 2006), authenticity is a socially constructed, collective interpretation of the essence of what is observed rather than any inherent properties found in the object, so authenticity is context-specific rather than universally standardised. As such Wang argues, “things appear authentic not because they are inherently authentic but because they are constructed as such in terms of points of view, beliefs, perspectives or powers” (1999:351). Hede and Thyne (2007) also observe that curators or guides can facilitate this process in their framing of the experience (or object). Similarly, as we will examine in the next chapter, art professionals such as dealers, curators and critics are essential in positioning artists and their work as authentic and valuable, the criteria collectors look for in buying art (this is evident in the fact that collectors usually want to meet the artists before they buy work and know the context of the work in order to establish its ‘authenticity’). Thus, like any other subculture, the art world has its own hierarchies and definitions of what is authentic and legitimate based on possession of subcultural capital and recognition of such possession by relevant others defining who is and is not considered an artist. Therefore, for an artist, achieving authenticity is a negotiated process between self, art world and the art work which requires the ability to
communicate an identification with the subcultural construction of what is authentic thus the importance of the socialisation process.

*Professional versus Amateur*

At this early point in the career trajectory, artists have started to form a professional identity which allows them to define between ‘professionals’ and ‘amateurs.’ While, as we shall explore, this changes throughout the career, at this stage it relies heavily on external contingencies that provide the artist with evidence that they have successfully positioned themselves within the art world, so exposure is important, as is studio space. One way artists evaluate their success is in terms of the critical response they get to their work: “success means getting good feedback.” [Alexander.7]. As we have seen, artists’ conceptions of themselves rely heavily on their critical context and the critical response they get, much more so than the money that make (although eventually the positioning of the work in the critical context translates to financial value), which is why artists accept that the ultimate accolade in the art world is to have your work in a major public museum such as the Tate where it is divorced from financial value. In fact, not getting any critical recognition whatsoever is a major reason to exit the career trajectory, for example one of the mid-career artists interviewed was not getting any opportunities to do shows with institutions or galleries:

*If I hadn’t achieved these shows this year I was going to stop. I think so, I’m getting old, I’m 36, I don’t own my own house, I’m really skint still at 36, am I going to have kids? There were some big questions about my future starting to emerge and I just couldn’t sustain any longer not having, not that it’s bringing me any financial security these shows but I had to break through a certain level, I would have stopped, I would have stopped, I mean f**k knows what I would do, what was I going to do? (...) But it’s alright now, that’s why I was just so relieved. [Sarah.22]*

Unless the work is shown and gets some type of feedback, whether good or bad, the artist has nothing on which to base their notion of how they are perceived and their niche in the larger art historical context, which is ultimately what their artistic identity is derived from.
It’s not just about making art, it’s about exposure (...). You can make as much art as you want and put it in a gallery or hire a warehouse in Hackney but unless someone writes about it... [Sarah.24]

This exposure in the art world is what separates a professional artist from an amateur as it signifies that the artistic potential is emerging and will eventually translate to economic value, the real test of being professional as we shall discuss later on (and perhaps even full-time status where the artist can devote themselves exclusively to their practice, a sign that you have ‘made it’).

Through showing and participating in the established distribution system, (thus the importance of the first show), the artist constructs their relationship to the world around them, both in terms of the in-group of artists they are immediately aligned with and the larger out-group of art history thus demonstrating their authenticity. Showing is a way for the artist of demonstrating or proclaiming to the world their artistic identity through their body of work and then evaluating their work in the wider context. In fact, the first show seems to be an important contingency, in that it is the pivotal point at which an artist can officially call themselves such, it is through an audience (however small) that the artist’s work starts to develop:

We generated our own audience, our own scene and it became a very satisfying project and it was only then that I really started to find an audience for what I was doing and things started to be less frustrating for me I think. [Faye.5]

Although artists are operating along their own personal ideas about what constitutes good art, this derives largely from a social consensus and they want to have “a feeling that it kind of has some meaning to other people as well as yourself” [Faye.10]. This sense of communicating to others through the work is what gives the work meaning and therefore the career meaning.

This sense of the critical context also explains why artists tend to privilege the long-term over the short-term when managing their careers, sacrificing economic security in the short-term for critical attention in the long-term and getting “a footnote in the annals of art history” [Chris.28].

I probably know I’d make money in the short term but I’m not interested in the short term (...) and so it’s odd and it sounds very arrogant to say things like
“hey guys let’s keep things under £10[K] for as long as possible” but actually that’s true because I’d much rather sell lots of things and get it to good places and wait for a sort of auction record. [Theo.29]

Although the critical sphere is emphasised over the economic sphere, the critical sphere directly influences the economic viability of the work as that value depends on this notion of ‘authenticity’ which we have seen is to a large extent based on the non-commercialiability of the artist (or at least in terms of the artist’s rhetoric and the self-image they project in their art world activities). The logic behind holding prices down is that it makes the work more attractive to serious collectors and museums. Once an artist becomes too expensive, the pool of applicants for their work begins to shrinks. Ultimately, an artist can price themselves out of the market which is why most galleries try to prevent work by emerging artists going to auction.

Although the key career contingencies discussed so far seem to rely on people, space is another important dimension. One of the main parts of ‘becoming’ a professional artist is having a studio in which to work, this also demonstrates a certain amount of economic capital and devotion to the career. The first step for all artists once they leave art school is to rent a studio, whether they need it or not:

I think when you’re out of art school your strategy is to get a studio, when you have a studio you feel like you’ve done something, you’ve achieved something it sounds silly now because you don't actually need a studio but then I think you feel like ‘I must be an artist because I have a studio’. [Diana.23]

In Hong Kong, the studio is even more prestigious as space is so limited on the island, one of the established artists interviewed there considered having studio space as “the beginning of [my] career” [Bruce.12]. It is about wanting to conform to the few guidelines there are in the art world, later on in their careers artists have the confidence to explain why they do not need a studio but at this stage a studio is almost a qualifying space in terms of being an artist: “something I had to do” [Sarah.26]. As well as being a space in which to create work, it is also an important financial investment that shows that you are serious about your career. As will be discussed in the rest of this thesis, due to certain stereotypes about artists, their creative process is prized and the studio is attractive to collectors and the general public as it is the place where the creative process happens and an ‘authentic self’ is created. The studio
thereby signifies authenticity and becomes a central space in which the practice is shaped; it can be limiting in terms of the space available but it is the space in which the artist engages with their work and as such becomes essential to the artist’s conception of themself as an artist, without it they are lost:

*I spend ALL [his emphasis] my time in the studio, I’m an incredibly boring person, I go to the studio and there’s periods of time where my children forget who I am but they know where to find me, I go to my studio more or less everyday and even when I’m teaching, I’m calling in there and I may not do work, I may just sit there and look at something, mull something over but I’m there all the time, I start early in the morning and I work through, that’s what I do and then I make appointments with people and break them and think ‘why should I bother to see someone when I could be doing this’ but as I’m not doing it at the moment... I’m at a total loss, I don’t know what to do with myself.*

[Jasper.15]

This is where the Romantic notion of the isolated artist who spends much of his time alone is rooted, although most emerging artists tend to share studios to reduce costs and the studio becomes a social sphere in which works are developed, frequently in partnership. Moreover, despite the myth of the anti-social artist (which we will discuss further below), while the work may indeed be created in isolation the artist must be in the social context of the art world in order to have value attached to the work, thus the whole notion of ‘outsider art,’ which designates truly marginal creations, cut off from society’s norms and audiences, produced by people considered insane and usually institutionalised.\(^7\) At this early stage in the career trajectory then, artists are actively seeking legitimisation by following the unspoken rules as to what constitutes a professional artist. Once they consider themselves to have this status in order to further cement their position as ‘an artist’ they must try and exert some control over both their work and their career.

*The Struggle for Control*

Once artists have started the socialisation process and understood the context in which their work needs to be positioned, they must actively negotiate the

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\(^7\) Although ‘outside art’ has become a marketing category in itself recently, for example with museums dedicated to outsider art appearing around the world, it is still not really seen on the market.
positioning of their work. This is due to the boundaryless career structure of artistic careers, as Fillis’ (2000) research of the artist as ‘artpreneur’ demonstrates, skills such as leadership and vision are key to success. At the start of their careers, artists have inherent problems in terms of establishing themselves, controlling their image and keeping on top of the direction in which their career goes. Whereas some take the route of least resistance, saying yes to every opportunity that comes their way: “someone wants me so I’ll go,” others are a great deal more strategic in constructing their career as we will demonstrate in the next chapter [Chris.20]. The data revealed a marked generational gap in that as the notion of a ‘career’ in the art market became a possibility, emerging artists started managing their work and careers as such whereas previous generations were generally much less strategic in terms of their career-management because “making lots of money just out of college, that was unimaginable” [Martin.4]. This is even more obvious in Hong Kong where the concept of a career as an artist was non-existent until about ten years ago. This is in line with a movement towards the commercialisation of the art world due to the rise in the art market set out in the literature review. This has led to changes in artist’s careers in that with the emphasis on market value, artists tend to be discovered earlier and to peak earlier, as one artist explained, commenting on her experiences in art school:

*Even though it’s 7 years, there’s been a massive difference, loads of those MA students, they’re being represented within their MA, let alone from the MA show, it’s just shocking what’s happening.* [Sarah.45]

Another comments:

*The speed of commodification has already picked up so extraordinarily and one thing that is sort of interesting (...), my hypothetical group of younger people who may be doing ‘alternative things’ will probably face temptations, etc. that were unknown to previous generations because I imagine they will be commodified very fast, you’ll be in a situation where youth itself is going to be the thing because of the aging of the population that’s going to be one of the commodities that’s going to be bought, you know you could already see it in all those shows over the last 10 years about skateboarding say or street art, urban art. (...) It’s very, very weird. It’s febrile.* [William.39]
Moreover as the public sector is currently being eroded in the UK there will be even more emphasis on private money and artists may no longer have the choice to work on ‘alternative things’ outside of the market structure.

As art is being used more and more as an investment, an auction record is becoming increasingly important and while auctions were traditionally considered a secondary market for artists no longer alive, this has changed completely and it is now common place for established artists to be regularly on the auction circuit. Auctions have become the real ranking mechanism in the art market. This puts additional pressure on emerging and mid-career artists due to the risks of either not having an auction record, failing to sell at auction or even worse their prices collapsing as they do not have enough social capital to guarantee a sale at auction:

Because you know you get to 25 without an auction record and people are like ‘what’s going on?’ which is awful because you’re playing into the hands of the [market] but you don’t, I can’t change it. [Theo.69]

This is particularly the case for Hong Kong artists. While in the West collectors go to galleries first, then auctions and then fairs, in Asia the auctions are the first stop, followed by fairs and galleries are the last alternative, at the expense of the primary market [Victor.13]. In fact, as the Hong Kong market relies overwhelmingly on auctions and the art fair, showing only the top, established Chinese artists, there are few support mechanisms for local artists.

As we have seen, psychologically, this emphasis on monetary value can be difficult for artists as it clashes with their artistic values in terms of the authentic Romantic artist. As the art world garners more press and auction records are picked up in the media, emerging artists have higher expectations about financial success which can lead to great disillusionment on realisation of the sheer amount of competition and the realities of the market.

Art is getting less and less intellectual. I think everyone now actually believes that when they hit art school they’re going to be an artist in their first year and that they should be having an exhibition. I’m not convinced it’s the best thing in the world for young students to be exhibiting art. I think there’s a risk that you
don’t learn your craft. I think there is a language to be learned or why bother going to art school in the first place? [Ewan.10]

In fact the older generation of artists worried that emerging artists are not left the time to develop and fix their own artistic identity, instead becoming too ‘fashionable’ and not being able to keep the success going in the long-term. It is therefore entirely common sense that the art market, which now has such a conspicuous presence, is affecting the work that is being made and shown, artists are being influenced by what is selling and what is being taught in art school:

So yes I think there is no question. In Britain the YBA movement totally changed the face of the art that was coming out (...). [Matt.12]

This emphasis on the market is not necessarily entirely negative, however, it also provides more opportunities for collaboration and mixing up of art forms as the market starts to embrace the edges of what is considered ‘art,’ a phenomenon we shall explore further in the next chapter.

As more and more practices have become subsumed by market mechanisms it is natural that emerging artists have to adapt their career trajectories in order to fit within this, while the traditional model of an active embrace of low-profile and non-success is still in operation, emerging artists are becoming more and more strategic about their careers and moving away from art as semi-religious thing (although still to be found in the rhetorics legitimising art as we have seen) towards art as a commodity. Post-YBA especially, even artists who were consciously working outside the market are being put into museum shows and pulled back in:

The interesting thing about the commercial world say compared to how one imagined it 30 or 40 years ago, I mean what’s happened is what used to be alternative practice, (...) it’s become the establishment. And some dealers have become very astute at working with that, say the Lisson gallery or you know White Cube obviously. [William.27]

The mid-career and established artists interviewed all insisted upon the fact that when they made the decision to become an artist the idea of a market was not something they were familiar with and did not consider in making their work. For emerging artists however, the market is inescapable, marketing and professional development
are being taught in art schools and degree shows have become targeted towards selling to collectors looking for the ‘next hot thing.’ We will look at this process through which a market is created for an artist in more detail in the next chapter. For artists later on in their career trajectories, they are now having to face the realities of the market:

*When I graduated in the late 70’s there were no careers to be had in art, there was no money.* [Martin.20]

Since formerly ‘alternative’ areas such as performance and video have been taken up by museums and therefore become legitimised as part of the art market, galleries have started putting financial value on these practices. Galleries are becoming more and more adept at marketing the art and managing the price structure in accordance with supply and demand. As artists are now being marketed as brands by branded galleries, the emphasis is on production and the artist’s studio becomes a production studio, the artist becomes a sort of industry:

*And the other bit of the economy that didn’t exist when I graduated was the artist assistant or the manufacturing part of the economy, (...) and that’s all new since the 90’s. (...) I’ve got a slightly more old fashioned way of working.* [Martin.30]

As the very notion of a profession as an artist has grown it has created a need for more career-management skills which will be discussed further in the next chapter. Where you show, how much you show and with who you show, are all important factors that can make or break a career. If you do not show enough and your work is not out there then it has no impact but if you show too much that can be problematic as well because “that’s kind of, familiarity breeds contempt thing” [Chris.18] and people start dismissing you for being too productive or “exhibition-crazy” implying an unnatural interest (in art world terms) with financial opportunities and a lack of authenticity in that such volume cannot be considered innovative (authenticity, as we have seen, being still largely thought of in terms of a single, original work of art) [Sarah.3]. So there are a multitude of decisions that emerging artists need to make in terms of how they want to be perceived and how they want their work to be seen.

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8 There is even a performance art curating post-graduate programme at Wesleyan University in the United States now (Artinfo, 2011).
Most artists are very aware of the fact that in order to create this image, they need to create a coherent body of work to be identified with, thus the need for a portfolio documenting their work, certain pieces may not fit in so: “it never went into the portfolio because I didn’t really think it needed to make sense with the rest of the work” [Alexander.13]. This takes us back to the relatively recent notion of the artist as an industry that has a brand, something explored in the third empirical chapter. However, creating this coherent body of work is not enough, just getting the opportunities involves a certain amount of career-management, so as well as creating work, in order to succeed, artists need to be aware of their audience and if necessary find it themselves:

The [first] few years, (...) I didn’t have a model for being in control in a way, (...) you were waiting to be chosen for things which is a horrible, disempowering thing, you were applying for competitions (...) I found that whole opportunities culture where tons and tons of students apply for everything, (...) I kind of learned that it’s not worth it and to do it yourself, to set up your own opportunities and that’s kind of what we’re teaching people now, that you absolutely have to prepared to set up your own (...). You have to DIY and create something beyond the object, you have to create your milieu in a way and your audience and make connections and things. [Faye.15]

This is when self-marketing becomes essential in establishing a career, although the word ‘marketing’ is hardly used by artists as it is tinged by the negative tones of economics and overly commercial artists are not judged ‘authentic’:

Marketing seems like a ridiculous word to use, but in order to represent what you do now so people can get a glimpse (...) yeah it’s about how you represent yourself, it’s important. [Alexander.12]

There is therefore an inherent contradiction between the need for self-promotion but being perceived as overly self-promoting (thus the negative connotations attributed to self-curated solo shows and showing too frequently). This also explains why branded artists such as Damien Hirst are not considered authentic by their peers, while much of it may be jealousy, the Hirst PR and marketing approach is deemed by his peers as too overtly commercial. Artists therefore try to hide their marketing activities, either
leaving it entirely in the hands of others such as their dealers or, more frequently, underemphasising its importance when discussing their careers.

The representation of oneself to the outside world comes through the work created and therefore controlling where, when and how the work is shown is crucial in establishing the career trajectory. Indeed, successful artists will often unconsciously have quite a clear idea of the market (market analysis), their positioning within it (market-orientation and product analysis) and their competition (competitive analysis) and therefore have a strategy for their positioning, often reliant on working with certain key arts market professionals. Emerging artists find out quite quickly that establishing control over their positioning in the market is essential (although difficult to achieve):

And then also realising that being a young artist doesn’t necessarily mean you have to be pushed around, (...) I remember googling myself on the internet and seeing my work at art fairs in Rotterdam and Shanghai without any permission asked, I didn’t know. Now there’s a picture for instance of a piece of work showing in Rotterdam last year, that work I don’t like, I liked it at the time, it was good but now it has nothing to do with what I do, I was so pissed off when I saw that picture because I thought “God this is on now and I’m not responsible for it, I don’t want to show it because I’ve moved on from that and I don’t want people who I might work with in the future to see that and think that’s what I do.” You know, so there’s lots of decisions like that that you want to be involved in, and I didn’t like what happened there. [Alexander.6]

The fear here is that a curator, gallerist or collector the artist wants to work with in the future may make the wrong impression of his work and write him off. Getting grouped into the ‘wrong’ group or with the ‘wrong’ dealer can be hard to come back from:

I think one of the other things which is difficult is that I’ve definitely been grouped into a bunch of people. [Theo.28]

In this case the artist did not want to be associated with those artists and was not represented by their dealer but because people assumed he was, when they wanted to buy work would go through the dealer, so the artist would lose 50% of the sale to
somebody who did not actually work for him. The reverse is also true, having the ‘right’ labels attached to the work ascertains critical recognition and sales. This is why emerging artists tend to prefer solo shows to group shows “where a piece of work means nothing amongst loads of other bits of work” [Alexander.9]. A self- or peer-curated solo show (which is increasingly what the first solo show is), allows the artist to “say exactly how works behaved together, (...) dictate that, to be in control of how it was experienced” [Alexander.10].9 So in some ways, because emerging artists tend not to have representation yet, they have slightly more control in terms of the direction of their careers as there is no dealer to answer to who can constrain authenticity. Unlike in the traditional boundaryless career literature which looks at more conventional organisational settings, in order to succeed artists have to give up a certain amount of control to other people (especially dealers as we will see in the next chapter).

To ensure the best possible positioning the right discourse needs to be chosen, this is often regarded as “jumping through hoops, making statements that people want to hear rather than just being honest” by artists [Chris.11]. This is the first sign of a divergence between artistic identity and critical and economic success, the artist has to represent themself in certain ways that may not be in line with their own notions based around their artistic-identity. This is especially problematic in dealings with galleries, emerging artists are at a disadvantage in negotiating with galleries:

They’ll just butcher, my sense is they’ll have your for breakfast really, they’ll just have you running around doing all kinds of things and just creaming off 50% of it. Like I was approached and I just turned it down because they wanted to start selling my back catalogue, previous work made but I was like ‘that was nothing to do with you’ you had nothing to do with that, it all cost a fortune for me to make, you had nothing to do with that, there is no way I can just let you come in at this point and just start taking 50% out of things. So that’s the sort of thing that goes down, I don’t like them. [Sarah.7]

So instead, this artist chose to stay unrepresented and keep control over her career. That meant a much longer than average wait for a solo show but she hopes that now

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9 This is the reverse for artists in later stages of their careers who have done a number of solo shows, have a well-established image and wish to do group shows in order to be part of the wider critical discourse.
she has two solo shows this year she will be “able to wield some power” in negotiating representation. Because most galleries are commercial, the emphasis is on selling the art work, sometimes at the expense of the artist which is why these early years can be “traumatic” [Sarah.33]. However, as an artist becomes increasingly involved with the art world they will slowly learn how to present themself and their work:

I think having been kicking around the contemporary world for a couple of years you sort of know what to say, because if I walk in saying I’ve just graduated then great but if I walk in saying I’ve just got back from South Korea being in the Busan Biennale and it was insane and you know Bill Viola’s piece next to mine was really good, or whatever, then people suddenly sort of have a look. [Theo.28]

It is about contextualising the work within the art world which as discussed involves knowledge and understanding of the contemporary art market and its language. This is also where again long-term versus short-term decisions are crucial in the trajectory, usually visible in the tension between the critical and commercial spheres an artist operates within, the critical, as we have seen, being characterised as authentic and commercial as inauthentic.

These power-struggles and control issues are incredibly important to the career trajectory as once an image is created in the market and the artist is positioned in a certain area it is difficult to change, however artists are not trained in marketing or branding or PR:

Because I’m much better as an artist than as a PR, it’s taken me 7 years from when I left the Slade to get a show, that’s long, (...) and that’s because I’ve been in charge of my PR and I’m not a good, I’m not a PR person, I’m an artist. [Sarah.22]

Unfortunately, in order to succeed, these skills are necessary. So as one artist put it:

It’s sort of frightening you have to be a sort of 200% human, you know you have to have all these things kind of in your head. [Theo.33]
So ‘being’ a professional artist is by no means limited to being creative and creating art works, it is also about the whole context in which the art work is consumed. In order to succeed, the artist must therefore balance their own self-conception of their artistic identity and values with the representation that others have of these.

This is why one of the major career contingencies is the first time an artist sells a work:

*That was definitely a pivotal point, to make money off your own work so that you can support yourself and make more work gives you a lot of confidence, it’s just very encouraging because you think, you can really just focus on that and not have to worry about working [non art-job].* [Alexander.4]

This is especially the case if the buyer is an important collector as it is essentially the endorsement of somebody who is higher up in the art world hierarchy which signals the possibility that you can actually make some sort of a living out of the work. However, it brings with it a whole other set of problems in terms of who you sell to and the consequences of selling, putting the artist squarely in the commercial sphere with the concurrent considerations of pricing. Within the art world there are all sorts of rivalries and competition so once again, working with the ‘wrong’ people or selling to the ‘wrong’ people can cause problems further down the line. Again, at this early stage, artists need the money and so do not have that much control as to who they sell to, it’s a lot harder to say no when you cannot pay your bills but selling to certain collectors can have negative consequences:

*I can’t be too sneering about the private sector because I would take their money and spend it. I don’t have the background, other artists probably richer than me but with more integrity might refuse. (...) I’m not being cynical but maybe they can, to start refusing sales it’s easier in that position, yeah.* [Sarah.8]

*But [important collector] also, she has friends and enemies in the art world and it’s like, and also in the wider social sphere (...) But yeah it’s kind of choices but it’s kind of, they’re not real choices I think and at that stage I’d spent loads of money on the show, I was pretty broke and you know, I was hoping for the next whatever commission, project, (...), so in a way my hand was forced, when*
So having that long-term perspective and the knowledge of the social circles within the art world can be key to artists’ careers. Just the decision of selling though, no matter who to, is crossing the threshold from amateur to professional (despite the emphasis on the critical in terms of defining oneself as an artist, being considered a professional is very much based on economic success) and means accepting that “yes I’m a commercial artist in some way, (...) my work can be sold and I can be part of the art market and part of a collection” [Chris.19]. That first sale can also be emotionally difficult in that the artist has invested a lot of time, effort and themselves to the work and due to the commercial being somewhat taboo in the art world, selling can be seen as selling out:

*I was thinking it was kind of like selling my soul because it was all my soul records, it was kind of an embodiment of my soul, all these objects that make me who I am [laughs].* [Chris.19]

The product the artists has created is at this point in the trajectory still wrapped up in the artist’s conception of self-worth and selling it can therefore feel like selling “my baby” [Chris.19]. Once that first sale has been made artists must come to terms with the fact that they are ‘commercial’ and tend to radically change the way they talk about selling. One of the established artists interviewed, who now makes his living entirely from sales, described his feelings about selling when he first started his career as:

*Speaking personally, [as an emerging artist] I didn’t, I would have rather despised someone who sold a picture, almost, it was that bad, it was stupid.* [Henry.4]

Now, selling is no longer psychologically painful but part of the natural process of the career. Once artists sell they must re-align their self-image to fit in with the idea of being ‘commercial,’ and so the more they sell, the more they accept that it is necessary and transfer the artistic potential from residing within the creative process in making the work to the way the art can communicate with a buyer. Moreover, finding a buyer becomes a way to secure the long-term potential of the work: to
“achieve something that whatever you do will be cared for after you go” [William.21]. Therefore the commercial aspect of the career becomes acceptable as it ensures the long-term survival of the work. Positioning is still the key here which is why certain collectors who are known for loaning the work out to institutions, allowing public access to the work and thus developing the artist’s career, are more highly prized than others. Although the relationship between the artist and the product changes through time, the link is still at the heart of their self-worth and identity. This is why any attempt of forgery of the work is taken personally. For example, a number of forgeries of Tracey Emin’s work appeared recently and she was left “hurt and distressed” as the forgeries “damaged my reputation and credibility as an artist,” “my artwork comes from my heart” she added, illustrating how her identity as an individual is wrapped up in her work (Attewill, 2010).

Emerging artists tend to have much more specific ambitions which are based on external representations or images of themselves, compared to more established artists who have already proven themselves in the art world and can focus on more subjective and personal ambitions. This is due to a need to be legitimised in order to be considered authentic in the market. Whether it is to “not have to do work” (other jobs) in order to focus on the practice fulltime, secure representation, “sell to a museum collection”, get a “big commission”, be in the “British Art Show” or get a “Paul Hamlyn Award,” the emerging artists all had specific goals they wanted to achieve, all of which would be measures of critical success rather than financial as even selling or getting a commission is in reference to museums rather than collectors (who generally pay more) [Sarah.30; Elizabeth.9]. Success at this early stage in the trajectory is critical recognition and positive feedback that can provide some kind of confidence in the ability to carve out a career in the art market:

So yeah I think success is getting good feedback and people responding to it positively (...). [Alexander.7]

So the aim at this stage is to focus on the long-term critical potential of the work and getting the opportunities to do so. The career trajectory is still conceived of in a relatively straightforward, linear way, unlike the way established artists conceive of it as we shall see further on:
I think as I said there is this kind of long, small group shows, big solo shows, represented by a big gallery, biennale, whatever it is, museum, retrospective, death, good 50 years between now and then I hope... [Theo.49]

Although at this stage in their careers, artists generally still need to juggle a number of different jobs in order to survive financially, it is clear that their identity has been constructed in such a way that they consider themselves ‘artists’ and not ‘teachers’ or ‘gallery assistants’ or whatever the other job they are doing may be. Indeed, the other jobs are chosen in order to facilitate the practice whether by providing much needed funds for the studio or materials, or in terms of flexible hours to allow time for making art, or even in terms of the skills they will pick up that will be useful to their practice:

That’s the good thing about teaching because I can slightly arrange it around exhibitions so I can make the work during the holidays and then I have to make up for it in the term time. [Diana.12]

The practice is considered the most important thing even if less time is spent on it than other jobs because artists define themselves in relation to their practice and sacrifice other areas of their lives in order to have the time and money to maintain their practice. As the practice becomes more and more central to their identity, the value of the work created within the practice starts to take on a larger significance and becomes linked to the value of the self in the artist’s conception of self-worth therefore complicating the relationship between the self and the product.

As we have covered, emerging artists must struggle in order to first become art world members, necessitating a socialisation process that usually occurs through peer groupings and must then try and position themselves within the art world. This process of socialisation and positioning entails learning and absorbing certain core notions about what is considered ‘authentic’ and aligning the professional identity with these notions by interacting with other art world members. As the career trajectory progresses, the professional identity will continue to adapt in order to manage and maintain their positioning in the art world.
4.2.2 Mid-career artists: managing and maintaining the career

Sudden attention: career trajectory takes off

Emerging artists generally go through a long period with relatively little support, where they are fighting for survival in a competitive and rather unwelcoming art world. There is a large drop-out ratio at this period, when after between two to sometimes as long as ten years of struggle after art school, social, economic and familial pressure can force the artist to exit the career trajectory and move on to another career. In fact it is an accepted statistic that most artists drop out before the age of thirty (Polsky, 2003; Alper & Wassall, 2006). The reasons are varied and include diminishing interest, lack of confidence, marriage and other life events and others jobs that were taken to support their practice eventually turning into careers. Anyone still making art at forty is probably in it for the long haul. Many of the artists who give up a career as an artist may still continue making work but only as amateurs not professionals, as soon as they take fulltime employment in other employment they find themselves cut out of the social circle of the art world. Those that do stick it out and start to receive some critical recognition, generally find that after years in “uttermost darkness” things suddenly take off [Henry.2]. This is due to the endorsement structure through which artists are recognised in the art market, so:

It normally takes a couple of years from something for someone to kind of, almost come back to you and say ‘would you be interested in doing this thing?’
I think also people are quite, quite weary of trusting their own taste in a way.
[Chris.17]

While these years are extremely difficult for artists, they also allow them the time to find and develop their artistic identity and finding the right critical context for their work (and therefore market position), one artist who suffered through about a decade of creating work and getting nowhere in terms of exposure, insists that this time alone was essential:

In retrospect I have no regrets because I feel it took me a long time to find my artistic identity and I did that relatively unhampened, unpressurised, I could fix my own conditions. [Faye.9]
This time therefore provides the artists with the freedom to create an ‘authentic’ artistic identity. Once an artist gets endorsement, whether from a dealer, collector or curator, things generally happen very fast, and in combination:

Very quickly it was suddenly like ‘here’s the new guy bang go’ and that has been great, that’s sort of worked for the last two years, you know and [curator]’s put me in the Biennale and you know, I’ve been in big shows in Milan, I’ve just had a solo show in Milan as well as this big group show he did, and it’s been, you know I’ve had the Haunch of Venison coming to my studio, I’ve had all this, you know suddenly it’s been quite sort of interesting. [Theo.19]

Another artist said that “things kind of combined magically,” which is the result of part luck and part having situated yourself and your work in the right context. In fact, just how happenstance and chance-based these career contingencies are cannot be underestimated (and will be analysed further in the next chapter). As things pick up in speed in terms of having to juggle different projects, the pressure switches from being recognised to staying recognised, keeping up the momentum:

I’m in a better position than I’ve ever been in the sense that the Milan gallery have pre-sold five things I haven’t done, (...) but I’ve got to make them and I’ve got to show them and I’ve got to show them in the right context which is whichever the right gallery is or whatever, so you know even though on the surface that’s great, (...) I can get crippled by these things and sit and do nothing because I’m too frightened to do anything but then on the other hand it isn’t a lot of pressure because really, it’s better than going ‘oh f**k how am I going to pay the phone bill?’ which, I’ve been there for 8 years before these last couple of years and that was a much worse type of pressure. [Theo.45]

The pressure of carving out and achieving a certain position in the market is replaced by the pressure of maintaining this positioning. Due to the amount of competition and the temporal, trend-based structure of the art market (based on seasonal auctions), ensuring the longevity of the career is no mean feat. Moreover, this leads to a certain limitation in terms of artistic freedom as now artists are expected to follow on from previous work and if they venture too far from what is expected of them the work may become difficult to sell or place. This is why the career needs to be continually
managed by the artist in line with the artistic identity and image they have constructed at the start of their career.

The next important career contingency for an artist is the first solo show. This is generally considered the threshold at which point the artist moves from emerging to mid-career as it means there is a coherent body of work which is strong enough to stand up on its own:

*I guess my first proper solo show (...) was a huge, I think that was a really important show for me actually and a lot of things came from that, the next 2 years were just non-stop after that.* [Diana.13]

*I had my first real one-man show (...). It was like rags to riches. I did struggle for 11 years but the sudden turnaround was very sudden.* [Henry.11]

Getting the solo show can be extremely difficult, it usually comes when the artist gets representation but it may also come about through a connection with a curator, but, if the dealer/curator and the artist can create enough buzz about the opening, the show can lead to a range of opportunities, not least of which is sales:

*Walking to the show two weeks ago and one of the best experiences of my life, (...) then 500 or 600 people kind of come through the place in an hour and a half and the dealer keeps coming up and saying we’ve just sold this, sold that and by the end it’s done, it’s finished, we sold out, it was incredible.* [Theo.22]

This is the first time the artist is really involved in the professional world of the arts market, when the artist is faced with pricing issues, press releases, guest lists, etc. and although to some extent the dealer’s role is to shield the artist from the commercial side of things, the artist is still very much aware of the importance of the solo show as a rite of passage which symbolises that the dealer/curator is willing to spend a significant amount of resources on the artist and thereby imposing some sort of external, critical and economic value on the art work.

As we have established, getting representation is an important stage of an artist’s career, it signals that an art professional has “real long-term faith” in the artist and their work. Most of the artists interviewed emphasised the importance of “knowing that someone believes in your work,” more so than in terms of
representation leading to a whole new avenue of exhibition in terms of collectors and other galleries internationally, as well as providing the critical context in which the artist is now going to be situated as we saw earlier with the other artists in that gallery [Chris.26; Theo.24]. The other major advantage of having a gallery is in terms of the practicalities of managing the career that now moves from being the artist’s responsibility to that of the dealer:

*I can’t wait for that to be over, that would be why I would want to be represented, so I don’t have to, and I can’t ever foresee making any money, I mean, it would be just so someone could help me with doing that stuff.* [Sarah.22]

‘The stuff’ covers everything from PR and marketing to insurance and shipping, all extremely time- and effort-consuming. Finding the ‘right’ dealer is the major issue here:

*You are lucky if you find the right person to represent you at the right time and that person understands you well enough to carry you forward.* [Erin.12]

In many ways the career structure is dependent on the gallery the artist is with, as some galleries will lead to more public commissions and grants whereas others will lead to private collections and a secondary market. So if you find that ‘right person’ you can suddenly be legitimised, as prestige for the artist is partly defined by the status of the gallery to which they are tied and representation can be the catalyst for other markers of success such as notice by critics and acquisitions by prestigious collectors or museums. In effect, the gallery you work with decides how you are positioned in the art market. Changing dealer therefore usually entails a change in the direction of the trajectory.

Because the relationship between the artist and dealer is such a close one, it represents a major contingency in the career trajectory in terms of how the artist is represented by the dealer (what type of promotion and marketing is given to the artist, how many shows, where the artist is shown in terms of fairs and biennials, how many sales, etc.) and how the artist creates work for the dealer (how productive the artist is, whether the work is of the quality expected, etc.). This is why choosing a dealer is one of the most important decisions an artist can make and why most artists are extremely
wary of “getting into bed with the first one who asks” [Elizabeth.3]. The ‘fit’ in terms of the values and ambitions of the artist and dealer is therefore crucial.

Even once the ‘right’ dealer has been found, the transition from working alone to being represented may be challenging for the artist who has to re-align their artistic identity and career objectives to fit with those of the dealer. As we discussed above, gaining representation can mean a loss of control for mid-career artists as they need to submit to the dealer’s expectations and are not yet established enough to have the upper hand in negotiations:

*I’ve got an email from them saying we’re going to give you a show at this point and then that just keeps getting put back, there’s loads of time where they’re not really talking to me, it took 2 years from when, and it’s just such a heartbreakingly long-time. I think galleries just have to be so much better at managing expectations of artists.* [Sarah.21]

Another artist goes so far as to say that he “hasn’t sold [his] soul to anyone” in reference to representation, he has chosen to represent himself in order to keep control of his artistic identity and career trajectory [Jasper.10]. Ultimately, the gallery is a commercial business and so their objectives are not necessarily the same as those of the individual artists they represent:

*I think you know an art dealer is there to make money you know, an institution or a curator is not, so that’s the difference.* [Theo.25]

Therefore, although the dealer may have some critical awareness and be interested in the long-term artistic development of the artist, they are also aware of financial pressures to keep the gallery afloat and the necessity to generate demand for the work in order to sell it. The freedom to create that is so crucial to the artist’s sense of artistic integrity and authenticity can be lost when joining a gallery:

*I have never had a gallery since them that has had as good principles as they had, for instance, they never interfered in what the work was, they let you make your own mistakes, they didn’t go around telling you what to do (...), so the artist was the main person, you know it wasn’t the curator and that was the absolutely key thing, to be respected, so the gallerist only helped what you already did, which I think is totally, totally against what modern management,
the way of dealing with artists really which is to pigeonhole them and then exploit them. [Erin.5]

The dealer has quite a lot of say in terms of how the work is shown and where else it can be shown and this can be seen as “interference” with the artistic progress [Faye.7]. Often the conflict comes when the artist wants to change the direction of the work, especially radical changes in terms of genre. The dealer takes on an artist because they believe there is value that can be sold in the work being created by the artist and the work fits in with the stable of artists they already represent, so it is natural that if the work fundamentally changes, the dealer may have serious reservations as to how to manage and sell this new work, sometimes having to find a new market for it which they may not be familiar with. The label attached to the work has changed and this is not necessarily conducive to continuing sales, especially when there are a number of collectors who have invested in the artist’s work and wish to see a return on their investment. When the two objectives become opposed, the relationship usually ends with the artist leaving the gallery.

I did a couple shows with him and it was great but then I became very interested in what was then called conceptual art and he wasn’t so interested in it (...) and I moved to somebody else. [Jasper.13]

As more and more artists get representation straight out of art school, this has an effect on how the artistic identity is constructed and makes the artist more likely to develop in line with the dealer and their financial objectives. So in some ways the underlying clash between the critical and economic spheres is becoming less significant in artists’ careers which may eventually have implications in terms of the definition of authenticity, perhaps even embracing the commercial.

This trend towards the commercial is even more widespread in the Chinese art market which has significantly shaped the career trajectory of Hong Kong artists. Galleries are unable to find new material to show as the work is bought up so quickly by collectors and auction houses, therefore Hong Kong artists tend to be much less reliant on galleries than their London counterparts as they do not rely on them for sales. Emerging artists sell at auction almost immediately which can cause problems in terms of long-term success as, if they fail to sell at auction, they are immediately blacklisted by collectors. Therefore artists in China do not benefit from the protection
that dealers bring to Western artists. Interestingly, compared to the London market, the discourse of commerce seems to be more acceptable in Hong Kong. Artists have a variety of possibilities in terms of working with private companies through commissions or sales and although the divide between culture and commerce is still present, Hong Kong artists seem to be more acceptant of the reality of commerce in the art world, they accept that the art they produce is ultimately a product in a commercial marketplace. This is probably because there is not the same historical narrative of collecting high art as in the West, in Hong Kong there is as much social capital in buying a branded wallet as there is buying a painting:

*It’s not a right or wrong choice what you’re spending money on, whether it’s a 5K painting or 50K wallet. We are simplifying it by saying it’s investing in culture versus materialism, but art can become materialistic when buying for investment or using artists for marketing which is the strategy of Louis Vuitton, etc.* [Peter.12]

Artists are more likely to jump into bed with commercial brands such as luxury fashion brands (such as the recent Louis Vuitton exhibition in the Hong Kong museum). One of the artists who showed in that exhibition suggests that those who oppose it “have a daydream of a grassroots arts scene” which is just not realistic [Leo.5]. Due to the popularity of the LV brand, in fact, the artist found it was a successful method of getting locals into the museum to see the art as LV has the cachet that the art scene has yet to attain and artists can trade on this. Many of the galleries that operate at the local level also offset their costs through commercial projects with interior designers or urban developers [Louise.1]. It is a question of needs must, in an emerging market, the role of commerce as a backdrop to the art market becomes more obvious and is therefore less taboo. Perhaps in the long-term this will result in a change in how authenticity is defined as more and more new Chinese collectors enter the international art market.

In order to understand how an artist constructs and manages their career and artistic identity, a further understanding of the media they use is necessary. There is a tendency towards product conservatism, in as much that dealers, collectors and museums want a piece of work that is part of a branded narrative (we will examine this further in the third empirical chapter), which is why a successful artist such as
Damien Hirst basically has four product lines (spin and spot paintings, animal vitrines and the skulls). This brand recognition is not available to artists who use different media or styles and they have to work much harder at establishing a narrative that covers the various directions the work goes into. The growth of the art fair in the last decade has made this phenomenon more widespread as it encourages name-recognition as a result of a quick glance as collectors stroll through the fair. As well as a shift in genre possibly causing damage to the image that has been constructed of the artist in the art world, each medium raises different problems that feed into the artist’s career trajectory in terms of the possible markets they can sell to. Once an artist is established in a certain medium, the limitations of that medium need to be held into account and so choosing to work in a certain medium is not just a decision based on talent but also on practicalities. For example, video is not “super-saleable” because unlike a painting it is not just “pure, aesthetic enjoyment” to be put on a wall and admired and therefore when chosen as the main medium by the artist, he must recognise that and be prepared to look towards other sources of income such as commissions and grants [Chris.6]. One of the Hong Kong artists argued the reason his work was so popular with curators was that it “is easy to transport” (Kai.21). In fact, in Hong Kong, many of the artists were making strategic choices in terms of media used. So using new media, for example, can be an advantage because although it does not sell as well as painting, for example, it can be promoted faster, so as one emerging artist says:

*I can exhibit my work in Europe which I wouldn’t be able to do with paintings, they wouldn’t work overseas. I am currently trying to collaborate with musicians for more exposure.* [Milo.3]

These decisions come through in the artist’s artistic identity and personal notions of authenticity whereby they can justify their decisions (and failures) according to these views:

*I guess I’m much more interested in following ideas through rather than making a saleable object (...) I was quite tied to idea of it being almost unsalable I guess.* [Chris.9]

This underlying rhetoric also came out in the Hong Kong interviews: “once you’re popular, you are heading towards death” is how one artist justified his lack of sales,
taking pride in the integrity of his artistic identity and using his outsider status as a
defence mechanism [Peter.4]. As a result the video artist’s self-worth derives much
more from the process, the ability to disseminate widely, and an emphasis on
accessibility, rather than the sales, unlike, say, a painter who can only show to a more
limited audience but has many more opportunities to sell. Again we see how circular
the production and consumption of art is as artists manage failure by redefining and
reinterpreting the art world, continuously constructing their own artistic identity in
relation to notions of authenticity, either accepting or rejecting the prevailing values
of the art market. It also has implications in terms of the career trajectory in that for
example, video artists have much less use for a gallery as they are not going to sell to
collectors so they tend to only get representation much later on in their careers, if at
all.

Furthermore, media can be chosen in order to demonstrate a political position in
terms of creating an alternative outside of the market structure:

A group of us had set up an artist-run space, because we were time-based and
performance artists so the idea of a market was totally alien to us and at the
time there was a strong political charge to that idea, it really was an alternative,
and you weren’t really thinking ahead very much. [William.6]

Currently, the market structure is subsuming these alternative practices, so that
something which had previously just had critical and reputational value is starting to
gain monetary value as video and performance-based artists are becoming more
mainstream. This will be discussed further in the chapter using branding theory as it is
argued in this thesis that as a result of the commercialisation of the art world,
collecting works of art is becoming perhaps less important than collecting artists and
the symbolic and cultural capital that comes as a result of being associated with the
most successful artists. The result of this move towards the mainstream for previously
‘unsalable’ objects is that the product is limited, mostly in terms of its ease of access,
often by moving from mass distribution and replicability to a small-edition for a
higher price. Again, this may not be in line with the artist’s reasons for creating the
work in their artistic identity construction and may cause turmoil in terms of their
conception of artistic integrity. One of the most established artists interviewed who
has lived through this transformation discussed a shift from placing value on
distribution to the masses to “not wanting to be entirely disposable in the longer term,” although the work no longer served its original purposes in terms of being in parallel to the mainstream media, it now secured longer-term significance and was therefore still of value and authentic; thereby demonstrating how an artist can manipulate and redefine their notions of authenticity in line with prevailing shifts in the art market in order to maintain their career [William.13]. Therefore, when considering the career trajectory and artistic identity, medium used needs to be taken into account to a certain extent.

Disregarded and forgotten: career trajectory drops off

In the span of a 50-plus-year career, there will usually be a number of ups and downs for an artist to navigate. After gaining some measure of success in terms of both critical and financial recognition, the first drop in the career trajectory is a defining point in the artist’s career as how that failure is managed will establish to a large extent whether the artist will have a lengthy career or not:

I don’t know, it just goes in waves really but I would say the first moment is not, it’s what you do with that that’s the key really, because the first moment you might get some success but there’s a queue of people behind you and also you have to go on developing what you do and if what you do doesn’t have the potential of development, you don’t really know that until you do it, how much it’s worth in a way, so it’s finding out that really. [Erin.18]

The difficulty is not when the artist first starts achieving some measure of success but sustaining it, there is a need to constantly expand the potential audience in order to keep going upwards and this requires ever-higher levels of productivity and distribution which may not be achievable. Moreover due to the trend-based nature of the art market which we have already discussed, certain styles will fall in and out of favour thereby changing the demand for the work. An analysis (conducted in 2005) of the top 100 artists of 1990 showed that one-fifth of these had seen the value of their works fall over the previous 15 years, two-fifths were even and only two-fifths were up (Thompson, 2008). Indeed, maintaining the momentum of the career can be impossible, all sorts of factors may impinge on it, whether it is a general recession, a change in the critical context of the work in terms of what is in vogue, a change in the
gallery management, or even, personal factors such as familial pressures, something which is particularly relevant for female artists who have children:

*I’d say the mid-90’s were a bad time with the downturn. And I mean, the other thing to be said is that, I think most people have this notion when things start to go well that the trajectory, which is the point, is just uppace, you know they think ‘ah I’m making it’ as it were, it’s just not true, the chances are there’ll be a down, it’s not one way.* [Henry.16]

This is another major point at which artists exit the career trajectory, as their social capital and their market, which have been built up through years of recognition are hit, the subsequent down-turn can be too much to deal with and many will give up. This is why it is important for artists early on to take a long-term perspective and be aware of the vagaries of the market and factor this into their career identity, thus the significance of subjective measures of success. Maintaining the career is therefore extremely challenging in light of both the social scene around which the art market is based and the need to be a regular within it (again, something difficult to balance with family life), and the fact that the market is constantly looking for the ‘next big thing,’ so the social capital that is available is fleeting in nature. In the words of Howard Hodgkin “because the further great problem of how to be an artist is how to go on being an artist” (1981). Successful artists need to constantly negotiate their positioning in the market thus the importance of branding which creates an identity that goes beyond just the product as we shall examine in chapter 6. Brown provides a case study of this with his (2003) analysis of pop star Madonna’s brand, demonstrating how she has consciously and continuously positioned herself in the market for long-term success.

Sometimes this dip, rather than being accidental, can also be the result of a strategic choice by the artist, taking a break or changing their immediate environment by moving away in order to find mental space and gain perspective away from the public arena. For example one artist had had a number of busy years after art school and found that:

*I was managing the work rather than having time to make it. So I think after about 3 years of that I thought ‘right, I have to stop and sort of make some space for myself and try and make the next work’ because I think that’s the
hardest thing especially when you think you’ve made a body of work, is just to, then you need a breather and then think about where you want to go from there. So I think it was a great few years, it was really, really busy, it was fun and exciting but then I wanted time to process it and think about what I wanted to do next and make new work and so I moved out of London for a couple of years into the countryside. [Diana.13]

This is a deliberate attempt by the artist to return to a more ‘authentic’ career trajectory based on subjective notions of success in terms of the creative development of the body of work versus value placed on the final product by other art professionals. Opting out of the career trajectory affords the artist time to re-centre their practice around their core artistic identity values. This can be quite pivotal in terms of discovering an entirely new context for the work:

*I went off to live in Spain and then I was quite lucky in Spain because there weren’t women artists, there were almost none, there was one well-known one, so that in a way helped me so I had a gallery quite quickly.* [Erin.17]

But it also necessarily entails a loss in terms of the support structure, it makes it more difficult to return to the market as you need to renegotiate your place and reposition yourself:

*It was very, very hard to come back from Spain (...) because I’d been very well-known somewhere else and had to come back to this, less well known again and have to build it up and also the British are quite untrusting in a way and it’s taken a long time, it’s taken them 5 years to realise that I exist again (...) it’s very slow, it takes years and years and years.* [Erin.11]

Essentially, this means returning as something-closer to emerging artist status in most of the structures, rather than as a mid-career or established artist.

The opposite is true of artists in Hong Kong however. As Hong Kong and Asia more generally, lacks the infrastructure and opportunities in terms of training of arts professionals, most artists (and gallery directors) go abroad for training and exposure. Finding opportunities to work overseas is much more crucial for Hong Kong artists than their London counterparts as although there are more opportunities for emerging artists now, mid-career development is lacking due to the shortage of
institutions in Asia. Moreover, because Hong Kong is so small, if they only exhibit at home “people will get bored” as the market is not big enough [Bruce.12]. Therefore, due to the under-developed local market, much of the efforts of artists and curators are therefore directed towards getting the art out, for financial survival, to start a dialogue with the rest of the world by participating in biennials and international art fairs and working with museums abroad [Amanda.5]. This results in a different career trajectory for Hong Kong artists compared to their Western counterparts. While it has become much easier for Hong Kong artists to emerge, with solo shows happening much earlier in the career trajectory than for artists in London for example, the problem is in keeping the career going as there are so few curators, institutions and critics to work with for professional development [Oliver.10]. One artist discussed a peer who was preparing to represent Hong Kong at the Venice Biennale in 2011: “Where will he go from there, what will he do when he gets back? He’s only 30 but it’s a problem, it’s very challenging.” [Oliver.11]. We will return to this issue of location in the next chapter when discussing the importance of art hubs.

In order to recover from this downwards turn in the career trajectory, artists must persevere and ‘renew’ themselves in a certain way:

*You have to go through that but it’s never easy so I would say, again I would guess that every artist’s career is punctuated by something like that and with it a sense that you’ve got to renew yourself and rethink everything and begin again really.* [Henry.19]

The artist must rediscover the identity and objectives they created for themself at the start of their career and decide which direction they wish to continue in, sometimes deciding: “that wasn’t the trajectory that I wanted” [William.7]. Once the artist rediscovers a sense of their artistic identity and a certain confidence in the work, they must try and recapture the critical recognition they once achieved by finding new ways back into that critical context and repositioning themselves within it, often either by travelling and gaining critical recognition in other places as a way back into the home context or through the awards system by applying for an award or a grant. What this process does give the artist is the awareness that “it can all fall to pieces at any time,” a fear which even established artists never really shake off as we shall explore later on in this chapter [William.19].
4.2.3 Established artists: or are they still emerging?

When an artist moves from being ‘mid-career’ to being established is unclear but a significant factor is the ability to quit any ‘other’ jobs. Having the stability in order to enjoy the freedom to work on the practice fulltime is one of the defining characteristics of an established artist. The issue of control reasserts itself here as well, the established artist regains control over their career and work, especially in terms of their relationship with their dealer, the percentage cut of the sale is generally reduced and the artist is much freer in terms of the direction the work takes as there is already an established market in the form of a solid collector-base that has invested in the artist and will therefore want to continue supporting the artist’s career to get a return on that investment. Your status in the art world is therefore related to the amount of control you have on your career. Finally, another factor that signals this stage in an artist’s trajectory is the social capital they have accumulated, in terms of name-recognition in the art world and the access they have in creating their work, “I get invited to do things that other people don’t get access to,” whether materials, technicians or funds [Erin.21].

Returning to subjective notions of success

At this point in their careers artists have a multifaceted and complex career identity which defines them as ‘artists’ and serves to differentiate them from people in other professions. One artist interviewed discovered that:

*It remains possible to keep doing it no matter what happens or changes in your life. Yes it’s part of your identity and it is so different from when you talk to other people and how they talk about success and some people that I know wouldn’t understand, they just think it’s nuts.* [Diana.16]

The value system an artist establishes throughout their career differs drastically from that of the ‘others’ in their society whether their parents, spouses or neighbours who may not understand their career choices. The moments that these ‘outsiders’ consider pivotal or important are generally not the same as those the artists themselves consider as such. Again this is due to the emphasis on personal development in the career identity due to the notion of authenticity, so one established artist could say that:
The moments you think to be strong are not necessarily the same as the ones everybody else does, for instance when Tate Modern opened I had a room with a big work in it there so that was a pivotal moment, that would have been a pivotal moment in the sense that there was a lot of appreciation and postcards or something but it wouldn’t be the work that I would have, it was because they wanted a work that looked at Judaism historically, it wasn’t because it was my work, really, honestly so although it was success and people love that work, to me, personally it wasn’t the most successful work I’ve ever done (...) you know it was more public and more kind of, not so private. [Erin.7]

Instead the artist found success in a much smaller project working in collaboration with other women:

The fact that this thing is right, you know, for me is hugely satisfying, much more satisfying than an exhibition in a big museum where there’s tons of struggles and at the end of it you’re just so exhausted by the opening that you just think ‘my God I hope no one’s there’ and that happens a lot you know. [Erin.22]

While the big museum exhibition is a much more public recognition of success, creating an ethically and aesthetically pleasing work of art was much more in line with the artist’s subjective notions of success. Moreover, these notions have developed through time, established artists have received recognition in their careers (which is why they are still working as an artist) and no longer feel the need to be legitimised in the same way as emerging or mid-career artists:

Well if you’d asked me 15 years ago I’d have had a completely different view too. And then, it’s different, there’s a difference between how other people see things and how you see things, for instance I started showing with Leo Castelli (...) that would be a pivotal moment because it was a much more public recognition than anything in Britain could ever have given you really, you know the same gallery as Jasper Johns and Bruce Nauman and Robert Rauschenberg so for me that was a huge moment but on the other hand the actual moment was pretty bereft, it wasn’t really very interesting. [Erin.16]
Once the ambitions of the emerging artist (such as getting representation from a very well-known dealer and being in the same critical context as internationally established artists) have been achieved, the artist tends to move notions of success back to the critical process and having the freedom to fulfil their creative potential in ‘authentic’ work. The relationships with the work changes throughout an artist’s career and at this later point in the career trajectory, selling a piece is no longer characterised as physically painful, artists have come to terms with their work being on the market.

Awards are also generally considered by artists as of little value or importance in their careers contrary to expectations that they would be major career contingencies given the way the endorsement process works. Even some of the most prestigious contemporary art prizes such as the Turner Prize do not seem to hold much attraction:

*I suppose we could talk about the Turner Prize because in Britain that seems to be the, it’s very odd because it means almost nothing, it happened to me at a time when it was really inconvenient actually, well I was doing other things, I think it was useful to them, they need people to be in the prize, so it’s that way around in a way, so if you agree to do it it’s not a very nice experience but I suppose it’s a sort of confirmation of something but, it gets attention and it gets focus which is good but the shows are always terrible. (...) I think most prizes seem to be, they’re a way to spend money and a way of confirming some sort of hierarchy and I suppose it’s useful to be in it and it’s useful in a permanent sense it is useful because it’s a marker in your career that people know about and they understand that, they understand prizes, they understand scholarships, they understand galleries, they understand a few things but those aren’t actually the things that make an artist work or develop, the two are completely separate so the things that make you develop might be sort of very other key experiences.*

[Erin.12]

The key to a successful career is to deal with the two sides in tandem, so on the one hand the self-image and personal development side and on the other, the brand image that others have of the career and its positioning in the market. While emerging artists dream of getting nominated for awards and prizes in order to achieve that ‘confirmation’ of their worth, all the established artists interviewed found awards insignificant and overly reliant on fashion or trends, arguing that “someone who’s had
the (...) biggest prizes, can still be completely unknown 10 years later, if you look down the list many of them are” [Henry.24]. They define the pivotal moments of their careers in relation to extremely personal life events, usually difficult events such as a divorce or a death which they then channel in their work:

*The comeback from that is what pushes you forward as a human, you know, not an MA, (...) but you know these aren’t the things which make you, you don't suddenly turn into something, you have to go through things to turn into something that’s real.* [Theo.18]

Here we see exactly how the artist’s self-worth is wrapped up in the work they produce. This subjective success is necessary because there is so much insecurity and:

*As soon as you start to derive pleasure from an outside influence you’re f***ed and it’s something I’ve realised, it’s so easy to do, but I think that this idea of this shiny thing that’s going to happen and fix you doesn’t happen.* [Theo.48]

**Insecurity and defensive coping mechanisms**

Indeed, no matter how many awards artists have received or the critical attention they have garnered it seems that there is no point at which an artist is completely secure:

*What I do find interesting is that knowing far more artists, and more artists at different levels is that there’s a level of nervousness and twitchiness seems to remain constant no matter how well you do, it is kind of reassuring but at the same time it would be nice to know there’s a certain point where you can just relax a bit ‘phew that’s over’.* [William.18]

Even Damien Hirst, probably the world’s most successful living artist is insecure: “I definitely worry that I’ll end up like Frank Stella, who made all that great early work and then no one was interested in the late work” (Ward, 2009). At this point the career trajectory is no longer envisioned as straightforward and linear as it is earlier on in the career. All the established artists seem to think they have an atypical career path, in that “it either works or it doesn’t and it works differently at different times and actually in difference places” but in fact, although there are many differences in terms of whether the artist has gone for the commercial route or the public route, national or
international, at which points they have gotten representation and awards, etc., there are underlying similarities in the general shape they take: a rather slow start before a rapid push in terms of critical recognition which then falls again and a number of fluctuations thereafter [William.13]:

*I don’t think I’ve had a very typical career at all, or a very consistently successful one, it’s been fluctuating* [Erin.7]

This, it is suggested here, is largely as a result of the creative process itself, as the work needs to develop in different ways at different times, there are stronger moments and weaker moments and the artist cannot always keep up the creative surge; as well as the inherent social and cultural context of the art world. In fact, the hope of achieving ever greater work is always there, a sort of carrot on the stick that moves forward the artist’s career:

*One doesn’t really know what one has in one, to the end, you just do not know, I mean one extraordinary surge might do, might really do something, it’s the circumstances, and as it happens (...) everything I like by Goya really is after the age of 50 and much of it is after the age of 70 so you know, who knows? And contrary wise I’d say that an awful lot of the artists whose work I love from their youth are not able to keep up to it, I mean I feel Hockney just isn’t, I love the early work of Hockney but I don’t really like what he’s done since, (...) it’s not easy to sustain very, very high level through a 50 year career. And often in many cases a change in partner or a change of analyst or God knows what.* [Henry.33]

As a result the artist cannot necessarily tell at what stage anything will happen which is why the long-term perspective is necessary “as long as it happens eventually then it’s alright” [Erin.23]. The competition is not with peers but with the success stories of art history. This is also perhaps one way for artists to manage their failures, success could still come. Although according to boundaryless career theory the individual is in control of the career trajectory the realities of artistic careers means artists usually feel that their future is completely out of their control.

*It’s like doing shows really, you can never tell, people say ‘how did your show work out in Columbia?’ and I go (...) ‘Well...’, (...) I suppose it’s hard to say
because someone may have seen that show who in 5 years time will come to me and people still come to me and say ‘I saw your show at Castelli’ and actually I’ve completely forgotten about them, you know it’s long ago. (...) So I suppose my feeling is that you have to keep on doing it and not worry about what the net result is, I don’t worry about whether it’s successful or not. And the other thing is that the money, it’s good if you pass a period where you make a lot of money but it’s not something, I’m only aware that I need to keep everything going, I’m very unaware beyond that actually so I tend to just think about what I need to do to make it work now. [Erin.17]

In fact, that comment is slightly misleading because although the artist is established enough and has enough confidence as to not “worry about whether it’s successful or not,” she is still extremely aware of what is going on beyond the here and now. In fact, all the established artists were still, very much like the emerging and mid-career artists, focusing on the long-term. Because the career is so much a part of their own identity, artists do not have an end in sight, there is no mention of retirement let alone early-retirement, the artists who were in their 60’s were discussing the work they would create and direction their career would take in the next ten years, as one artist (who is now 64) declared:

I’ve always thought ‘ok I’ve got till 80’, maybe I’ve got more than 80, (...) it’s not impossible. [Henry.29]

Quite the contrary, the real measure of success seems to be in securing long-term critical recognition, their legacy in art history:

It’s several levels, one of which is critical recognition where whatever one is doing is seen as part of a conversation, that is an interesting conversation, (...). but for me [success would] be to carry on doing what I do, in a way that people are interested in, (...). So for me yeah, critical success followed by people buying the stuff and people buying the stuff is not only financial even though that’s a significant part, it’s also the feeling that somebody will look after it, you know that, I’ve done enough with slightly forgotten artists and there’s that thing of a shed load of forgotten stuff is incredibly poignant and rather upsetting and I know there are far worse things in the universe but it really does. [William.21]
Most of the artists interviewed wanted to leave a message that would exist when they were gone in order for their lives to “mean something”. Again, this highlights how much of themselves they symbolically project into their work.

Furthermore, the hope of producing better work of greater importance never leaves either. Examples of artists like Louise Bourgeois who only achieved critical recognition in her 60’s came up again and again in the interviews as the role-model of critical rediscovery when most career trajectories are considered finished. Artists can then justify to themselves that “there’s no rush” and there may still be the possibility of a bigger platform on which to operate [Diana.24]. In fact this subjective notion of success is a bit of a moving target, it evolves throughout the career, when the artist reaches the next level, a further one reveals itself and ultimately it lies in the overall art-historical context:

*I think almost every good artist has awareness of just how good art of the past is, so I don’t think success is, you know, I mean I don’t know in which terms one is using that, but I think in real terms, we all feel aware that, we’re not up there, we’re not Rembrandt, so I mean that’s the reality. Now, having said that, there is always you know, hope lies in the human breast, one always wonders whether something will trigger some circumstance of fate, because there is somewhere in the germ of talent which you still have there is the possibility of great achievement you know. (...) It’s actually taken me till ridiculously late to realise that the real ranking in art is not primary, it’s secondary markets, the auction market is what really defines it (...) so I ‘m waiting for that you know, it would be interesting to see. [Henry.32]*

This is the way in which artists, looking retrospectively, can justify their career, it is partly out of their control and they cannot be aware of their final resting place in the annals of art history. This is the way artists maintain their identity while producing art that nobody buys. The example of Van Gogh selling only one painting in his lifetime is another common one. While the market defines success in the present, market failure does not necessarily mean the work will have no artistic significance in the future.
Figure 4.1 Example of a career trajectory: as social capital rises, career peaks with museum show(s) and sales to private collections, however social capital can be lost resulting in a downward path (at which point many artists exit the career). If the artist keeps going, social capital can be built up again. After death most artists are quickly forgotten and only the exceptional few will have work that still holds value on the market.

This analysis of artists’ career trajectories demonstrates how the professional identity changes through time. It also reveals the importance of positioning for artists to create this professional identity and manage their careers in line with both their subjective values of success and the art world’s values based on authenticity. We now turn to an analysis of what an artistic career entails, looking at how wider societal perspectives about artists affect the professional identity and being to examine the relationship between the career and the product, a key issue of the thesis that will be expanded upon in the following chapters.

4.3 Artistic Careers: Myths and Realities

As mentioned above, people in other occupations do not necessarily understand why anyone would choose a career as an artist. All sorts of stereotypes abound, ‘the artist’ is considered by the general public to be amongst other things: poor, slightly eccentric, provide a reflection on society, a sensitive soul, etc. These stereotypes do feed back into the construction of artistic identity and as artists start their careers they may be extremely destructive:
To come to the Slade at about 16-17 was terrible really, and of course I didn’t know what sort of voice to speak in, what kind of hair to wear, what kind of dress, and I was, I’m sure sure, very, very inauthentic in some ways really when I look back at it (...). [Henry.30]

People would come over and say ’oh you are living a strange life’ or, you see, there is a way in which the role made by society, part of the stereotype which is very much relevant (...) is a sort of ‘monk’, (...) and there’s a way in which you know the person in civvies, in everyday life who comes to the artist wants them to be living in the way that they would like to be, as a surrogate, so I think everyone, every artist experiences that, you are a reflection of the other possibilities, they would rather you were haywire, all over the place, yeah. [Henry.31]

The emerging artists interviewed were especially aware of and influenced by these stereotypes of what an ‘authentic’ artist is:

You look at people like Dash Snow, you know his entire work was ‘live fast, die young’ (...) you know, he did die young and that’s not (...) funny and people are still trading off that. (...) It’s bollocks, [the myth of artist] totally, and I think you know people are pushed to become that. Totally, it’s so dishonest [using these myths to sell work] and it’s so, you know I think someone like Dash Snow is a really good example of someone who was suddenly sort of celebrated for being fundamentally f***ing miserable. [Theo.39]

This artist in particular was a recovering alcoholic and drug addict and he had associated his work and practice with pain and destruction, and the reason an artist such as Dash Snow made such an influence on him was because he was on a similar trajectory and thought “that could have been me.” Living what he called a “tortured life” was his conception of ‘being an artist,’ and it was only after going into recovery that he realised that he did not need to be tortured in order to create good work [Theo.48]. Holbrook and Bradshaw’s (2007) analysis of Chet Baker’s life demonstrates just how powerful these myths can be (due, as we have seen, to their strong connection to notions of authenticity in the art world) and their ethical implications. They show that the iconic Romantic mythology of the artist as self-destructing arises from the contradictory demands for artists to be non-commercial
aesthetically and critically oriented while also facing the need to make a living in the market. Robertson (2008) also discusses the appeal of the tragic depiction of the artist and his Bohemian lifestyle and how this translates to higher prices for artists associated with this conception. Again, we see that psychological anxiety is inherent in the career trajectory. How notions of authenticity, critical and market reception are internalised will be further discussed in chapter 6 which takes Belk’s (1988) notion of the extended-self one step further, whereby the artist’s product and artistic identity, the way it is constructed, received and consumed in the market becomes an extension of the artist’s self.

As artists proceed in their career trajectories, their expectations as to what an artist is and what they can achieve alters as they go through failures and successes:

_And you have all these delusions when you’re at college of how it’s going to be like and actually it’s quite nice being where I am now because it’s much more about what’s actually happening and the work and the chance of exhibitions rather than projecting any kind of illusion. (...) You know what to expect and you know that things don’t necessarily happen straight away (...). There’s no sort of, I don’t think there’s ever one key breaking moment, I think it’s just a catalogue of different things that happen._ [Diana.6]

As discussed, artists further along in the career trajectory, no longer feel they have to justify their existence as much and have the confidence to break away from what they earlier thought were key issues in terms of authenticity. However, essentially, the artistic identity created is in some ways a controlled version of the self, constructed alongside society’s stereotypes (which come directly from the myths and stories that are told) and must be so in order for the artist to achieve success, as we have seen, society expects certain things from its artists. The artist may well believe that they have always held these values as central to their identity but in fact, they arise and change through time in the art world.

The chronic insecurity that most artists feel comes with the fluid career trajectory due to the endorsement structure of the art market, the artist’s career is in fact characterised by this insecurity:
I mean obviously you have, I have an abject fear of being a sort of puff in the wind and you know the work will never be taken seriously. [Theo.47]

Singer (1990) found that only one in three artists whose careers began with shows in elite galleries made it to the auction market, a reasonable definition of artistic market success, and Singer is starting with only the most established artists. In order to survive, the artist needs to have some confidence in their own ability and have notions of subjective success that do not depend on outside influences as we have covered. Therefore any achievement in terms of the art market such as awards, museum exhibitions or sales tend to be talked down by the artist. There is constant pressure and anxiety, financial anxiety and status anxiety and anxiety about whether the work is good or not, because the artist is the company, is the brand, the career is therefore self-absorbed and based on this search for the authentic:

I don’t know how much longer I can kind of hack this kind of total uncertainty all the time, it’s just kind of terrifying but there you go. [Chris.29]

In fact, this uncertainty is the main reason why artists leave their careers. For those who continue, the necessity is for an extremely solid artistic identity which incorporates subjective notions of success in order to successfully navigate the fluid career structure:

I mean you kind of have to have belief in yourself, it’s kind of mad, it’s an absolutely insane thing to do to be an artist, I mean from the beginning, it is cause you’ve got to just totally believe in what you’re doing and sacrifice. [Chris.10]

You need self-honesty in making art [and] in how you make your career decisions, in a world that is highly fluid you need to have one constant and it has to be you because otherwise you’re f***ed, you know if you start going like ‘I’m going to do this because this is right or he thinks that’ or whatever you’re just going to spend the rest of your life doing that. It’s a bit like trying to be competitive with other artists, whether I want to, it’s completely pointless because if I’m going to be competitive with one I may as well be competitive with Damien Hirst which is completely pointless. [Theo.9]
So although there is a huge amount of competition in the market, artists generally do not admit to being competitive, instead they would rather prize themselves on having an ‘atypical’ career path:

*They’re all journeys and they’re all different. And I think because of that you can’t really compare yourself.* [Diana.23]

The fact is that all artists’ career paths are atypical, it is much more haphazard than the typical notion of an art career that goes from foundation course to degree to MA, to being represented by a gallery, having a solo show, international art fairs, museum shows and you’ve made it:

*My so called ‘career’ and I think the word only applies in the sense of horse and carriage running down a hill out of control.* [William.5]

*But I don’t think I’ve had a strategy really, one thing’s led to another.* [Diana.23]

The artist has to just keep working and trying to create opportunities to show in the hope that maybe something will happen but it is in many ways unpredictable, there is nothing mapped down. Moreover, it takes a significant period of time for the art world to react to any work:

*I show something and it doesn’t seem to get picked up or people don’t seem to work it out for another 6 or 7 months, yeah I’ve noticed that, that I do one thing and people are a bit like... and then suddenly 6 months later I get a huge amount of interest in it.* [Theo.18]

In the current political and financial climate which is becoming increasingly risk-averse, artists are struggling to continue risk-taking, a significant part of the artistic identity due to the central notion of creative integrity and authenticity, and the cuts in funding for the arts are going to be an added pressure on already insecure artists, especially those currently emerging. Which, perhaps, explains why emerging artists are much more likely to discuss their trajectories strategically rather than established artists who discuss things in terms of ‘luck’ and ‘fate.’

In Hong Kong, a career as an artist is even more difficult, as the Hong Kong arts scene is only just emerging, one of the main barriers that artists need to face is the
lack of recognition and knowledge on the part of the general public (which has significant implications in terms of status and identity). Although there are a few big collectors who will spend a lot of money, most locals, as one artist puts it, “would prefer to buy a handbag to a piece of art” [April.6]:

Hong Kong is still fine tuning the momentum of collecting fine art. Lots of people have money but don’t have the taste yet. They would rather buy a wallet for 50K than a piece of art. Plus here people don’t have big homes to invite people over so what’s the point of having art if you can’t show it off? People don’t think of art in terms of a sensitivity, it’s not in trend to do so yet. [Peter. 2]

The concept of contemporary art that does exist in the public’s mind is limited to paintings. The divide between the art scene and the general public is pronounced and there is a lack of platforms to address this: the spaces where interesting work is curated are inconvenient or inaccessible to get to and the commercial galleries that are located centrally generally suffer from a lack of curation. Despite the rise of Chinese contemporary, contemporary art does not yet have the buzz that it has in the West, as one artist notes: “Hong Kong is one of the few cities where art isn’t cool” [Leo.4]. The visual arts have yet to attract the social cachet that anime, music or fashion have, there is little cultural capital to be associated with buying contemporary art. The bulk of sales go to collections or museums abroad, not to individuals in Hong Kong. Hong Kong contemporary artists are still negotiating and fighting for their place in society. Glamour is not associated with artists, even the relatively established ones. As one of the most successful Hong Kong artists put it:

Saying you’re an artist is like either being a hit man or being permanently unemployed. You are worse than the guy in the flower market [Peter.6]

Politically, although less censored than on the mainland, the artists are not exactly embraced either, funding structures are highly bureaucratic and often irrational. This means that the artists who did choose to become artists did so acknowledging that they would never make enough money out of it to survive. This meant that the artists

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10 One of the established artists interviewed in Hong Kong is also a senior figure in local cultural policy and he discussed how, when setting up MOCA Shanghai, a frustrated official complained that the museum was not fully set up after a year and a half. So even when officially, “more museums are being opened than Starbucks in China,” for political and commercial interests, the arts are not nurtured [Stephen.5]
who did pursue their practice were doing so in order to fulfil their own interests and personal development in line with subjective success and therefore their identity as artists is extremely fragile but also deeply personal and protected. As their status is so low, the rhetoric of art as a vocation rather than as a career and the importance of subjective success is particularly important. Moreover, the low status of the artist raises certain immediate practical barriers in terms of anyone considering becoming an artist, parents views of art were often mentioned in interviews as one of the important factors in pursuing art or, more frequently, not pursuing it [Bruce.11]. While this also holds for London artists, these notions of status seem to be more important contingencies on Hong Kong artist’s career trajectories.

A career as an artist also necessarily entails a certain flexible lifestyle that is not necessarily conducive to relationships or families. First of all there is the fact that even established artists are not generally making large amounts of money and relatively established mid-career artists have an annual salary ranging from £15-20K, a starting salary in any other field:

*But that’s the thing you work as an artist you don’t have a salary, you’re never going to have a salary you know, unless. It’d be nice sometimes, I would sacrifice some earnings to know that every year I would make 15K or something, that would be great but just to kind of have that security but maybe the insecurity is something that kind of drives you to keep making stuff, I don’t know.* [Chris.5]

As artists are essentially working on a freelance project basis, they have no idea whether they will be making enough to survive in six months time, it is a “constant gamble” which necessitates the balancing of many different projects, jobs, relationships, perceptions and ultimately identities [Chris.10].

*How do you survive? and I kind of describe it like a hustle basically, I’m working like, if I’ll do this project, right, yeah, I’ll do this residency and that’ll pay for the time to do this thing that could get shown here and then that thing that gets shown there maybe leads to a new commission, you know, it’s constant balancing of yeah, of how much time to dedicate to things that maybe are slightly outside the stream of your main practice and I guess that’s the*
difference I try to make sure that everything that I’m doing is somehow related to my practice, you know. [Chris.10]

I’ve not had a job in my life, never, (...) I never did regular teaching I just did odd days, I’d just float in for a day and then float out again, it doesn’t feel like a job. I mean in other words I have no pension, except for the state pension, to put it at its simplest. And I think a large proportion of artists must be in that position. You invest in your work and that’s all you have. [Henry.12]

So again, in order to maintain some sort of coherent identity as ‘artists,’ they need to have their practice at the heart of their notions of self, the conception of self as artist is the fixed core around which everything else in their life revolves. Also, this is not a 9 to 5 job, (part of the reason why artists become artists in the first place,) as the artistic identity becomes more and more central to the artist’s self-worth, it becomes hard to differentiate the life from the career:

I kind of do both at the same time, and I film a lot on holiday and I film a lot when I’m with my daughters so they kind of come into my work sometimes (...). Yeah it really is hard to differentiate. (...) It’s tricky because you’re always kind of running between one, so it’s hard, you don’t really clock in or out as such. And they both feed into each other so much that it’s hard to separate them, because the more I’ve been working, the more the work and my life kind of become kind of meshed into one. [Elizabeth.2]

This places certain constraints on the artist:

When I’m making a show I am in the studio 7 days a week, all the time and then everything, relationships suffer so if you’re in a relationship and stuff it gets a bit tricky. But at the moment I’ve finished the show, (...) I did it, got bronchitis and (...) I was already planning the next thing, I can’t not do anything. [Alexander.16]

So many artists who do exit the trajectory do so because of pressure from their partners and the need to support their children. Many artists who do keep at it, especially female artists, make a choice not to have children.
In the long-term the process through which the artistic identity is constructed and the shared values around being an ‘authentic’ artist that come about from immersion in the art world, results in artists tending to associate primarily with other artists who have shared values while distancing themselves from those outside of the art world who do not have similar conceptions on career success:

_I think I don’t really know anyone who isn’t an artist anymore, it kind of pervades your life._ [Sarah.27]

As well as a career, it becomes a lifestyle, which is why artist Richard Patterson says “you don’t really ‘give up’ art once you’ve started” (Berens, 2008):

_I never stop entirely and I’ve always drawn, I draw, I am a drawer (...), I don’t think of career too much, identity is the issue._ [Henry.28]

_As long as I’ve got white A4 paper and a few felt pens, I’ll survive._ [Martin.18]

So when a dealer, curator, critic or especially collector buys into the work of an artist, they are buying into the person or at least how that artist has constructed and positioned their artistic identity which is heavily correlated to their own self-worth. In other words in order to be successful artists must create their own market (within the wider art-historical market) in which their body of work can exist and this must be aligned with the ways in which other art market professionals view them. Therefore, when artists are marketing their work they are also marketing their self to a certain extent, or at least a highly controlled and constrained version of the self, leading to tension in terms of living up to that version of themselves.
Figure 4.2 Circular process whereby an artist is constantly constructing and reconstructing their professional and personal identity in line with how they are positioned in the art world in order to justify their life choices.

4.4. CONCLUSION

This analysis of artistic careers demonstrates the critical importance for artists to deliberately position themselves in relation to the art world in order to gain insider status as 'authentic,' highlighting the importance of authenticity to the marketing process. Authenticity is demonstrated to be a multi-dimensional concept that is used to define what art is and who is or is not considered an artist. As such it can be extremely limiting to the artist. However, authenticity can also, as a socially constructed concept, be transformed through collective efforts, thus the need for artists to come together, creating movements to have their work accepted. This chapter has also examined the various facets of artistic career trajectories, most notably the instability and fluidity of them. While the structure of the art market
requires artists to obtain endorsement from other art world members and these are therefore the contingencies on which these careers are based; the endorsement process is neither straightforward nor clear. Artists must work in conjunction with these professionals in order to position themselves in the market. Moreover, positioning depends on the product that is created and the context in which the product is placed (and requires a socialisation into the art world context, thus the importance of interaction and the meaning attached to it). Indeed, it could be argued that the product itself is less important than its position in the marketplace. The artist must form and align their career on the basis of their interpretation of the underlying values of the art world based on authenticity and the actions of its members, requiring constant reinterpretation of their career. While the literature (Leigh et al., 2006; Beverland & Farrelly, 2010; Hede & Thyne, 2010) discusses the role of authenticity in identity construction for consumers, this chapter finds that it also plays a role in identity construction of the producer who must internalise it in order to be successful. While this can be done unconsciously, throughout their careers artists constantly monitor and edit their career choices in terms of the work they make and where it is placed according to perceived authenticity. Indeed, the very concept of authenticity must be broken down as it applies to the product, the artist and the career, if any of these is not deemed authentic the value of the work will decrease. This is because the three parts come together to create a mythical narrative of which the artist is the protagonist and this is what is at the heart of the brand (see Holt, 2004) as we shall explore in the third empirical chapter. Belk et al.’s (1991) study on collecting supports this, as they find that the collecting community sacralises certain objects through myth, in the case of the art world the myth of the authentic serves this purpose.

What is considered ‘authentic’ is itself a manufactured notion which changes through time and contains inherent contradictions between the critical and the commercial. This highlights the importance of having a temporal dimension in analysing artistic careers. Control of the career therefore requires constant renegotiation in terms of positioning and artists must frequently cede control to others in order for their career to be furthered. To complicate matters further, the market itself is actually an aggregation of several mini-markets, for each country, each style, each artist, each period of that artist’s work. In fact each artist is their own market, with supply-and-demand characteristics that greatly influence prices, factors like who
owns the work; who is buying the work; who’s showing the work; and, of course, who’s selling the work and in what quantities. This leads us to the beginning of an understanding as to how the career, the artist and the product are related: buying the product means buying the professional identity which is correlated to the artist’s own personal identity. Therefore both professional and personal identity are co-created in relation to how the product is consumed in a cyclical process. Moreover we have also seen that while the structure of the career trajectory is boundaryless, the artistic identity must be relatively bounded to notions of subjective success and a sense of vocation in order for the artist to survive on the market. Analysing artistic career trajectories has revealed just how fragile they are and the need for career-management skills including marketing. It has also highlighted the importance of relationships in the valuing of work due to the network structure of the endorsement process. Now that we have examined how artists can position themselves in the market and how they value their own work we will turn to these relationships in order to see how artists are legitimised and valued by these various art professionals and how this affects the value of the art work.
5. Value as a Social Phenomenon

“Lots of people are saying I am a genius (...). I actually think I was damn lucky.” – Damien Hirst (2011)

As discussed in the literature review and demonstrated in the previous chapter, due to the unregulated nature of the art market, value in the art world is created through an endorsement process based around a number of experts who act as gatekeepers in legitimising artists and their works. This is in line with Abbott’s (1988) definition of professions as organised bodies of experts who apply esoteric knowledge to particular cases in the case a knowledge of what is ‘authentic.’ According to him, they have an enforced code of ethics or behaviour, thus the need for artists to be socialised into the art world as we have just examined. Relationships are therefore the central currency through which artists can establish their careers and become professional artists. ‘Knowing whom’ is critical to career success. While we have identified the importance of artist positioning themselves in relation to these various groups of experts in order to be legitimised as authentic, we have to examine how this affects value in the art market. Moving from the individual identity processes of the artist and the art work’s potential value we now turn to how this translates into social capital. The professional relationships that artists have to consider are of three main types: peers, art world professionals (of which dealers are the most important but also includes curators and critics) and the audience (collectors and the general public who are potential collectors). Generally, during the course of their careers, artists first come into contact with peers who can act as champions for the emerging artist, these are usually local relationships and lead to the first exhibition opportunities; the art world professionals are the experts who are usually located in significant cities for the art market and they act as gatekeepers, positioning the artist in the market and enhancing the value of their work; and finally the audience is an international market and artists with the highest reputations are enhanced or constrained by the people and institutions that own the work. As the artist negotiates these relationships and accrues social capital from them, the value of the work changes from artistic value in its creation to social value in its recognition and finally attributing economic value in its sale. However, as we have explored in the last chapter, these relationships do not necessarily follow on from each other in steady progression but rather come together
at certain key stages leading to the rather unsteady career trajectory of most artists based on a series of peaks and dips, where the attention and social capital of the artist culminates at certain points in the career before plunging them back into the depths of obscurity with the tantalising possibility of (re)discovery always around the corner. This chapter seeks to unpick how these social relationships add value to the artwork and allow for critical and financial success for the artist on the market. To do this, it is necessary to examine the concept of value more closely.

As identified in the introduction to this thesis, there has been a resurgence of interest in the concept of value in the marketing literature through the service-dominant logic set out by Vargo and Lusch (2004), moving towards a more dynamic and holistic conception of value that takes into account the fact that value is constantly in flux as it is co-constructed. In art, as we have established, value cannot be defined purely in terms of economics as this only emerges from the social structure of the art world due to the symbolic nature of the product. Therefore the social capital that is needed to achieve any kind of economic value on the art market must be taken into account. As such, relationships are crucial in the construction (and co-construction) of value and as pointed out by Saren and Tzokas (1998) it is by examining these relationships that we can understand how value is negotiated through interaction. In order to understand how value emerges from relationships, a historical and sociological account of the art world is necessary. Our analysis of artists’ career trajectories has demonstrated that what is considered to have the status of ‘art’ is socially constituted and defined. This is in line with Danto’s (1964) institutional theory of art whereby legitimation is normative. It is therefore necessary to understand how legitimacy or status is achieved, how it is denied, how it changes, how it is lost or regained in order to analyse how a work of art achieves, or more accurately, is conferred value. This status is fluid and temporal precisely because the art world is a social and historical institution. Hegemony, domination, control and manipulation are all features of the politics of art, no less than critical, aesthetic and theoretical determinations of value and innovation. This is why artist Damien Hirst can say “if you get away with bad art, it becomes good art” (Hirst, 2011), if we all believe it is true, then it is, linking back to the constructivist perspective of authenticity covered in the previous chapter.
Control of the market is therefore a matter of social as well as aesthetic domination and manipulation. The authority is a social authority and the artist's work, to exist as an entity in the art market, has to be acceptable as a commodity for sale. The politics of this art world is therefore a politics of style, of influence, wielded by critics, dealers and art-entrepreneurs. As touched on in the previous chapter, Wijnberg and Gemser (2000) explain in their research that expert selection has dominated the visual arts since the 20th century as a result of Impressionist painters’ need to get value attributed to the innovative aspects of their style of painting. Experts now play an essential role, certifying the innovativeness of either individual artists or groups of artists. As they note, the fact that artistic innovativeness is a characteristic that is difficult to evaluate by the average person not only reinforces the position of experts; it also makes it more likely that group formation will become important to producers and experts alike. Experts and art entrepreneurs play a direct role in engineering status and the art market provides the conditions. In order to achieve success, as we have explored, movements’ goals and tactics need to be ‘framed’ using the wider reasoning or values of the ideology in order to be made comprehensible, valid, acceptable and desirable. This means that they need to be explained, marketed, or packaged in a way that convinces or resonates with a target audience. The art world, in the sense of the field of cultural production in general therefore possesses a discourse of common terms and ideas for discussing art which are used to legitimate art works as art. Therefore this thesis analyses the art market as a cultural construction on which larger social forces have an indirect impact. Curators, dealers and critics frame work as authentic art using this ideology based on notions of innovation and originality. This framing depends upon calling pre-existing ideas and values about the nature of legitimate art and what is valorised and excluded (Joy & Sherry, 2004). Power in the art world therefore comes from deciding what is authentic and what is not and both how this is defined and who it is defined by changes over time.

Baumann (2006) identifies both endogenous and exogenous factors that facilitate success (legitimisation). He argues that the ability to mobilise resources is crucial to art world legitimisation, this follows on from Becker’s (1982) work on art worlds where the perspectives shifts away from the creation of an individual artist towards art as collective action. To explain artistic legitimization, we therefore need to know which resources are mobilised, whether structural resources such as institutional
settings, equipment, etc. or symbolic resources such as organisational principles and prestige. As centres of cultural authority, museums’ decisions about which cultural productions to sponsor are accepted as legitimate by other art world members as well as by the wider art public. Similarly, high status galleries “package” art to an art-buying public, often an early step in the process of consecration where the actions of museums come near the end. These institutions also have the cultural authority to persuasively label certain cultural productions as art and position them in the art market. High status private auction houses such as Sotheby’s and Christie’s are another resource in art worlds. Association with these houses is helpful in itself to provide prestige, but they also provide visibility, key to art world success. Art world success also depends on gaining power, and savvy art world members will recognise the necessity of strategy and tactics, unfortunately existing studies on the art world tend not to characterise resource mobilisation as strategic or tactical but instead as contributions toward an apolitical goal of art world development. Because artists must demonstrate sufficient “disinterestedness” to maintain credibility in keeping with the notion of authenticity being rooted in the creative not the commercial, their strategic and tactical behaviour is not always evident. Nevertheless, artists are often strategic. It is interesting to note that supporting members of art worlds are not held to the same standard of disinterestedness. Looking at the power relations between artists and other members of the art world will allow us to unpick how an artist’s career and the value of their work depends upon social relationships for access to the art market.

5.1 Peer Relationships: Championing Emerging Artists

Although as we have covered in the literature review there have been some studies exploring the relationships between artists and dealers (White and White, 1965; Velthius, 2005), and other actors in the arts market such as critics, curators (Joy & Sherry, 2003; Buck, 2004) and collectors (Robertson, 2005; While, 2003) there is very little research focusing on relationships between artists themselves. These relationships are touched on in literature on the endorsement process, especially in context of discussions of art school but there seems to be little understanding as to their importance as a vehicle for accumulating cultural and symbolic capital as part of the endorsement process. The literature (Buck, 2004; Robertson, 2005; Kerrigan and Freeman, 2007) points at the fact that a peer group is essential in getting recognition to attract the support of dealers and other actors but there is no understanding of how
this process works and is managed. Moreover, these relationships do more than simply build social capital eventually translating to higher value, they also provide a context for the development of the work which is why Buck (2004) finds that “for the great majority of these artists it is peer group approval that matters more than commercial success” (19). In fact, as discussed in the previous chapter, making peer connections is essential in order to enter the art world and to learn the ‘rules’ as to how to get valued in the art market. All the artists interviewed first integrated into the art world through peer relationships to “get into the system” [Elliot.8].

The usual first point of entry into the art world for an artist is at art school. In fact art school is increasingly becoming the first legitimator in an artist’s career (Buck 2004). Here they make relationships with peers and tutors that will influence the direction their trajectories will take. Art school provides prospective artists with a forum in which to: “develop their practice, form their identity and acquire the necessary relationships for their advancement” [Grace.1]. As well as gaining knowledge about the art field, students gain access to social networks which, in most cases, form the basis of their entrance into the art market. As one curator put it, art school is seen as especially useful as a way of getting introduced to the local art scene for artists who do not have the necessary connections or come from abroad. One of the artists interviewed had worked and shown extensively in Ireland previously but coming to London found she had to build up the social capital all over again, in line with Kerrigan and Freeman’s findings (2007). This is especially the case for MFA courses in cities where there is a significant art market such as London which allows emerging artists to access to the first set of gatekeepers that will move forward their careers:

So it was really good to come to London and you know doing the MA here was a great way of just infiltrating. I didn’t immediately get a place at college, I was in a studio at that point but I did find it very hard to enter into any kind of communication with other artists because yeah, it’s tricky to enter something like that as an outsider so (...) I still wasn’t really having conversations with people. So getting onto the MA then was just the perfect way of, kind of, getting into the London scene really. [Elizabeth.13]

Moreover, as discussed in the last chapter, connections made at art school tend to lead to collaborations and often become long-term, if not life-long, groupings.
Becoming part of a collective or grouping is also a way of capitalising on peers’ networks and attention.

*The thing when I left college was all the people I was working with, or potentially showing with, we all stayed connected in some way, that was pretty important. So (...) for that first 4 or 5 years everybody was quite closely connected and that was quite important because people were doing stuff and things were starting to happen so the momentum, (...) it was important that you knew what other people were up to, it was an incentive to do something yourself, (...) so that was quite important, a very competitive environment.* [Elliot.15]

Therefore the collectives made in art school often become the way in which artists emerge after art school, pooling resources to create opportunities through shows and press attention, the competition involved spurring artists on. Working as part of a collaboration or individually but in close proximity to a group of like-minded artists tends to influence the work that is created as part of the artist’s practice whether ideologically or aesthetically and through these groupings opportunities arise which is why so many emerging artists depend on this social structure of clusters. Being recognised as part of a group or movement can attract critical attention and attaches value to the work as we will discuss further on. In essence, these groupings can be a marketing tool:

*To have my work kind of placed in this group of amazing artists that I had already really admired like James Ireland and Mark Titchner and the opportunities that provided, the kind of audience that provided for me was just kind of invaluable.* [Elizabeth.16]

In fact, White and White (1965) discuss that the notion of ‘schools’ were used by the Impressionists in order for the public to be able to place them and therefore recognise them.

Tutors can also be a useful way of gaining endorsement and accessing experts as they are usually practicing artists or curators themselves, and who can provide exhibiting opportunities and introductions. In fact, just getting accepted on certain courses can provide legitimacy to artists as it signals the endorsement of the tutor group head who interviews and selects which candidates are accepted [Mike.13].
Attracting the attention of art school tutors can be highly rewarding, in fact, it is not uncommon for some prized students to be introduced to gatekeepers in the art world [Sofia.2]. The University of the Arts London, for example, provides a variety of opportunities for students to come into contact with key gatekeepers in the visual arts market. The head of the Emerging Artists Programme at the university has institutional connections with biennials, art fairs and museums around the world, and relationships with all the major London critics, dealers, collectors and curators. These relationships are nurtured in order to help students feed into these networks. Moreover, a number of the most promising students are picked out to participate in the Collector’s Scheme, a bespoke service for fifteen top collectors [Grace.2]. The scheme scours the end-of-year shows in order to discover and endorse artists for these collectors and by organising studio visits and private views, the scheme facilitates sales. Participating in such a scheme is the opportunity for a young artist to create relationships with important members of the art market, kick-starting their career. Another common opportunity reserved for art students is fellowships, open only to students in specific art schools. One well-known example is Saatchi’s Fellow at the Royal Academy leading to inclusion in an exhibition held by the Saatchi Gallery thereby ensuring that the artist’s career trajectory is on a fast-track to success. Being in art school is also an opportunity to access certain platforms such as in competing for prizes and award shows, for example New Contemporaries which, as we will see further on, can be pivotal in gaining social capital.

Degree shows in the UK and especially in the London art schools have become increasingly important, acquiring almost ritual significance as the transition from student to professional. As will be discussed below, they are also important to Hong Kong artists who, in order to become successful must find success on the international art market, and therefore must be legitimised by the same Western structures. The degree show is the result of at least one year’s work and is a platform for artists to market themselves for what is often the first time. Galenson’s (2005) study of artistic success suggests that a few top schools play a leading role in successful (both commercially as well as critically) artists’ career trajectories. Indeed in the data, a few names are consistently mentioned. A degree at top art schools such as University of the Arts London (notably Central Saint Martins and Chelsea), Goldsmiths, the Royal College of Art and Slade School of Fine Art, enhances the probability of meeting top
dealers and collectors through the institution’s connections. Many young artists take this into account when choosing which art school they wish to attend, often they “apply on the sole basis of who attends the grad show” [Sofia.1]. In the past twenty years or so big-name collectors have started making the degree show circuit a part of their annual calendar much like attendance at the key art fairs such as Frieze and Basel. Their attendance is therefore an opportunity for them to invest in emerging artists and in a slightly insular looped way, as a result of any purchases they make, the artist gains exposure and social capital and the value of the work rises resulting in further sales and opportunities for the artist. Having work bought by one of these collectors often leads to gallery and sometimes even institutional shows as these collectors often have their own museums as in the case of Charles Saatchi and Anita Zabludowicz amongst others:

Anita [Zabludowicz] bought my MA show and that was a huge kind of, the fact that she bought the whole show as well, the whole installation was so kind of encouraging to me, so, yeah, it was such a positive kind of encouragement. And then working with them as well, with [the Zabludowicz team] at the gallery, because they chose to put that work in an exhibition (...). Because you know I did the MA show but you don’t know how many people go to a college MA show really, and just kind of provided a huge kind of springboard to kind of launch from college and I think a lot of opportunities came from doing that show. [Elizabeth.16]

Tobias Meyer, director of Sotheby’s contemporary art department says that collectors flood these shows in order to “beat the galleries at their own game, (...) this insatiable need for stardom has made buying student work the art-world version of “American Idol,” calling it a “hunting sport.” (Vogel, 2006:2). The most famous example of a collector’s visit to a graduate show is Saatchi’s visit to the Royal College show in 2007, where he purchased the entire output of student James Howard, for £4,500. Saatchi’s publicists then forwarded the information to every UK news outlet, and most ran the story. Howard achieved some fame, and was approached by dealers wanting to represent him. Howard gained priceless critical attention and the publicity probably tripled the value of Saatchi’s purchase, demonstrating the self-fulfilling nature of the major players’ investments in the art world (Thompson, 2008). Although training does play a part in the value of an MFA as evidenced by top
collector Anita Zabludowicz preference for going to see work in “particular schools” and sometimes students who study under “particular master[s],” it seems the real value of an MFA has less to do with the degree certifying an artist’s professional aptitude, than that the programmes themselves make concentrations of work by emerging artists easily accessible in one place for dealers and collectors [Molly.1]. This “homogenisation” of artists’ careers is resulting in fewer entry points to the market, whereby artists who do not go to art school are at a relative disadvantage.

While many peer relationships start at art school, throughout an artist’s career they will continue to associate and make connections with like-minded artists either through showing with them or working in their proximity or even chance meetings at art events. As shown in the previous chapter, artists usually start their careers by integrating into a subculture of their peers and gradually breaking away from it as they find an audience and expand their market. Early on in an artist’s career, appearing alongside other artists in groups shows can provide the social capital necessary to attract gatekeepers to the work. One emerging artist interviewed saw one of the group shows he’d done as a pivotal career contingency because he was suddenly showing with established artists which resulted in a new platform on which to market his work:

[The show] has been incredible, because suddenly I’m showing with Keith Tyson, Paul Fryer you know the Chapman brothers, all this sort of thing you know, really fast. [Theo.63]

Just being shown with these artists is important in that it signifies that the artist is becoming part of the established canon, or ‘mainstream’ art world and capitalising on these peer relationships is one way for artists to successfully emerge. In the wider context, being part of peer movement can indeed be a useful marketing tool because of their cultural cachet, especially to audiences who have little knowledge of the art world, it means the work is easily recognised and categorised and comes with a pre-attached value, in essence the movement brands the product, something we will examine further in the next chapter. For example, one artist discovered that he was being promoted as a ‘Young British Artist’ in Italy, as a result, the work sold for prices that the artist could not have achieved in the UK where he could not be associated so readily with the YBAs [Alexander.20]. When an emerging artist
can show with established artists or somehow be mentioned in context of a successful movement such as the YBAs the social capital is transmitted rapidly and being able to manage this social capital is necessary for an artist to capitalise on it.

Moreover, these peer relationships often lead to future opportunities, for example one artist discussed how a peer who was doing a residency with him was also:

_A gallery manager/curator at Spike Island and he invited me to go and give a talk at Spike Island in Bristol. [Chris.35]_

which then led to more work in Bristol with a curator who was at the talk. These relationships are also incredibly important in getting gallery representation as the best way to get a dealer is through recommendations by artists they already represent. [Sarah.63]. Curating other artists can be another way of getting started and being part of group shows. The social capital of the other artists you are working with rubs off:

_Yeah so doing [shows] like that with exciting artist-run initiatives and things is good because people are interested in those things and people then become interested in what you do and it’s nice to be associated with something, an exciting bunch of people. [Alexander.27]_

However, peer relationships do not only lead to opportunities, they also bring with them conflicts and competition. The reality of the art market is that there is only so much demand for a certain amount of artists and the number of emerging artists far outstrips this number. Because the art world revolves around a small number of contemporary artists in a few genres there are bound to be rivalries and hostilities which have certain implications on an artist’s career:

_I think the other realisation is that perhaps when you first enter the art world you think comradeship and you feel it’s very friendly (...) but then you gradually realise that even within your own corner there may be tremendous hostilities both personal and ideological and so you start to have to negotiate all that. [Henry.49]_

In negotiating their place in the art world, artists need to be aware of the alliances and rivalries in positioning themselves in the art world to create the right image of
themselves in the market, capturing the right values. Artists have to be prepared to defend their positions and their work in the cut-throat art world, both to themselves in order to keep going as discussed in the last chapter, and to others:

*Any young devotee is going to stab you in the back sooner or later and how you cope with that is a very difficult question, (..). I tried not to get high on malice if you like which is a great temptation and a lot of reputations are made that way, by really being a devil.* [Henry.57]

As a result of this uncertainty and competition artists are constantly comparing themselves to their peers even though they are loathe to admit it as they pride themselves on the originality of their work [Chris.33; Theo.74; Diana.49].

The importance of peer relationships is therefore not to be underestimated, providing early access to the art world’s social networks and an understanding of what these entail, the complexity of the social structure of the art world and how the artist can start to forge a place within it for their work to be valued:

*Yeah, I think that’s the key. Just meeting a few people early on, who don’t necessarily provide anything but just point you in the right direction, that’s the way it works, you might not see it yourself but somebody else can probably see it so you get gently turned into the right direction so you’re facing the right way and then it might take a long time for the penny to drop I suppose.* [Elliot.13]

In this way peers provide two key roles in the artistic career trajectory. Firstly, as we saw in the last chapter, peers are a way for artists to position themselves in the art world and learn the values and language of the art world. Secondly, established peers acts as champions to emerging peers, bringing them to the notice of the gatekeepers of the art market whose function we shall now turn to.

**5.2 Expert Relationships: gatekeepers of the art world**

Experts are the crucial contingencies in artists’ career trajectories, without the social capital of expert relationships, artists will never access the art market. There are three main categories of experts in the art world: dealers, curators and critics. In the current configuration of the art market, dealers are by far the most important of these because of their position in the art world as the link between the product and the
commercial market. As the quality of art in the primary market is highly uncertain, the reputation signal of both artists and art galleries is the central element in the pricing decision (Velthuis, 2005). The status of the gallery has a direct effect on the artist’s career trajectory. Moreover, this correlation works both ways, the status of the artist also impacts on the gallery’s trajectory, the relationship is symbiotic as we shall explore further on. Due to the importance attached to representation (and the concurrent rise in price in the work once the artist joins the gallery) there is increasing pressure for an artist to gain representation in the first few years after art school. It is only once artists have representation that they are considered professional artists by art world members as they are now endorsed by a dealer who has access to some kind of market, however small. Representation is generally the artist’s first introduction into the art market:

*It felt like a kind of introduction to the art world in a way, you know, showing work in the gallery.* [Chris.34]

When choosing the artists they work with, galleries rely on their own social networks as one dealer explains: “demand for new artists is created through consensus and an art world buzz” [Rob.1]. The gallery very much has the upper hand in negotiating relationships with artists, especially emerging ones, indeed, it is taboo for an artist to approach a gallery directly asking for representation, those who ask are usually dismissed as too ‘aggressive’ or ‘desperate’ (due to the longstanding repudiation of commerce and marketing which the art world continues to insist upon in its characterisation of the ‘authentic’ artist as we examined earlier): “you know you can’t really approach a gallery which is an awful thing,” instead artists have to get “onto the circuit” and wait until a gallery approaches them, thus the importance of positioning [Theo.66]. As this dealer claims:

*In choosing artists I tend to go after them, those who ask usually aren’t good. The art world is very small so most of the better artists have been around sometime. You all know them or have even shown them. I mean I’ve exhibited a lot of people I represent in our independent programme so I know their work or I made a relationship from that.* [Richard.1]

There are however some ways for artists to get around this by strategising:
I'd really not thought in those professional terms, things either happened or
didn't happen and I'd not been very good at problem solving when they didn’t
happen. So I approached the dealer at [...] and pitched a rather careful project
to her, which she was happy to run with. (...) It’s very difficult to make those
approaches if you don’t have something slightly outside of yourself to approach
about, if you’re just approaching about ‘me, I want to do a solo show at your
thing or I want you to look at my work,’ (...) it’s a no-no but if you’re saying
‘look I’m applying for this funding, if I get it I’ll be able to bring this funding
with me, I need somebody who’s potentially interested in doing this project
would it be possible to put your name on this proposal, that has been a way I’ve
found to get around it. (...) So I kind of made myself and my work visible to her
in a roundabout way. [Faye.27]

However, in order to do this the artist already has to be in contact with and recognised
by the dealer in some way and one of the easiest ways is through peer relationships.
This is why having some champions supporting your work and introducing you to
gatekeepers is essential. Here we see that control is very much out of the artist’s hands,
while they can position themselves in order to be noticed and identified by the dealer,
there is little else they can do, value attribution on the market comes from others. The
dealer usually watches the artist develop for about a year or so before having the
confidence to sign them up. This is why Ivan Karp, celebrated dealer who worked at
the Castelli Gallery and signed up many of the great American artists of the past
century argued ‘“discovering’ is such a misleading word. The artists discover
themselves. I prefer to use the word ‘identify’” (Polsky, 2003:125). This is why the
previous chapter focused on the development of the artistic identity, this has to be
formed before the artist can enter the market.

Once agreeing to work together, in establishing their relationship, again, there
is little room for negotiation by the emerging artist, the power is still firmly in the
hands of the gallery and the standard 50% cut the gallery takes can be hard to swallow
for the artist but it is the price that needs to be paid for a certain financial stability and
access to more avenues of exposure, new markets and new audiences:

We’re now discussing how to take my work to art fairs because that’s kind of
where a lot of curators see the work and kind of choose things for international

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shows as well as selling stuff which is also part of the thing because if you sell something to a big collector in New York then they might kind of mention you to other galleries in New York or museums, and that kind of leads on to a whole new avenue of exhibition so it’s kind of, I guess it’s viewing sales as primarily a networking tool rather than necessarily money. [Chris.45]

Representation, while rarely lucrative financially is useful in terms of social capital because it means access to a new network. The gallery therefore provides further relationships for the artist to further their career and increase their visibility, the artist willingly accepts the 50% cut in order to gain in access and social capital. Moreover, within the art world it is more acceptable for galleries to deal with commerce (although still not too overtly) than artists and therefore galleries provide more economic capital to artists in the long run, negotiating with collectors and usually helping with the shipping, insurance, tax, framing and other additional expenses:

_The good thing about having a gallery is that there are certain parts of the art world that you don’t really want to deal with and you don’t have to._ [Diana.34]

The dealer is also powerful in terms of distribution and the level of distribution, as we shall see certain dealers have galleries in various international markets allowing for greater sales opportunities.

The gallery’s role is to manage the artist’s career but as we saw in the previous chapter, this can be problematic as galleries and artists may not have the same conceptions of success or the same goals:

_It is a lot about how you manage yourself, the galleries are supposed to do some of that but not all of them do. (...) But if you have a gallery, part of their thing is to manage your career, to help you but actually they’re not very good at that, they just want to sell work and that’s their way of managing a career._ [Jude.19]

Therefore, choosing the right person to represent you, (in as much as artists have a choice, usually demonstrated by refusing to work with certain people and taking the risk to wait for another offer), as we saw in the previous chapter, is one of the most important decisions an artist makes in their career:
Sometimes having a show with somebody isn’t a good thing, if the person you’re showing with, if you get a bad appearance from it, then it’s not. [Mike.12]

Again, this is related to positioning in the art market, showing in the wrong context can be harmful to the career trajectory in terms of loss of authenticity and the resultant social capital, value comes from context.

In fact an artist’s career structure is in many ways dependent on the gallery they work with. This is particularly obvious when looking at the difference between public galleries and private galleries. Private galleries will be much more helpful in terms of raising money for creating new work as they have a strong collector base but they may not allow the artist to take as many artistic risks as a public gallery would which in the long-term can lead to a better reputation and higher value due to the link we have exposed between innovation and value. In London the split is represented geographically, the West hosting the more expensive, private galleries while in the East the galleries are usually artist-run spaces and innovative project spaces typically publicly funded. The East End is therefore slightly more cutting edge as they are prepared to work more with younger artists who are at a rawer stage in their career whereas in the West galleries concentrate on more established artists. In a way, this is simple economics at work:

*The West is something like one hundred and twenty thousand pound a year [in rent]. (...) So what do you think you have to sell in a year to make that?! You have to sell about five hundred thousand pounds worth of art a year just to cover your costs and make anything. So you know if you are selling Banksy, Damien Hirst or Lucian Freud then you don’t have to worry about it. But if you’re selling young emerging artists then how are you going to do that? How are you going to do that unless you have a huge backer? [Matt.3]*

This is also reflected in terms of the product sold, less saleable products such as installation and performance art being much more likely to be exhibited in public galleries. Getting picked up by a prestigious gallery can have the effect of projecting the artist into the limelight and making them a superstar based on the gallery’s reputation alone. The galleries with this much power tend to be private, for example, White Cube or Gagosian, international powerhouses who have galleries all over the world and work with the biggest collectors (Gagosian for example is now clearing in
excess of $1 billion annually). Artist Cecily Brown’s paintings went from $8,000 in 1999, to after joining Gagosian, $800,000, a hundredfold increase (Goldstein, 2011) in line with Chong’s (2010) characterisation of these galleries as market makers. There are however, also a small number public galleries who have strong relationships with the major museums and therefore getting represented by them can also be pivotal to an artist’s career trajectory (Chong, 2008; Horowitz, 2011). The power dynamic between the gallery and the artist is, like in any relationship, constantly shifting, so when a prestigious gallery represents a relatively unknown artist the power, status and associated social capital transfers onto the artist and vice versa if the artist is reputed and the gallery is new or unknown:

This old artist [...] suddenly got taken up by a very happening gallery of the day called [A] and for a few years he had this extraordinary period, he was showing in Chicago, he was showing and he said to me is ‘what you need is a [A] to legitimise you’ and that’s again terribly true, even an unfashionable looking artist if they’re showing in just the right place at just the right time will be fine, they’ll be legitimised. You know you happen to be there, somewhere in the spectrum they need, a gallery might need one ‘straight painter’ or one ‘expressionist painter’ or whatever label is attached, you see what I mean, it works like that. [Henry.53]

Moreover, social capital falls as well as rises and just as an artist’s career trajectory is likely to fall, galleries going out of business is also a regular phenomenon thereby directly affecting the status of the artist and their work’s value.

The big branded galleries are therefore known for being leaders in the field, they decide what is new and what is ‘hot’ on the art market because they have the social and economic capital to do so. For example, a survey of the May 2011 contemporary auctions found that 52% of all lots in Christie’s evening sale were artists exhibited by the Gagosian Gallery while at Sotheby’s the number was exactly half (“The Wizards”, 2011). This is another example of the self-fulfilling prophesies of the art world, once the branded gallery takes on an artist the collectors automatically buy the work because they know it is ‘hot’ and will assure them a return on their investment and so the artist gets more critical attention and social capital, which leads to higher prices and more sales, etc. As we saw when examining the career trajectory, social capital
and attention attracts more social capital and attention, leading to the peaks in the career trajectory as a result of this momentum. As one disillusioned public dealer states:

*In terms of monetary profit a gallery’s reputation these days is the safest bet you’ll find (...) For collectors I think it’s virtually impossible to see what the next best thing will be. If you are a commercial gallery you will be able to do it because you’re in a position to make it happen. It’s to do with promotion. There are galleries who have a greater significant presence than any of the artists they represent. (...) We’re racing towards a situation where artists aren’t all that important, ‘important’ galleries are. Gallerists have become the new priesthood.* [Lucas.23]

In fact the very establishment of these branded galleries in Hong Kong in the last year or so is a sign of the local market maturing. This is why when collectors come to the major art world cities such as London:

*The first thing that collectors do is look to the known galleries like White Cube, Lisson or Gagosian. (...) That’s the way it is and as a young gallery which is not in that league you just have to be aware of that. The first port will always be ‘what are they showing?’* [Matt.14]

One of the artists interviewed was picked up by Leo Castelli, one of the first superstar dealers, although it happened at the end of Castelli’s career, the relationship still provided the artist with a huge amount of social capital and her prices went up significantly. The timing was slightly off though, if she had met Castelli thirty years earlier she would have probably been one of the top superstar artists in the world today because their social capital could have risen in tandem [Erin.26]. As it was, she was picked up when the gallery’s status was dipping, at the end of its trajectory and although she still profited from this (as even on its dying legs the gallery was much better known than most), it was not as profitable a relationship as it could have been if the gallery’s status was rising rather than falling. Here we see how relationships in the art market change through time and mirror each other, creating a dynamic interaction through which value is negotiated.
These branded galleries obviously have to make quite a lot of money to survive, estimated at between £50,000 to £100,000 a week to pay salaries and extremely high rents as they are located in the centres of major cities. They therefore have straightforward business concerns, the equation has to balance or they will go under. The more money they have invested (whether in the space or the production level) the less risky they can be in terms of what they show and who they represent. In some ways then, the artists in these galleries therefore have less control over their work than those in small galleries, especially since the galleries work on an international level, when the work is circulating all over the work exhibiting in group shows every month, the artist cannot actually control this process, the gallery uses its resources to do so, this is why some artists may try to leave their dealers. As we saw in the previous chapter, the gallery may also exert influence on the direction the work goes which can be extremely uncomfortable for artists to deal with:

*I was really happy when I’d mocked it up myself and made a very beautiful kind of Keith Robinson-style machine and suddenly [dealer] had given me a lot of money to create something really big, you know it didn’t really fit in that show because it wasn’t really that context. Did you see the letters piece in that show? That was fine because that was something that I’d made and I really felt and I really meant it, you know one was very much an artist trying to get this voice, the other was very much part of the art world where production had played a massive part, financial backing had and I felt uncomfortable about that.*

Theo.74

In the upper end of the market then, value is therefore not to be found as much in terms of creativity or aesthetics, as the art world ideology would suggest, but in terms of the economic value of the work. The extreme example of this is seen in Hirst’s ‘For the Love of God’ a skull covered in diamonds, whereby its economic value due to the materials used give the work symbolic meaning and value, a reversal of the usual valuation process whereby economic value emerges from the symbolic.

As these branded galleries have played a more and more important role in the art market in the last couple of decades due to the injection of wealth into the art market, they have been able to attach value to work that was previously considered valueless such as performance and video work thereby expanding the parameters of
the ‘commercial’ (which has effects on artists’ trajectories as we saw in the previous chapter):

But then of course, having said that, somebody like Douglas Gordon, part of his genius, well not his genius the Lisson gallery’s genius was to find a way twenty odd years ago for getting big bucks attached to something which previously had been of critical and reputational value but never monetary. [William.29]

Ultimately galleries are businesses so they will look to promote artists whose work they feel has a place within the art market. Less powerful galleries, who have more to gain, tend to be those that will capitalise on the emphasis of the ‘innovative’ in order to collaborate with the artist to create new markets and sale opportunities, the big, branded galleries often start this way but once established they stick with the style they know to maintain the brand, leaning more towards traditional customer-orientation. Therefore due to the way value emerges from the social capital of these galleries, it can be dangerous for an artist to be too innovative.

As we saw with the Castelli example, just like an artist, a gallery has a certain career trajectory whose direction is driven by the dealer. As the relationship between the dealer and the artist tends to be highly personal, (both dealers and artists saying they “go with the people [they] like” [Jude.19] and the “chemistry” has to be right [Matt.8]), when the dealer changes, the personal relationship between the dealer and artists and collectors who work with them is necessarily broken. Due to this and the high costs associated with galleries, galleries tend not to last very long which can leave the artist without the necessary social capital, forced to re-enter the art world at a lower level than previously at:

Galleries don’t last on the whole, no, no, no and sooner or later most artists have a bit of a wilderness time, there’s some moment at which they, and I certainly did and it was frightening because I had obligations to my parents, they needed money and quite soon. [Henry.50]

It is rare for a gallery to out-live its dealer. As we can see, the influence a dealer has on an artist’s career is extremely important, one of the key contingencies of the artist’s career trajectory, which is why artists tend to say ‘I’m working with so-and-
so’ rather than ‘I’m represented by.’ This is also why artists often follow the person they are working with if their contact changes gallery:

Yeah they represented me, for quite a long. I think I stopped working with them 2 or 3 years ago, not in a dramatic way, it was just I did other things since 96 and I work with someone else now who used to be at Lisson, kind of freelance if you like. [Elliot.10]

So in this case, when the gallerist the artist had been working with previously decided to work independently, instead of staying with the branded gallery, the artist chose to take a risk based on the trust established from the prior relationship and keep working with him. In fact, it is interesting to look at how the gallery and the artist’s trajectories reinforce each other in value co-creation:

In my experience starting out as a gallery is not very different from starting as an artist where you basically do what you want to do and hope it works. On a simple level you concentrate on what your project is but until that voice is heard be it by collectors, critics, whoever, you have freedom to develop it. (...) Most big galleries who are successful will tell you that there are only six or eight people in the world who really buy art big time at any one time and they have to do work with those people because otherwise they have no business. [Andi.19]

Much as with artists, a gallery’s reputation often starts based on both its social networks and its identity reflecting the values of the art world in terms of an emphasis on innovation and creativity, as one dealer exemplified:

I began by doing a huge show, involving or implying, that certain people were involved. Every single powerful person in the art world I somehow managed to get involved in the project because of that one person who was well known and had connections. (...) I invited people along which included the heads of different institutions (...). I put a £2000 advert in Frieze (...). For the advert in Frieze I was cheeky, I phoned up people like Norman Rosenthal, Iwona Blaswick and I asked them if I could put their names on the advert in the sense that they sort of make an executive contribution toward the conference. Do you see? They turned up at the show and spouted crap like it’s the best thing since the pyramids. (...) So I had basically a full page advert that looked like some
gallery had come out of the middle of nowhere and had every single person that was anyone in the art world endorsing it. So the first thing is innovation, success really depends on it and a certain edginess I think. [Lucas.24]

Just like an artist, a gallery needs endorsement from the art world insiders which is why many dealers first work for other galleries building up their connections before then starting their own galleries:

I do know that a lot of people who set up galleries have worked in other galleries before. One of the points of working for a gallery would seem not just learning the principles of how a gallery is run but also making those relationships. You are not going to walk off with any artists (although some might) but it’s about those other relationships that are not just collectors but the press, curatorial and all those kind of things. [Ethan.15]

Once the gallery has made the artist famous (and that is usually the direction this happens in rather than the artist making the gallery famous as artists who already have high status need galleries with massive resources in terms of promotion to keep selling well and are usually unwilling to take a step down), the power relationship shifts and the artist has more say as to what happens and can start exerting some pressure on how the gallery works. Although this is still limited at the top end of the market as the continuous backing of a high profile gallery is necessary to keep the social capital and there are only a few of these branded galleries. Once the artist achieves the highest levels of success, their dealer usually lives in fear that the artist will leave the gallery and they will thereby lose out, having invested time and money into the progression of the artist’s career. As one dealer stated:

The only disadvantage is that once they reach that level [Venice Biennale] that’s all they want and you hope that they [artists] don’t forget you. [Ethan.8]

Artists often do move on in the hope of reaching a new level, either in terms of a new audience or more money or because they wish to shift the direction their work is taking:

And basically I felt the gallery wasn’t going anywhere, all they could do was sell up their blue chips, which was sort of dead artists. (...) So anyway that gallery wasn’t going anywhere, so I left them and went to Flowers. [Henry.53]
Generally, then as the artist becomes more established, the gallery usually becomes less important for them in that they already have the necessary contacts to keep selling “you know, if you’ve been round long enough people come knocking on the door,” [Jasper.19] so some artists do leave the gallery system in order to have more freedom with their work and work on a project or commission basis [Martin.27; Elliot.12]. This usually means taking a hit financially but having more artistic freedom to pursue ideas that may not sell. This phenomenon has become more widespread as artists no longer have to rely on the gallery fax machine and secretarial back up, they can take care of their own affairs and do their own paperwork through email, collectors no longer need to go through the gallery to contact them.

As well as working with dealers, there are a variety of other art professionals artists work with, most important of which in terms of securing social capital are curators and critics. Curators also provide artists with social capital by showing their work in museums and biennials which result in a higher profile and concurrently, prices:

Maybe there’s also something to be said about the relationship you have with curatorial people, because apart from just showing work there are networks that exist between artists and interdependent curators that are increasingly important for self-supporting, co-dependent relationships, (...) and I think those are quite strong and significant relationships that exist. You’ll see a lot of artists and curators work together and move together, and as curators have become more important figures in the art world and their status has changed in the last 15 years I think that’s become also particularly significant for artists in their development too. [Charlotte.8]

Curating, much like representing, is an editing and positioning job, it can affect both the market value and the public’s perception of an artist’s work. In fact, it is becoming more acceptable for artists to not have dealers and rely solely on curators for exposure especially at the early stages of their career:

No I don’t actually have representation], I have curators I work with a lot, I have [A] quite a lot and I’ve started to work with a curator, the one that curated the Liverpool show, [B] but I don’t have representation no. [Diana.33]
And I met people who were very helpful like [C], now works at the Tate, he’s like a freelance curator, he’s introduced me to people. [Jude.16]

These relationships are important in providing the artist opportunities to show in the public sector (as discussed in the last chapter, balancing the commercial/private and critical/public is necessary for a successful career), more specifically in a museum-context and garner all the benefits of this: catalogue, critical coverage, being contextualised in the wider art world, etc. Moreover, these relationships, like those with dealers, are based on trust and tend to be long-term leading to a variety of opportunities, often internationally, the career trajectories can also have a similar dynamic in that if the curator’s star goes up, the artist goes with them and vice versa.

However, as established in the review of the art press, as the art market has become more important in valuing art, the role and power of the curator as an advisor in the art market has also changed. As public and commercial have become more and more intertwined with museums taking on sponsors and curators advising collectors, the value of the art has become more and more dependent on it being approved by the branded collectors in the market. As one artist points out:

So I think the curatorial line has become actually incredibly compromised, it’s very, very difficult. It seems to be on one hand, yeah sort of immoral on one level, certainly has the potential for, I’m certain these people don’t feel immoral but it’s a bit icky. There’s a degree of insider trading going on here which is awkward. [William.38]

Therefore, the role of curators has become somewhat blurred, many working for commercial galleries as well as museums. However, whatever the nature of the curator’s choices in terms of who or what to legitimise, for an artist, working with the right curator can provide a completely different platform and move them from the periphery of the art market to the mainstream, enhancing the value of the work. It will be interesting to see whether there will be a shift in the underlying criteria as to what constitutes ‘authentic’ art, breaking the link between the authentic and the anti-commercial due to these power shifts in the art market.

While curators have gained in importance in the art market, critics have lost out. Although critical recognition is still at the heart of artists’ definitions of success,
as we saw in the last chapter, the financial side of things is becoming increasingly important and in fact, getting good reviews is no longer a promise of success or even a condition for it:

\[\text{Success:} \] it’s several levels, one which is critical recognition (…), you can achieve that without the other level, but it’s increasingly hard, which is the sort of financial collector-base sort of thing. [William.48]

While in the past criticism had a crucial role to play in informing people of what was good and what was bad, collectors now look at the market instead, preferring art indices to art reviews (Coslor, 2009). Again, we see value is socially constructed as critics have lost their social standing and power, they can no longer legitimise artists. The media has taken the focus off the critical because it is not as easily understood or absorbed as numbers are, this has also had the effect of boosting speculative investment.

But now people don’t look to art criticism anymore, people look to the art market. Instead they think ‘well who’s selling and who isn’t?’ You could have a sell out show, work selling for millions of pounds and it will be totally panned by the critics and writers; Damien Hirst is a perfect example. Criticism is clearly not having an influence on people; people are still happy to buy. [Richard.6]

As the critical has become subsumed by the monetary, reviews have very little impact on market forces:

Jonathan Jones of the Guardian is an important critical voice, and he’s not afraid to be contrary. But if his reviews had any impact on monetary value most of the YBAs would be selling the Big Issue. [Lucas.16]

This comment is slightly misleading in that a certain amount of critical success is necessary for financial success as we have established, but this critical success does not have to come from the critic, it can instead come from the dealer, curator or collector. Perhaps one of the reasons the critic has lost authority is due to the fact that there is no one prevailing viewpoint anymore, it’s not like Modernism or Expressionism, as the market has expanded it has taken on an ever increasing multiplicity of voices so it is hard to have a complete view of it or a clear voice on it.
Indeed as noted above, once an artist becomes a brand (as in the case of Damien Hirst), they are impervious to art criticism because they are a commodifiable asset with a status so strongly cemented that it can withstand the criticism, the only thing that affects the work is market forces, so if everybody suddenly decided to sell the work the value would go down, just like with any other market asset. This phenomenon will be explored further in the next chapter.

Critics do still have a small role to play though, especially for emerging artists who strive for any recognition or attention, while reviews do not act as a marker for the experts, gatekeepers and collectors, they do achieve this function for artists themselves who get validation from their (good) reviews:

*So yeah, I’d say from reviews, I get a lot of encouragement and reaffirmation of what I’m doing.* [Elizabeth.18]

In fact, artists often use their reviews to contextualise and position themselves in the art world when setting out their careers and artistic identities:

*A writer called Stuart Morgan, (...) wrote the first bit of sense about the work, and it was in ArtScribe, two or three pages, it was a huge event for me to have that sense made of the work and you know (...) it was a really good piece of text, it made sense of a lot of things for me so that was pretty crucial. And it was a good place to start actually, (...) it was really important.* [Elliot.16]

Critics are also important in terms of sheer volume and exposure. Damien Hirst has been noted to quote Warhol’s mantra that “you don’t read your reviews, you weigh them” in response to negative reviews, implying that value comes from visibility and exposure rather than critique of technical abilities (Higgins, 2007). Even bad reviews still provide artists with much-needed attention in the overcrowded art market.

Ultimately, experts are the ones who can allow or deny access to the art market. Relationships with experts therefore must be nurtured by artists in order to have a market. Dealers in particular hold an essential role in providing social capital and adding value to the artist’s career and their work but curators and critics also perform this role to a lesser extent. It is only through exposure with these
gatekeepers that the work can be consumed by collectors and the wider audience. We turn to these relationships now.

5.3 RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE AUDIENCE: LEGITIMISATION

The other main group of people artists have to deal with is collectors. Most collectors are not experts, although some are, but they provide the main source of income for established artists. Collectors have become increasingly important as the art market has gained in momentum. They buy art for a multiplicity of reasons, some buy as an investment, some because their friends do and some because they love it [Theo.68]. There are about two hundred and fifty really serious art collectors in the world, so called ‘supercollectors,’ then about five hundred quite important collectors, then there are about one thousand more normal collectors and finally there are budding collectors [Matt.19]. The supercollectors hold a lot of power in terms of legitimisation and therefore in setting the final value on the art market:

You can see why Saatchi got into it because it’s just such an uncontrollable market or in some ways very controllable, he buys something the price goes up, sells it the price goes down. If you can have that influence on the market to kind of say that collection is going to be worth something, validate it in a way, it’s a weird world, in a way I’m not sure what my relationship is to it. [Chris.47]

Saatchi tends to buy from young artists in bulk, and if he holds the bulk of your work, your fate as an artist lies in his hands. He can exhibit you, sell you or store you away in the dark, he works much like a dealer in this sense. The value of the work therefore comes from being in or out of certain relationships.

Most artists gain their collector base through their gallery although they may have picked up a few collectors from degree shows or other avenues of exposure before joining a gallery. As an artist becomes more established and starts to develop a collector base their market becomes more secure but there is a parallel tendency towards product conservatism in as much that collectors and museums want something that’s part of a narrative that has been branded, so somebody like Damien Hirst has a few product lines, collectors can buy into one and then diversify into others and everyone will recognise the work as a Hirst. This problem will be explored in more detail in the next chapter. The growth of the art fair which will also be
discussed further on, has encouraged this conservatism as well, at every art fair the same select few, instantly recognisable artists are in each of the stands. So collectors can exert pressure on both artists to develop in a certain way and also on galleries in terms of what artists and what work gets shown, particularly if the collector is backing the gallery.

Like when working with any other group whether peers or dealers, working with a certain collector can further or stunt an artist’s career. Moreover, although we are discussing these relationships in isolation, they impinge on other relationships as these individuals have their own networks, alliances and rivalries. As one artist discussed when his work was bought by a well known collector:

*She has friends and enemies in the art world and it’s like, and also in the wider social sphere so you kind of, and especially selling such a major thing, (...) but I’m totally glad I did because it’s led to all sorts of great stuff.* [Chris.39]

Being part of a well known collection is a welcome addition to any artist’s cv and can be especially beneficial in terms of access to museum shows. As the value goes up from being placed in the collection, collectors will also wish to see this value increase further as a return on their investment and so are often very willing to lend the work for museum shows:

*The collector will invariably want to lend that work to a good museum because one, it makes their collection worth more and two, that’s part of what a collector collects for. They like being involved in that whole art world. They get invited to the big dinners and they see their work up in a museum. So for them it’s like a badge of honour, because it’s their piece. The artist enjoys being shown at the Tate but the collector is the same – ‘well I chose that work, it’s mine’ and everybody else is looking at it and thinking ‘wow I wish I owned that.’* [Richard.2]

For collectors, much of the appeal of buying art is not only the possible financial investment but the social and cultural capital it provides in the eyes of others, derived from being perceived as a ‘taste-maker’.

As with dealers, these relationships can be hard to navigate, in fact, although selling to supercollectors early on in an artist’s career can provide much critical
attention, exposure and social capital, it can also be extremely difficult for young artists to stay in control of their market afterwards. For example, one of the emerging artists interviewed had sold to Saatchi and the work he sold was supposed to be exhibited in the Saatchi gallery but it took so long to be exhibited that:

When it finally came around, by the time it came around, the work is so old that I don’t really like it to be honest which is kind of funny. It’s just not really what I’m interested in so I’m a bit in two minds about it because it’s so public and it literally was my school work so (...) I kind of rather that it hadn’t happened to be honest because all the benefits I got from it were from him buying it at the time, it didn’t really matter whether he showed it or not, that didn’t add anything. [Mike.7]

As the artist had not really established his practice yet, selling to a collector with a lower profile would have been more beneficial but practically, as demonstrated in the last chapter, refusing a sale is a very difficult thing to do in the early stages of a career as artists need both the money and the social capital gained from having the collection on their cv. Emerging artists often struggle in negotiating prices with collectors too, as the collector knows that the artist needs to be in their collection more than they need the artist’s work and so usually ask for a discount of 50% or more:

There was quite a known collector who offered me half the money and came to me directly, trying to cut the gallery out, even though the gallery was like an artist-run space that doesn’t operate fully, but he had no qualms about doing that, it’s quite offensive. [Mike.17]

Indeed, artists are at the bottom of the social hierarchy of the art market, especially emerging artists and therefore have difficulty in negotiating deals with more powerful figures because their value cannot emerge until these figures proffer them to the market.

The new generation of collectors has focused much of their cash on the most speculative signatures of the moment. This is reflected in the ranking of the Top 10 artists of 2008, the year the art market peaked, with two living artists parading alongside the world’s biggest revenue earners: Damien Hirst and Gerhardt Richter (Artprice, 2009). This means that collectors will buy the ‘branded’ artists who have
won certain prizes, represented by certain galleries and shown in certain museums or biennales because they know that the value is relatively safe as a whole network of experts have previously endorsed it, their value is ensured, so for example one dealer mentions that:

*The youngest artist in the gallery was selected for a show at the Venice Biennale and I’ve now sold almost every single work she’s ever made and they’ve mostly gone to major collections. There’s nothing like that for teaching you how collectors work.* [Andi.9]

She continues to say that this can be problematic as:

*Yes definitely collectors can influence what art is made, of course, they are the fuel in the machine. (...) Some introduce their favourites, who don’t have galleries. So there is a huge amount of pressure from collectors who have spent heavily with the gallery to do a certain thing.* [Rob.9]

As we can see, although this thesis focuses on artists, relationships between the various other actors in the art market such as between gallery and collector impinge heavily upon their career trajectories. As Chong (2008) notes, for collectors “the product is the art work itself plus the artist and the dealer’s reputation,” thus the importance of the branded narrative we shall examine in the next chapter. These collectors therefore want pre-endorsed artists who already have sufficient amounts of social capital, which is as close a guarantee of investment potential as exists in the art market. This is why it takes so long for artists to develop a buying relationship, because buyers are looking at an artist and waiting for the artist to develop:

*So I have frequently sold things that I had shown them three years previously. And sometimes you think how silly because it’s very often that a person has bought something at two or three times the price two or three years later. It’s happened about four times now that someone’s asked me the price and I say that the artist has recently graduated. Then there’s been notable success within a career and then the prices go up. Then someone who’s seen it in 2001, last year bought work that was £10,000 when I showed it originally for £1300, without even complaining. Yes, they wait for them to be sure and to give them the extra confidence. We know that a lot of artists who leave art school are not
practicing as artists five years later simply because it is a very difficult thing to do. And collectors are very aware of that. [Andi.12]

This means that the main audience for the art (and to some extent the general public as museum buyers work in much the same way) decide who to buy on the basis of what has been legitimised by the experts but this is a very circular process as the impetus for the experts selection is based on the market which the collectors influence. While pandering to the art market is considered taboo, the competitive spirit around which the art world is constructed means that it is necessary. Although artists struggle to deal with this fact it is nonetheless a reality:

The fact that it is supposedly cutting edge is sufficient in itself; it doesn’t matter what it looks like or what it might mean or do. (...) One can think ‘oh I’ve got the next best thing.’ If that’s what you want then there is always the next big thing and then the next, next big thing. And so it is an addiction that is encouraged. It’s capitalism, consumerism. It’s very difficult for artists to come to terms with this. Most artists for example have a fixed idea of their monetary value and forget to take account of the fact that it has only got a value if someone wants to buy it. That’s where the value comes from in anybody’s case in the end. [Xavier.18]

Well who is attributing the value? I think fashion is what makes it. You can almost see things before they happen and you shake your head. If you go to Frieze you can see that what the next big thing is supposed to be has been decided upon. And there’s a lot of money making sure that it works. [Lucas.15]

Again, we see the insular cycle of the art market whereby membership is self-constituted between a few art world actors.

Once an artist starts selling well at auction and prices go up, it is no longer the artwork being judged because those who have invested in the artist want a return on their investment, and they therefore continue to support the artist in order for this to happen:

Once the artist is established in the money side of things it doesn’t matter what they make. Their work is still going to sell at the highest price because of a name, the artwork is no longer being judged. [Xavier.2]
Price is therefore somewhat divorced from the actual object, value comes from intangible rather than tangible features. The price structure for an artist changes once they have been at auction and becomes a target for investors. Whereas previously works of art that were extremely popular were considered rather low-brow and popularity was disparaging, there is a paradox now because when someone is doing well commercially it is considered a given that it’s good, it goes beyond criticism and beyond people questioning whether it is good or not.

*Take Damien Hirst. The last price decides the next one, so his prices are changing according to the market. It means that again and again you have to find a new type of collector as the prices go up. You’re reaching out to some very different types of people and you obviously have to make a different effort. I mean the effort behind Hirst’s operation is probably incredible in terms of PR, there’s a whole team behind it. You just don’t do that by yourself. You have to contact hundreds of journals every day and there are probably about ten people all doing PR but that’s what keeps his popularity and his visibility all over the world.* [Ethan.4]

This is why there are brackets in pricing, it jumps from the £500 to £1000 range for artists who have just left art school, emerging artists can charge £2,000 to £5,000 and then there is a massive jump from the £5,000 to £10,000 range to hundreds of thousands for the superstar artists where the price range becomes exponential [7.46].

Although much contested by artists themselves, in the art world, price equates to value and high prices come only after being validated at auction for which social capital is necessary in terms of provenance. Moreover by one work doing well at auction, the body of work’s value goes up, as does the social capital of the artist. This is why pricing is so difficult for artists. As a dealer explains:

*Pricing is complicated or rather you’ve got to pitch it right. You can’t just put on what you want; you’ve got to be very aware of what other people do. Everyone knows what he or she can buy in contemporary art for £1000. People who are buying art know what they can buy for £1000, £2000, £10,000, £50,000. They know who sells at what price in terms of what artist and they have comparables. A lot of artists seem to think’ this cost me a year to do therefore it costs a fortune’. That consideration unfortunately, has no place in the equation*
of the way things are priced. So when an artist does begin to sell and does begin to sell out - and I’ve got two artists who’ve sold almost everything they’ve done - that does push prices up, especially when they start selling to public collections and international, high profile collections. [Andi.13]

As established in the previous chapter, artists are understandably reluctant to conceive of their work as only a commodity, worth what somebody will pay for it, due to the underlying ideology of artistic values which pervades the art world in which they operate and because of how their self-worth is wrapped up with the product, seeing the work described by only its price tag is uncomfortable. One of the artists who had considered herself ‘alternative’ until relatively recently when she started to work with a gallery, is currently struggling to come to terms with the prevailing market conditions:

_It is quite politically contentious this notion of branding because it’s all the words of capitalism, this kind of unexamined ideology that’s taken to be just the kind of background reality that everything has to conform to that’s just unquestionable so this notion that artists would brand themselves as a product, this productisation of everything is kind of, I find it really quite disturbing really. But then again I’m aware that people have a kind of, even if it’s not fully theorised, if people have an instinct as to how they’re seen, you know are able to have control, more control over that and that does make it easier for them but that’s by no means the people who are the most interesting artists. Identity is a less threatening term. [Faye.38]_

This is why so few artists enjoy going to art fairs or auctions but prefer to centre themselves on the critical value of their work rather than the financial one as demonstrated in the last chapter:

_When you get (...) people who’ve just seen your work and they’ve emailed you just because, you know this email isn’t going to lead to a sale but actually this email is far more interesting than someone going ‘I saw your work in the Deutsche bank collection and I’m interested in buying something’ (...). I think there is a use for this stuff and I think it isn’t money, it isn’t as a commodity and I think as I said these emails and things that I’ve had over the last couple of years have been amazing. [Theo.75]_
Monetary value is only one aspect of the total value and although increasingly important, artists tend to dismiss it due to the Romantic ideology they must embrace to be considered authentic.

Figure 5.1 A visual representation of the way the art work accumulates value through the various social relationships, shifting from artistic or aesthetic value to social value which eventually translates into economic value.

5.4 Managing Relationships

As we have covered, maintaining good relationships with a variety of different people on a variety of levels is essential to an artist’s success in the art world as value emerges from these relationships. Managing these relationships in the long-run is therefore crucial, artists have to keep these connections going and in every decision they make consider how these decisions may affect their relationships and therefore careers. This is not always easy as there are all sorts of complications in terms of competing loyalties and rivalries which can have knock-on effects:
I’ve been offered a show by [A] but I don’t think [A] is the right context which is difficult because you know [her father] who is the curator of the [B] collection has just bought a work of mine so there’s a lot of this thing. [Theo.68]

When considering exhibitions, artists need to find the right context in terms of the work but also in terms of their network of relations, satisfying prior professional relationships while still expanding the audience. Being ‘good with people’ is what will allow an artist to go far [Theo.72]:

Strategy and charm may work for them, success often depends on, certainly with exhibitions, when you’re travelling around, depends on being an ok person to work with, I think if you’re incredibly difficult, the curator, you just think they’re not going to ask them again to be in another show. [Diana.47]

This is true both in terms of networking and starting relationships but also in terms of managing and maintaining them in the long-term. The literature on artists’ careers fails to recognise the fluidity of the art world due to these relationships, the resulting fragility and insecurity of the career trajectory and the impact of chance events on the career (of which more further on). Artists are under pressure to participate in social situations in order to further their career and artists without the necessary people-skills (not least in terms of perceived integrity and trustworthiness) are unlikely to be successful:

That’s the part that I’m really rubbish at and I have to get better at doing. I don’t get to enough private views, I think that’s awful. I was just working really hard. Applying for stuff, failing, I never apply to anything now unless I know that someone I know is going to be in the thing. Never going to enough private views, never really just completely failing on that side of the networking opportunities, and then eventually (...) [A]’s gallery show I sent him in my DVD myself, (...). And even [A] who’s absolutely brilliant, phenomenal, he’s like yeah I’ll be in touch with you, I think it’s only been complete luck that recently this has happened because even though [A] looked at my dvds and he likes my work I’m sure it was because I just, I then 10 months later managed to send a email to him that happened to be on the day he was programming, it’s been constantly being in these people’s minds, it’s just. And you know representing yourself. [Sarah.35]
This quote comes from an artist who has managed to secure her two first solo shows in galleries and both these opportunities came from prior connections which opened up new avenues and through self-promotion in terms of reminding these connections of their interest in her work over time. The artist herself is not comfortable with the necessity of networking and self-promotion but has come to realise that it is necessary to break through which is why she no longer applies for funding or awards without knowing someone on the judging panel thus demonstrating the importance of social capital. In fact, as Towse (1993) notes, talent is socially determined in the art market and therefore embodies not only the artist’s artistic abilities but a whole range of behavioural skills as well.

In Hong Kong, the lack of marketing and networking skills were particularly visible and impacting on artists’ careers. This is due to the fact that Hong Kong art is not considered overly saleable or recognisable internationally which has effects on who buys it. The important international collectors who are looking for investment opportunities do not buy Hong Kong art, opting instead for mainland art, those who do buy are generally doing it for their interest or love of the art rather than the investment opportunities. The artists themselves emphasised their long-term friendships with collectors, they do not characterise these as business relationships and therefore struggle when they do exhibit abroad and are confronted with the international art world. A number of the artists interviewed noted how uncomfortable and lost they felt when exhibiting internationally, resulting in poor sales [Kai.16]. In the art world, knowing the gatekeepers is the only real survival mechanism. Moreover, these various groups of critics, collectors, dealers and curators all expect different things in different measures. The works of art that deliver the most value to the most people and serve the most complex constituencies for the longest time are considered the very best ones and have the highest value on the art market.

Managing these relationships is particularly difficult for emerging artists because their value is as-yet unknown, their artistic potential only translates to value as a result of the endorsement process. Once artists have broken through and have a certain amount of social capital, it is in the interest of the experts who have already invested in that status (and its resulting market) to continue to do so:
I think you break through, you know this is where the Milan show was incredibly easy I just did four months straight making all this stuff and then it was shown, and that’s what you want, it was shown and sold and sold to the right people and it was well publicised and Vogue wrote a nice article and Flash Art had something on us, it was easy. [Theo.84]

This is why there are long periods where nothing is happening in the career trajectory before sudden rises in exposure and social capital lead to further opportunities, thus the shape of the career trajectory as explored in the previous chapter. Once an artist has representation, things tend to become slightly easier as it is the gallery’s job to provide and negotiate these relationships for the artist. However, the artist can never completely rely on the gallery as their ultimate goals are usually divergent. Moreover, these relationships need to be constantly re-engaged and re-negotiated as the work evolves: “it’s juggling, a lot of juggling and a lot of different hats” [Diana.35]. The art world is composed of a number of different circles (based amongst other things on the format and genre of the work and the location of the market), these circles overlap and spread out from the innermost circle of the ‘power-100,’ the internationally recognised insiders composed of artists, experts and collectors to the more general art public who may just visit a gallery and buy a print of the artist’s work. An artist is usually involved with a number of these circles in terms of different markets in different countries and these different groups can be completely separate with competing interest, so certain buyers, for example, may have nothing to do with the curators or the commissions an artist receives:

I gave a talk at Chelsea the other day actually about what you do after college, advice to artists and I mentioned, I said you’ve got to think of your career as someone like Bob Dylan rather than a boy band, it’s very crude but actually quite accurate in a way. Yes, there are comparisons with the music industry, certain artists come on the scene and are very hyped and have a lot of support but if you don’t succeed quickly then all the support drains away, you can’t keep the act going. You have to sustain the level of your prices so if they’re too high and you need that backing, you need to be in group shows and be written about, you can’t just be talked about by collectors, it doesn’t mean anything. And there will always be a next kid along next year and then another one and another one. [Jude.20]
In fact in terms of the established artists interviewed, the sense of the need to network to maintain the reputation is constant and it becomes almost second nature:

It’s quite interesting doing this, meeting students, because you often bump into them later so it’s quite a good thing to do I think, it’s such a small world, the thing I always do is go to the Royal College of Art curating course, I do a talk there once a year because those young people on the whole do go on to work in the art world often at quite high levels so you always bump into them, (...) it’s actually a very good way to keep in touch with younger generations so they know who you are, I almost do it for myself, I don’t really do it for them, I do it as a way to tell these young people who I am so I think you have to be quite open really if you’re self-employed, you have to be open to new experiences and/or new ways of meeting people, just to keep your hand in. [Jude.32]

So as well as managing relationships there is a need for artists to balance their career trajectory, it is becoming increasingly rare for an artist to work solely in the public sector or solely in the private sector, successful artists must balance the two, paying attention to the platforms (e.g. art fairs, biennials, galleries, institutions, collections, etc.) on which they show their work and the audiences that can be attracted through these. This is why having a catalogue is so important to an artist, it presents the trajectory an artist has taken in the best possible light, the mix between public and private and the collections, galleries, museums the artist has been in. The various platforms essentially act as market mechanisms to generate wider audiences. Having different platforms to work on also allows artists to navigate the highs and lows of the market:

So when the banks messed up so spectacularly, everyone was terrified and it was just before Frieze, and suddenly nothing sold and all the artists were going ‘ok commissions, commissions’. (...) The best thing about commissions is that they pay you to make the work that isn’t selling, and often the commissions feel like it’s work that you’re sort of finished with, they’ve seen a version and are asking you to make another and you think ‘ok I’ll do that’ in order to finance the research or whatever you call it in the studio. [Martin.34]

Again, we see how even artists who do not have to balance multiple jobs in order to survive, must balance multiple projects as artists, perhaps taking a commission they
are not particularly interested in, in order to fund work that is more in-line with their current artistic interests. Representing this trajectory in the right ways is therefore as important as the trajectory itself, so the way an artist puts together his cv and catalogue can mean the difference between success and failure:

So I have to sometimes make it look like I’ve had solo shows when I haven’t so I might say that me doing an education project at Camden Art Centre which is kind of a solo show, is a solo show and then to get this interview [in the Guardian about emerging artists] I then had to undo all that and say no none of these things I’ve ever done are solos so you know all this different spin that you do. [Sarah.36]

In order for artists work to be valued, they need to reassure buyers of the work’s potential worth by marketing not just the product on the basis of its aesthetic characteristics but also the social capital accumulated in the career which acts as assurance of the work having a place in the market.

**5.5 Platforms of Endorsement**

In terms of what art world experts and audiences look for in artists’ cvs as proof of social capital then, certain platforms have more potential in ensuring success than others. Three categories of platforms are particularly important to an artist’s visibility in the art world, leading to the social capital necessary for access to the market: prizes and awards, museum solo shows and retrospectives, and auctions.

Prizes and awards are one of the mechanisms through which an artist can breakthrough. Competitions such as New Contemporaries and the now defunct Beck’s Futures function as a selective mechanism whereby the thousands of graduates in the UK are reduced to less than a hundred, as one curator explains:

Those kinds of things can be quite influential and what they lead to for better or worse is media exposure and I think that has an increasing impact on the opportunities that artists get because I suppose when you think about the way in which (...) the chief curators in any of these organisations, the way in which they become aware of other artists, very few can put their hand on their hearts and say it’s because I go to every artist’s studio, not even show, (...) and the reason is of course that it’s impossible to do that, too many artists. So
somewhere down the line you have to trust someone else’s or trust the processes that kind of filters the good from the bad whether that’s through shows or some other device, some other sort of exposure, writing or whatever it is, any kind of media exposure. [Charlotte.8]

Of course, the process of judging is entirely subjective and has certain inherent biases, based on the preferences of the judges that year, the medium they like to work with, so, for example, they may already have a few video or performance artists and not want any more, etc. In fact most of the artists interviewed did not quite understand how the process works, one artist who won the Turner Prize commented that on the night of the award:

_ I really felt like a kind of observer of some phenomenon, strange ritual on the night._ [Elliot.19]

If shortlisted however, the artist benefits from a surge in critical and media attention which “gets the work out there” and will move forward their career [Elizabeth.17]:

_New Contemporaries (...) was one of the main things just because I still get people calling up saying they saw the show and that was over 2 years ago (...). I still get people who saw that calling me up. Just that thing more than anything. Which was right at the beginning, which is kind of weird._ [Mike.6]

Another emerging artist got an opportunity to participate in a museum group show as a result of New Contemporaries [Alexander.28]. Inclusion in these competitions and prizes lead to meetings with gatekeepers starting with the panel doing the selection and then all the other experts who look to these awards as a signal of emerging value [Elizabeth.17].

_The panel is a really great panel of very current thinkers and practitioners and curators, all kind of London based, so once you’ve, so it’s nice when you get [shortlisted] because (...) those people are exciting people anyway so that’s kind of a nice thumbs up apart from the money._ [Alexander.30]

The attention these competitions generate is generally short-lived however and artists must capitalise on it by making the necessary connections while they have the opportunity because even winning a prestigious award such as the John Moore or
Turner prize is no promise of long-term success as any glance at the list of past recipients will attest.

Prizes are not only important for emerging artists though, mid-career artists can also benefit massively from them. Prizes at this stage provide even more of an legitimisation of the artist and their work although it does depend which award it is as certain awards are more prestigious than others and the value of having these awards waxes and wanes with time, in line with the power shifts and trends of the art market. So for example while Arts Council Awards used to be a mark of discernment symbolising a certain amount of value they no longer hold any symbolic power:

*From the point of view of an authoritisation it depends upon the award, I don’t know whether the Arts Council has that role anymore though it used to, whereas if you get say the Paul Hamlyn Award or something it does, or the Turner. (...) but it did used to be that the Arts Council Award used to have a much more symbolic role than they do now. Because the Arts Council has been stripped of so much expertise, or rather the intentions and aims of the Arts Council have changed so much as well.* [William.40]

One of the reasons for this shift in legitimacy is because as government policy on the arts has turned to effectiveness, translating the value of the arts into more instrumental, general civic, social and educational terms to end elitism and attract a broader audience, it has moved away from the art-world criteria of innovation. Artists who apply for government funding therefore often do so at the expense of art-world visibility and market success. The most prestigious award for contemporary art in the UK now is the Turner Prize and being shortlisted for the Turner Prize results in significant price rises (winning can elevate prices by 1000%) in the artist’s work [Grace.5]. Although the artists interviewed who were shortlisted or even won the Turner Prize were generally quite dismissive about its importance to their career they do admit that it was useful in terms of the symbolic capital that it generated in that it is taken as a marker by experts and collectors, confirming their position in the market [Erin.31]. While it may not mean much from the point of view of the artist himself, prizes act as signals for the art market in terms of what has value and what is art, it creates “noise” about the artist [Elliot.19]. Another artist interviewed reinforced this by pinpointing the importance of the Turner Prize in his career not so much as the
Prize itself or even the money he won but in meeting people as a result of the prize as it generated a sort of ‘circus’ [Jude.47].

One of the reasons the Turner Prize is so prestigious is because it takes place within the museum context. As we have discussed, the museum, as the pinnacle of the endorsement process, is the final judge of value in the art world in terms of social capital, awarding the artist a place in art history and therefore results in a rise in economic capital on the market. Hence, having a solo show in a museum is another important contingency in an artist’s career, furthermore, a retrospective is even more significant, signifying the artist’s career as a whole is legitimised, not just a year-or-so’s worth of work. It is no surprise then that most artists include a museum sale in their definition of success, inclusion of a work into a museum is an important contingency in an artist’s career (thus also explaining the importance of relationships with curators). Museum shows only happen once an artist has reached a certain level in their career, one of the main reasons for this is that public collections only have a certain, rather limited, amount of funds and therefore cannot take risks on emerging artists who may or may not make it, it is much safer to focus on artists who have already been endorsed and have enough social capital to prove they are worthy of inclusion into the annals of art history.

Getting a museum show provides the artist with a huge amount of exposure and critical attention. One of the artists interviewed was in the process of preparing for a retrospective and feeling the pressure the critical attention will generate:

*I’ve got a big show next year in London where I will show work from the last 15-20 years, that will be a reckoning, that will be in the Hayward gallery, so that’s going to be, the knives may be out then for me but we’ll see.* [Jude.23]

Whether the reviews are good or bad, in the rather fluid and uncertain art world anything that looks like an institutional blessing provides the artist with much needed recognition. Representation in public collections therefore leads the artist to higher levels of social capital and more sales to private collections who now know that the work has been legitimised by the museum and is therefore ‘valuable’:

*I know my rather limited representation in private collections (...) would not have happened without the public collections.* [William.43]
This, however, brings us back to the blurriness between the public and the private. As many collectors or dealers are now represented on boards of purchasing, they have an interest in the work getting into the museum to raise the value of the artists they have invested in. This is another example of the rather inbred nature of the art world networks.

As covered in the literature review, while a couple of decades ago, high-priced contemporary art would be sold by dealers; now much of it is done by established auction houses. As the market has taken over the legitimisation of art work, auction houses have imposed a retail approach to art, marketing to new collectors and media-driven financial speculators (Velthius, 2005). Work by an artist selling in these evening sales is proof of their success and acceptance by the market, because resale at auction signals appreciation in the artist’s prices therefore only the most branded artists are featured in auction sales, those which the auction house knows they can market. As we have seen, economic value emerges from social value in the art market and therefore the artists who are sold at auction have already accumulated the social capital necessary to ensure high prices for their work.

In the previous chapter we discussed artists’ notions of success and found that a large part of success was subjective, to be found through the work they made. While these subjective notions of success are key to artists’ careers in terms of providing them with reasons to keep at their work despite lack of financial or critical success; subjective success means nothing to the wider art world. When the art world is judging an artist’s success, the work itself plays very little part in the overall criteria for ‘success.’ Success in the art world is defined by market success as evidenced by the work being resold at auctions and this market success is achieved by the endorsement process or as one of the artists called it: “these very weird systems of accreditation” [William.23]. Therefore both critical and financial success are needed to reach the pinnacle of the art world and by nature of the very structure of the endorsement process they are inextricable. Degrees or technical capabilities mean very little in terms of walking into a gallery and getting a show, instead the key contingencies that are analysed are having a group of supporters, branded gallery names, prizes or awards, branded collectors buying the work, museum shows and auction sales.
So far, I have described the endorsement process as a ladder, each rung allowing access to the next but in reality it is much more haphazard and random than this, artists can be rocketed from hero to zero and vice versa in very little time as any type of critical attention seems to attract more attention and as this builds up, one thing leads to another and prices go up in tandem. Artists’ career trajectories are therefore fragile and rather difficult to break down for analysis because while any one factor may not seem to have any impact on the career, in conjunction with other factors, it may prove to be critical. Value emerges over time in multiple ways but key to the valuation process is the social capital which comes from relationships and these relationships are only available in certain locations.

5.6 LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

As we have seen, the selection process in the art world is based around getting visibility and exposure to accumulate the social capital necessary to access the art market. Access to the art market, as we have seen, depends on having a “pyramid of approval” [Chris.36]. However in order to even access these networks of experts, artists must be in the right location. So far, we have ignored the geographic realities on which these social networks are based, taking it for granted in that it is a necessity for artists to be in these places in order to make the right connections. As noted in the literature, the art market is based around specific geographies or “scenes.” For UK artists, this means necessarily being in London where the networks and facilities are located: art schools, studios and established international critics, dealers, galleries and collectors. London is one of the world’s key global nodes for art exchange and therefore acts as a magnet for aspiring artists who need to interact with these networks for their work to be valued (While, 2003; Chong, 2005), thus the justification of focusing on artists in London for this thesis. Hong Kong, on the other hand is starting to become a global node but artists, for the moment, still need to go to Paris, London or New York in order to become successful, as discussed earlier. The importance of networks is at odds with the Romantic ideology of the artist as a ‘lonely genius,’ in fact, there is evidence that access and proximity to influential art makers are crucial for an artist seeking to build a reputation (While, 2003). In fact ‘networking,’ despite being an essential part of life in the art world, is a bit of a dirty word and artists, as we have discussed, try to disassociate themselves from such attention-seeking and promotional behaviour due to its commercial undertones:
I try not to have any part of it but you can’t but get attached to it in some way, the weird kind of politics of private views, people who know people who.

[Mike.18]

Even though artists are aware of the underlying conflict between the critical and the commercial in this Romantic ideology, they cannot help but attach negative connotations to production, marketing and networking:

I was heading for trouble and I think that part of the trouble was that when you have a sort of market situation, you do, it’s very difficult (...), I was already in my early 40’s I should have known better but I did slightly go into production and so this sort of old artist like Jeffery Camp may say to me ‘some of those look as though they might have been done for money’ and I thought ‘oh God’. So, and I remember saying to a dealer, ‘you know I set out to be a visionary painter but I’m worried, you know sometimes one’s just picture making’ and he said something like ‘have you ever heard of a serious artist, can you think of one 20th century artist of whom you’ve heard that isn’t partly a picture maker’? Isn’t that true of Matisse, Bonnard, Picasso. It’s true. But, nevertheless, there was something wrong. [Henry.48]

The artists were very aware of the need not to “be one of those people who spams everyone all the time” and to claim that networking and social climbing is “wrong” despite the fact that the art world in which they live and work is based almost entirely upon networks of experts and survival is dependent on networking [Alexander.26; Theo.51]. So networking in the right situations without seeming too keen is crucial in artists being able to stay ‘authentic.’

Having the necessary exposure is therefore the single key ingredient that differentiates successful artists from their peers. Visibility is therefore one of the criteria of success:

The killer is when people aren’t interested, some people can maintain the sort of unknown genius in the garden shed model, I have too much nervousness and self-doubt for that I think. [William.49]

In fact, as we discussed in the previous chapter, the genius in the garden shed model is very much a myth, a work of art is only worth as much as someone is willing to pay
for it and if nobody knows about it then it has no real value. Being productive as an artist means not only creating new work but also working the scene. As one dealer discusses once an artist is established, their work becomes a commodity on the market:

*I don’t have any artists yet whose works are commodity-like. I would be so much happier if every time I had an exhibition, big collectors, who would retain the work’s visibility, would buy. (...) Anyone who is really a top collector is great because it means that the public will see it and there is more visibility.*

[Matt.13]

This is why museums are the ultimate sign of legitimisation, they assure the work of the broadest possible audience and (in theory at least) a future audience as well, as, once the work is in the collection, it stays there. Although many artists do take breaks, leaving the scene in order to move their practice forward, they do eventually need to re-establish themselves and as examined in the last chapter it can be extremely difficult to re-enter a network once you have dropped it:

*I felt that in those two years I’d opened many doors but I hadn't really found what I wanted to do and I felt that I needed space to do that, not really be in a public arena in a way (...). In hindsight I think it’s better to stay in a support network rather than to leave it completely because it’s kind of difficult then to get back in.* [Diana.25]

Artists therefore find themselves in the position of constantly having to manage their relationships, while they often need time away to think about their work and be creative, if they stay away for too long they risk not being able to show (or sell) the work they create. The pressure to be part of the scene can be heavy to bare. Some artists find creative ways to stay within their networks:

*And some people do that whole thing of working the scene, you know going out and showing your face and in a way my videos have done that for me, being in my videos, people kind of recognise me.* [Chris.35]

However this is an exception and you already need to have a certain amount of social capital in order for your work to be shown within the right circles. This movement from different networks and levels of networking is what causes the upturns and downturns of an artist’s career trajectory.

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Therefore, location matters in the art world. Hellmanzik (2009) studied auction records of the past twenty years to estimate the value of artworks over an artist’s career and found that artists working in a cluster location reach a peak in the age-price profile of their work 5.4 years earlier than artists working elsewhere. Furthermore, Hellmanzik finds that the value of the work produced in artistic clusters is systematically higher than that produced elsewhere, she argues it is due in large part to the tacit knowledge than can be internalised, in line with this study’s findings in terms of socialisation into the art world. In order to ‘make it’ then, artists need to be in cities where they can access some level of exposure which will eventually lead to international exposure. This means going to a few key cities, London being the most important art market in Europe. Local proximity to these global networks of the art world allows artists to benefit from otherwise unattainable tacit knowledge. Artists therefore come to London in order to access this international scene and be part of the larger context, to build their social capital for the resulting opportunities to exhibit to achieve critical recognition which, as we have seen, is their primary measure of success:

I’d kind of been there for so long [Ireland] that I really wanted to kind of expand on what I could learn and also the kind of, the circles that you know I could move in and you know get into more of an international kind of scene [London]. [Elizabeth.13]

I moved to London in 1984 and that’s when it became clear that I was going to get closer to art and try to figure it out, figure out functioning as an artist and I also started to write for magazines which was quite useful because it kept me visible and involved even though I wasn’t important, I was in the context and that was quite handy at the time. [Martin.21]

The move to London is therefore an important turning point in an artist’s career:

The move, coming down to London was a key move, so it wasn’t as much about people as moving into a different environment. In England at least art happens in London and you can’t get away from that (...). Coming down here, teaching a bit, going to lots of shows, beginning to review them, having a bit of a voice, I think that getting immersed in the arts scene in the day-to-day activities of the galleries and artists, that drew me in. [Martin.23]
Artists who are not in London are at a disadvantage and have to work harder to create their own opportunities. Moreover, the social cachet of being a ‘London based artist’ is not inconsiderable. Using the cultural capital of London is a way for artists to establish themselves and get representation in other markets around the world, as one artist interviewed put it, his Italian gallery was: “seduced by the London thing” [Alexander.29]. One of the emerging artists interviewed managed to get representation in a top gallery in Italy based on showing in prestigious group shows in London [Theo.64]. In fact securing representation abroad as a London artist is much easier than securing a gallery in London itself. This is partly because of the sheer number of artists looking for representation in London but also because artists are aware of the importance of this market and are therefore much more careful in choosing the ‘right’ gallery to work with. While working with a second rate gallery in Italy or elsewhere will have no major impact on their career, their choice of gallery in London will categorise them so it is sometimes better to stay unrepresented rather than work with a gallery that does not have a great reputation:

*I’m a lot more forgiving, that sounds wrong, carefree about showing abroad but in London I don’t know who I would like to be with because there are people who have asked but it’s nothing.* [Mike.15]

However, artists who are based in London but do not show in London are looked down upon as London is considered the pinnacle of the endorsement pyramid, although prices may be higher in other markets and therefore tempting to artists, resorting fully to these is considered a sell-out by the art world which in the long-term means losing value. One artist discussing a peer who was working primarily with a gallery in Brazil, one of the up and coming emerging art markets said:

*Yeah I saw some of his work there. It’s weird [that he doesn’t sell in UK but in Brazil]. It is odd.* [Jude.18]

Another of the artists interviewed even acknowledged that she had this problem and was making a conscious effort to change her exhibition patterns:

*To really, really try to redirect my practice to the gallery and actually show in my own country because I was finding that I really didn’t show work in my
country except for a few screening events and I wasn’t satisfied with that.

[Faye.26]

The UK art market is therefore extremely London-centric and there is little chance of survival for emerging artists based outside of London:

And you know the art school thing, going back to that, obviously, particularly in this country, there is a sort of value in being in art school but only if you are in Glasgow, possibly Edinburgh or London which is in the degree show where people like [dealer] and collectors will go year round. However if you’re outside those sort of three, it’s just not going to happen so then you have to rely on getting into a postgraduate, I guess, but then of course the postgraduates where you get people walking through are also only in Edinburgh, Glasgow, London. Which nobody ever articulates or rather, the prospectuses never do.

[William.36]

Moreover, this seems to be becoming even more the case. Opportunities for visiting artists to lecture in art schools have decreased substantially with budget cuts and the emphasis placed on academic qualifications for teaching staff:

And it was terribly useful from everybody’s point of view, a model where, you would speak to an artist and he would say ‘well I do a day a week at Burton, and a day a month at Leicester’ for example and that would give them enough money to get by. (...) So that wider support system for artists has gone and I think that has had an effect on students because you had your fulltime staff which were of course very useful but then your excitement was to meet people who were doing what you wanted to do and those people were also a conduit for those people who weren’t in London, so the artist might go back to London and say ‘hey I saw someone...’ and that’s sort of gone which is a shame.

[William.37]

This phenomenon is one of the ways a change in the structure of the art world is having an effect on artists’ career trajectories. Not only does it lead to a bias towards artists based in London but it also affects artists in terms of their support structures, teaching has always been one of the most popular ways artists could survive financially due to its flexibility. If it is no longer a possibility artists may
have difficulties finding other sources of income and perhaps exit the career trajectory entirely.

Once in London, artists can start accessing the gatekeepers they need to impress, this takes time and art school often serves as a way of doing this as we established, however, because of the sheer density of art world networks in the capital, it becomes possible to infiltrate through other methods too:

*I sort of found my way in the art world by meeting people and making connections and stuff. And that just developed over time, so that’s a very, very simple way of putting it. Up till 97, 96, so I was just blindly stumbling around really trying to find a place. Because I suppose if you go to art college you have all these networks you can rely upon, your friends and tutors, I had none of that. (...) Just because if you’re in London its quite easy because you just meet people through openings, that is the best way really to do that, it’s an amazing opportunity really openings when we think about what they do, it’s an amazing, fluid moment when the structures, the hierarchies are slightly inverted or collapse slightly so you can meet most people if you want to at openings. Especially later on, the later you are the more drunk people are. And actually it’s a very fertile thing in that way, openings, very important. (...) You have to be convincing on a variety of levels.* [Jude.12]

We see here the importance of capitalising on chance encounters, which we will examine in more detail further on. The sheer amount of art world activity happening in London can be quite overwhelming to new artists: “so it was quite mind blowing when I first moved to London” [Elliot.26]. Being visible in the London network of openings and other social events is therefore essential. The work can be done anywhere else but you need to have a presence in London in order to stay connected and relevant, for social capital accumulation and its resultant value. Once established in London, as we have seen, artists can use London as a platform to access other markets, thereby raising the value of their work both at home and abroad. Art fairs in particular accelerate the transnational exposure of artists. Selling abroad can be extremely strategic, especially for emerging artists, being labelled “international” is a selling point:
I think if it had been in London and things had been sold at that price it would have been ridiculous because I was just out of college but there because I was ‘from England’ and they used words like YBA which is absolutely ridiculous and it was a bit naff and a bit embarrassing when I think about it now. And critically it wasn’t amazing because I didn’t really have very exciting conversations with them but I was able to put on shows that I would document, and the space looked nice and I took them back to the UK and it looked like, you know, it was good. [Alexander 20]

It is a way of building up the catalogue and to justify raising prices for the work. Moreover, in order to be successful, an artist has to be constantly expanding their potential audience and while there is only so much you can do in one particular place (there is a danger of too much exposure in one market as we have discussed) spreading yourself out can be extremely advantageous.

Showing abroad not only provides the artist with a new audience but also a changing context in which the work is seen. As will be discussed in more detail later on, showing abroad is particularly important for Hong Kong artists as their local scene is radically different to that of London. Limiting ourselves to the London case for now we see how one artist discusses her international practice:

I had to kind of go very carefully from each thing to the next and then I had quite a lot of success in France for a while, now it sort of comes and goes but then I did quite well, I think it’s also depending on the country because different countries have different, their own trajectories so sometimes they’re working faster than at other times, at the moment I’m showing in South America a lot and South America is up and coming and energetic and they can do projects that other people wouldn’t even attempt at this point (...) and there is an energy there that is different from Europe say. [Erin 28]

This provides a variety of opportunities to show and sell the work:

So every year I was involved, going to this festival, made lots and lots of interesting connections and contacts and saw a lot of work and found a whole new international context for my work, so I was then showing a lot, quite a lot
Part of this is pure economics, so BRIC economics such as China and Brazil have market power and therefore have vibrant emerging art markets but it is also about the critical context. Being in a different critical context can provide much-needed perspective on work for artists as well as possible inspiration. A knowledge of the different critical contexts provides artists with an understanding of how the history of art is constructed and can be pivotal in the direction an artist’s work takes and in providing them with an international career. Because the art world is so small, in order for an artist to be relatively successful, an international career is necessary and even a relatively unknown artist will have done somewhere between thirty or forty solo shows all over the world in a thirty year career.

*I love travelling to exhibitions abroad and being part of; I love the whole thing of it and I love meeting all the other artists and being there and seeing your work in relationship to other work I think is really interesting and also just the audience changes and therefore their perspective changes and that’s really interesting as well.* [Diana.43]

*I was so proud to be in [museum show abroad] and realised that two of my works stood up and a lot of them didn’t, you know, that’s the other great thing about having it on the other side of the world.* [Theo.76]

The key point though, is that access to these international markets comes only through first being a part of the London market, social capital built up in London allows access to the key platforms in the rest of the world. The career progression does not work the other way around, artists outside of the key network hubs of the art world cannot accumulate the social capital necessary for either exhibitions internationally or in the key hubs such as London (by these exhibitions we are referring to the platforms that participate in the endorsement process, such as biennials, fairs and galleries). In fact, artists outside of the key hubs are not really considered to exist in the art world at all and therefore their work has no value on the market.
Rather than having one single trajectory, artists have a number of trajectories depending on which markets they are working in. Each market has different demands and artists must be able to manage these varying demands:

You can’t tell what, in different countries there are different triggers that will make things work you know. [Erin.35]

These ‘triggers’ are based on trends and fashions, so artists need to be aware of these when working internationally. Artists have to operate by finding their own space within these trends because as soon as you no longer fit in to this you “don’t exist” [Erin.29]. Artists (and dealers usually help with this) therefore need to manage each market somewhat separately, while prioritising the key network hub. Again however, these competing demands can be difficult to juggle. As we have seen neglecting one network at the expense of another can have long-term consequences. One artist interviewed moved to Australia for a number of years and coming back to London afterwards meant that he had to re-establish himself, building up the networks essentially as an emerging artist:

Because I had 15 years out of the country I’m essentially closer to an emerging artist in most of the structures than I am to a mid-career artist, say someone like Mike Nelson who’s 10 years younger than I am, is at Venice sort of thing. [William.26]

All the artists who had moved abroad found themselves in that situation when wanting to return to London:

I mean my generation, the ones who stayed in England, have done better than I did, the ones who stuck in one place and just sat here but then they were able to use their background and their contacts which, I lost all that when I went somewhere else. [Erin.42]

The problem is that while the trajectory itself is not linear, the gatekeepers who control the artist’s position within the art market see it as such. So a gap of more than about a year in any narrative is harmful because once out of sight, an artist is out of mind. An artist therefore has to strategically manage the markets they are operating within, constantly reconnecting with their networks in order to maintain their social
capital and expanding their audience in order to raise the value of the work, without going too far and flooding the market, a delicate balance:

*After about two years in Spain I thought ‘oh I’m going to be trapped here what shall I do?’ I was very aware of it, so I started doing this travelling, I did a show in Poland.* [Erin.38]

### 5.7 Overview of the Endorsement Process: Nebulous and Insular

Precisely because an artist can only be judged ‘successful’ and their work ‘valuable’ as a result of certain key figures in the art world endorsing them, being associated to the ‘right’ dealers, curators and collectors is extremely important. One of the artists interviewed, when reflecting back on his emergence onto the art world scene, pinpointed an understanding of the structure of the art world as critical to establishing himself:

*You suddenly realise that [the art world is] very small (...) I had this collector called [...] walk into my studio the other day and she’s huge, she’s a massive collector, (...) she walked into my studio and went ‘oh you, you know I’ve seen that and I’ve seen that and I didn’t actually know it was the same person.’* [Theo.68]

It is only when art world members start to gain an understanding of your work and can recognise it as such that an artist’s career truly starts to move forward. Although a large part of this is down to chance, being in the right place at the right time, an artist who is able to strategically manage their social capital in order to further their career is much more likely to succeed, an ability to navigate the social networks in order to access the ‘power 100’ who act as gatekeepers, allows for a much more rapid rise to prominence. Moreover, because the art world is relatively small, gaining access to certain gatekeepers provides rapid access to others, so rather than a linear process, endorsement is much more of a rapid accumulation of social capital that cannot be easily untangled:

*I mean I think the other thing is, all the people I’ve named are very much a very kind of like if you had the venn diagram like this, you know, I’m definitely very much in one overlapping or maybe two (...). You know I think my tutor [in art school] is a good person to meet, again I don’t think he’s someone who would
particularly nominate me for anything but you know just by the nature of his influence, his tutor was Peter Doig (...). And the other guy who was my teacher (...) he was taught by Dowel who was taught by Carlos Durat, you know who taught Sargent so it’s quite interesting how these things sort of work, whether you, whether any direct introduction or email or whatever goes on, it doesn’t sort of have to, you're just sort of there. [Theo.83]

Just ‘being there’ is enough, which is why appearing in group shows with celebrated artists allows for social capital to be transferred, as we have seen being part of a movement or even just being associated with other artists can enable access to social capital:

*I think very quickly there was this other bunch of artists (...) and they were all getting together a bit of momentum and I sort of feel I got kind of tacked onto them very quickly (...). It’s been a very good year, you know a good couple of years, (...) because suddenly I’m showing with Keith Tyson, Paul Fryer you know the Chapman brothers, all this sort of thing you know, really fast. [Theo.63]*

An artist’s career is therefore an accumulation of connections culminating, for the most successful, in superstar status, artists who have seven figure incomes of which there are probably less than one hundred in the world (Thompson, 2008). These connections do not usually directly lead to anything but they are necessary for long-term survival in the art market:

*You sort of build a momentum of people who, you know you may meet someone it doesn’t necessarily mean that it’s within their interests to either try and sell something for you or introduce you to a collector, introduce you to a gallery or whatever, this sort of thing, you know, but I think once you start to make, (...) you know you start to build up a little following of collectors or following of gallerists (...). You know so it’s just a culmination of lots of different things I think. (...) So you realise that there are people who are looking, and so you kind of often think, [you just have to wait for people to put it together] yeah. [Theo.79]*
This is why when asking artists about the pivotal points in their careers, the majority of responses focused not on events themselves but on the people they met as a result of these events and how those people opened doors for them. So exhibiting is valuable not just in terms of selling and getting critical feedback on the work but as an opportunity for others to see the work and become part of the larger art world context. This can only be done by other arts professionals, although the artists themselves can try to position themselves and their work in the art world, the power lies in the hands of the gatekeepers who hold the financial strings of the art market and they are the ones who ultimately make the value judgments that position artists. Once one gatekeeper endorses an artist the others are usually quick to follow in order to capitalise on the new value that has been attributed to the work, value is therefore less created by the artist but rather, more attributed by the expert. Introductions are therefore the real currency for artists in their careers.

But yeah it’s just such kind of, tiny coincidences you know and then when my name is mentioned by [A], another very important person, from Art Projects to him as someone to do a performance day at the ICA he’s going to say yes probably because he’s had that prior working with me sort of thing. (...) I think also people are quite, quite weary of trusting their own taste in a way because that’s what a lot of this is, it’s sort of putting your neck on the line and saying I believe in this artist, a lot of people think that other people have more, that it’s got to be approved by lots of other people before, I mean that’s what the art world is in a way, it’s like building a pyramid of approval isn’t it? [Chris.36]

The artist is therefore at the mercy of experts in terms of how they are classified and positioned within the art world but the necessity for the artist is to keep making work, an artist who no longer produces work is instantly dismissed, artists are only as good as their last show. Shows are therefore the main way in which artists can expand their social circle as they provide an artist with the opportunity to promote themselves without directly asking for anything (which as we have seen is taboo):

In terms of sort of exhibitions that have happened recently or been pivotal, I was in one, (...) a lot of people came and I was really pleased with the work that I made and I got a really good response and I think that things came out of that show in particular. [Diana.30]
In order to survive as a professional artist therefore, a certain level of endorsement needs to come together in order for there to be a breakthrough which is described as “sudden,” from that point on it is not only about accumulating endorsement but about maintaining it through the direction of the work [Theo.60; Henry.42]:

So everything you know, between 1979 and 81, yeah was just perfect, I was terribly lucky and that was definitely a career moment. Annus mirabilis. So roughly, 11 years of uttermost darkness and then, but you see, this is always very misleading because I had made many, if you like, like-thinking if you like, comrades, brothers, connections, things that fate. [Henry.44]

Although the perception is that artists suddenly emerge from nowhere and become successful, this hides the reality of the fact that they have usually been slowly accumulating social capital in order to emerge:

So I guess it’s been rather slow, the problem is the kind of hit-single idea of contemporary art at the moment, the X-factor, it has happened for one or two people but there’s one or two thousand it hasn’t happened for that way, it’s a slower, I speak from the height of my years now, what I say to students is what you need most of all as well as being good is tenacity and an ability to hang on in there while the rest of the world try to stop you. [Martin.24]

So, again, connections are what lead to success and rather than it being one key, breaking moment it is rather a catalogue of different things that work together to immerse an artist into the art world and attribute their work with value. The progression can be quite natural if the artist capitalises on their social circle in order to create opportunities for themself:

I think that when you’re growing up as an artist you know certain people, they tend to be or your generation, you’re hanging out together, if there’s something in the offer, make it known that you’re interested. (...) I don’t know how I met [dealer] but he was around my generation and I just said to him, ‘I’ve got a project I’d like to work with you on’ and we did it and that was that. [Jasper.21]
The problem with achieving this level of social capital and success is that the artist can find it extremely difficult to keep producing at a pace and in a style that will satisfy the experts:

*I guess my first proper solo show would have been at the [A] Gallery, that was in 2005 or 2004, yeah (...) and a lot of things came from that, the next 2 or 3 years were non-stop after that and then (...), I felt a bit dizzy.* [Diana.37]

Burning out is therefore one of the major risks for an artist and as the social pressures accumulate, artists’ success may come at the price of time spent on the practice:

*Well I’m working on making new work at the moment which sounds like that would be what you would always say but last year because I had this survey show in a museum (...) and I did this book (...) and a couple of commissions, I felt like I was more being the administrator of my own work rather than actually making new stuff. (...) But I’ve really felt last year I didn’t really make any new work and it doesn’t feel like the studio has gone forward very much and I was more than happy to do what I was doing but psychologically it makes you really anxious.* [Martin.37]

Moreover, with the social capital needed for an artist to emerge comes a set of limitations. This is due to the fact that the artist has now been positioned by the experts as creating a certain type of art and this is the artist’s niche in the art world. In order to satisfy demand for the work, which is what a successful career depends on, the artist’s new work must be perceived to be in line with previous work, and straying too far from this set perception or niche is dangerous. The most successful artists find strategies to encapsulate their entire life’s work within a certain coherent storyline. Art professionals and the general public want to buy into an artist’s body of work, not just one piece, and in fact buying one piece of work symbolises buying into the entire brand image of the artist and whatever that stands for, so having a ‘Hirst’ holds cultural capital to collectors (something explored further in the next chapter) not because of any aesthetic aspects of the work itself but because of the artist’s reputation as one of the top contemporary artists. There is an inherent contradiction in terms of the work being stand-alone and therefore holding intrinsic value while also being infused with the characteristics of the creator of the work and those who have endorsed it, taking us back to the discussion of the ‘aura’ of the work in the previous
chapter. This is demonstrated when a painting attributed to an Old Master is found to be a forgery and therefore plummets in financial value due to its reattribution. Its aesthetic value is unchanged but due to its historical value being reassigned, its financial value decreases substantially. Our pleasure in the work may be enriched by what we think we know of its artist, how we imagine it fits into the story of the artist’s development which is subsequent to the pleasure of the qualities on display, proof that we buy into the career rather than the work. Forgeries see through this pretension. There is therefore a certain amount of pressure on successful artists to create more of the same:

*You get offered things that are paid that are actually like things you’ve done but aren’t actually what you want to do and there’s always pressure, not pressure but people asking you to do things that are similar to your work but actually it’s their idea and you have to enact it or whatever.* [Jude.25]

Any work that does not fit in with the brand image has to be explained and defended in the right terms in order to ensure continuing social capital or else artists face exclusion from the art world:

*Like the stuff I’ll be doing with landscape architects in the city centre, regeneration projects, it’s out there, so quite a few people in the art market don’t understand what it is.* [Elliot.11]

So although, as we saw in the last chapter, artists tend to see success as progression in terms of their work with value attributed to experimentation even if it leads to failure, in the art world, while some change is allowed, if this change does not fit with the artist’s brand, it will not be successful. This will be examined further in the next chapter which uses branding theory to look at artistic careers. There is therefore a major chasm that opens up in terms of the value of the work, depending on whether it is from the artist’s viewpoint or the art world’s, when discussing Andy Warhol’s career one of the artists commented:

*I think it was quite tough for him because he got into a rut basically, he wanted to do more experimental things but his business manager said ‘no, just keep doing this you can make millions of dollars.’ But you see that, you see that with artists like Damien Hirst, he’s in a rut, a very lucrative rut but I mean creatively*
he’s dead, more or less, or might as well be. The pressure is to keep the business going, it’s as if you’re making cars. He probably doesn’t even own his company any more, only parts of it, it’s like if you’re a car-manufacturer and you start making cars that are completely different from what people were expecting, that’s almost the level he’s at, he’s trapped in his career really. It’s probably the best way looking at it, he’s trapped in his career, I mean he could do anything he wants but he doesn’t, he just does the same thing. He’s obviously very successful though. [Jude.31]

This is why, as discovered in the previous chapter, once artists achieve a certain level of financial success they tend to re-align their artistic identity and values with objective rather subjective success, whereby value is defined in economic terms.

These findings on the endorsement process are in line with network studies of the art world. However, the way networks are usually conceptualised as only points and links is limiting, existing network studies do not convey the complex ecosystems in which elaborate systems function. While they are good at describing long-distance and unexpected connections they are less so in describing the fragile and complex nature of, and conditions in which, the connections occur. Giuffré’s (1999) study is one of few that takes this into account, arguing that the art world network is continuously changing shape and artists must successfully move through this ecosystem. This is similar to Bourdieu’s (1984) conception of an ‘artistic field’ as a network that is continuously changing shape as actors reposition themselves relative to each other. The art world, therefore, poses an interesting problem in that both the worker and the job are in a state of flux with regard to relative status. The changing network structure of other actors in the system, by changing relative rankings, may affect, for better or worse, the status of actors whose own pattern of ties have remained stable (Giuffre, 1999). It is interesting to note that although there have been a number of initiatives aimed at providing networking opportunities for artists online such as, for example, the Axis database, they have not had much success. Why they have so far failed to work is largely due to the nature of the art world, the relationships that inform and allow the development of an artist’s career cannot be synthesised formally, they have to emerge through a trust-basis in line with the rather inbred nature of the art world; who you know is probably the single most important
factor that influences an artist’s career trajectory. Moreover, this points to the importance of geographical location, of being seen at the ‘right’ places.

So although the driving force for most artists’ work is to fulfil their own creative potential, in order to succeed professionally, artists ultimately make work for other people, unless it is seen by others then it has no value. This is why artists spend a lot of time agonising over what their audience (however this is defined) will think of the work:

So it’s kind of constant anxiety, (...) whether it’s worthwhile doing it because you know that some audiences will like it but maybe that’s not the audience you want, which makes you think who is the audience? (...) so yeah it’s kind of exhausting. [Alexander.33]

When there is no audience, the artist has failed:

Obviously no one came. And it was all a bit soul-destroying but it was really good and the show was really good (...) and then I got a bit depressed after that because no one came. [Sarah.52]

Even if the artist is producing new work, it has no value until it has been acknowledged by the art world, and for this to happen some members of the art world have to not only see it but also react to it, gaining access to these people is therefore crucial. The importance of the network is why many artists consider success to be access:

Or for instance now I get to do really difficult projects (...) that is a luxury so because I get invited to do things that other people don’t get access to (...). It’s often what I want to do and I find ways to get it done, (...) I asked a couple of backers about that and they agreed to finance it so that’s something where I’ve initiated it. [Erin.44]

As a result of the endorsement structure of the art world, value is in the hands of a few taste-making individuals within a market system and is therefore subjective, although, as it takes more than one person, a consensus of subjectivities is needed. Ideally, work is accepted in several different ways: curatorially, critically and sales-wise. It is only once an artist has accumulated a certain level of social capital however, that they can
gain access to the high-end tier of art experts who have the money and power to make things happen for them in terms of distribution. Artists careers are very much in the hands of these experts which is why as one artist put it, they are such “essentially socially-paranoid animals, we need to know where we are in these hierarchies, we’re sort of monkeys, so I think those awards and things do help” [William.45]. Artists are therefore relatively powerless as to the position they can occupy within the art world:

I mean, you never know who’s going to show you, who’s going to offer you a budget to do something. You know I did a, I don’t know, a paid sort of screening sort of 150 quid, standard appearance fee thing for a performance and stuff at the A foundation in Liverpool as part of an arts project thing and that was seen by a curator and that meant that I got, they commissioned me to do some work for the Liverpool biennial in 2008, so it’s like a knock-on effect, you kind of do stuff hoping that maybe something will happen but you can’t ever predict whether the good things are going to happen. [Chris.31]

Much of what an artist’s career trajectory depends on therefore is the power the artist has in the art world to place their work in the right places with the right people in order for it to be perceived as holding value. For the vast majority of artists, this means a long (often pointless) struggle to be accepted by the top dealers, curators and collectors:

Art is so kind of self-absorbed in many ways, you are the company, you are the brand, and how that kind of gets positioned in the world. I guess, I hope that, you know the more I think about it the more sad it is really, wanting to be accepted by these people in positions of power, I mean that’s ridiculous, why do I even care? But of course you do, you know, I want the Turbine Hall, I want a cinema film or something. [Chris.53]

Ultimately, it is a competition for power, to secure the critical attention and social capital which will move forward an artist’s career. Approval in the art market constitutes of particular people (the experts) validating the work and, by extension, the artist. Opportunities to be validated are scarce and artists are therefore continually under pressure to make connections and receive feedback. Artists are at the constant mercy of outside influences which is why their sense of self-worth and subjective success is so important. In Hong Kong this competition is not quite as obvious. In fact,
the word that kept coming up in interviews, rather than arts world, or art scene was “neighbourhood,” indeed there was a surprising lack of competition between both artists and galleries, they tend to actively support each other. These relationships tend to be factional and camp-based, artists from art schools stick together well after graduation much as they do in London, sharing studio spaces and other resources. These groups tend to be extremely close-knit: “everyone is friendly, it’s like a family” [Kai.1]. After working in their studios all day they meet in the evening for drinks and dinner: “it’s like a village more than a network” [Kai.8; Oliver.7]. Having relationships with role models from previous generations, as we have seen, is an extremely significant contingency on Hong Kong artists’ career trajectories, not just in terms of acting as examples for others but in actively promoting their peers. One artist discusses how “the first time I thought about my career seriously was when [Bruce] invited me to go to Singapore for a show” [Kai.3]. The fact that the art scene is so small does have significant advantages for emerging artists. As so few of the artists depend on their art work to live, the stakes are not as high. Even the galleries, which in London compete for their artists, in Hong Kong they generally prefer to work together, referring artists to each other, focusing on the bigger picture rather than their short-term gain [Amanda.2]. These connections are even more important than in the UK as they are needed in order to know what’s going on as the scene is still relatively underground and there is very little press on Hong Kong contemporary arts, however they are easier to make than in the UK. The network is easily expanded, one artist who had been living in New York previously was amazed at how quickly he was integrated into the local arts scene:

*Within a month I was sitting down with the major players here, it’s completely different and very open. Because there is no cult of cool, people don’t take themselves that seriously. You don’t need to pay your dues here, there are great opportunities.* [Leo.7]

Although this may sound too good to be true, this is not completely selfless, in order to emerge on the international market, there needs to be critical mass. In order to market themselves, the art scene members need to market the Hong Kong art market in general. Hong Kong artists are not struggling for approval in the Hong Kong art world but in the international art world, so there is still; competition for validation but it is at a different level.
Artists are also often in the dark as to how well they are actually doing: “it would be nice if people told you, you know, what was going on” [Chris.13]. Especially in terms of getting to certain key platforms that will move forward their careers (such as prizes, awards, representation, into museum shows, etc.) artists often feel extremely confused as to how the process works and see it as more of a game of luck rather than anything to do with genuine talent. Artists must be able to handle the haphazardness of their professional situations, there is only so much they can do in terms of making the right connections and placing themselves in the right contexts:

But you know, that’s a large part of the game, it’s dealing with rejection because most people, most curators say that see your work are going to reject you because they’ll (...) decide not to include you in their next group show, not to give you a solo show... But it’s just that one or two that do that keep the ball rolling. [Chris.35]

It is a numbers game and the numbers are not favourable to artists so curators or dealers often have to make choices on the basis of extremely subjective criteria:

You know, I wasn’t selected for the British Art Show and I would have loved to have been in that, , and that’s a short term ambition to be in some sort of survey show but that depends on like, two, three people, the curators and they don’t like my stuff or they feel like ‘well we’ve got one kooky guy who dresses up in stuff, we don’t need another one’. [Chris.54]

Another artist complained that:

My work is in Bloomberg New Contemporaries [now] and it’s up for sale and no one’s buying, it’s because I’m in the corridor again, I was in the corridor in Liverpool as well. [Sarah.47]

Although this may just be an excuse for not selling, there is some truth in the fact that the placing of a work is crucial for its sale and the artist is usually not involved in how the work does get placed both in the actual exhibition as in this case and in the wider art market. Once the work is sold, the artist no longer has any say as to what happens to it although this can severely affect their market. This instance of the work in the corridor is one example of the many factors that seem relatively unimportant in terms of the long-term career trajectory but could actually prove to be pivotal.
Many, many factors are here, I mean society is a big factor, what society asks you and gives you and the opportunities that come your way, I mean I always wanted to paint rooms, I always thought I was a mural painter but I doubt if I’ll do it now. [Henry.54]

So much of what artists do is hallucinatory or symbolic and others then load meaning and value onto them that in essence defines their contribution to the art market. Although the value of a piece of art is perceived to be intrinsic to its aesthetic qualities, this is only one part of the value as any successful forger can attest to. As well as not knowing how their work is judged, there is no real way of artists knowing when things will pick up or slow down, each new body of work being the equivalent of Russian roulette.

5.8 Taking into Account the Role of Chance

In terms of all these relationships that artists’ careers impinge upon, one of the major factors in the forming of them is chance. This is one of many examples from the interviews, this particular example focusing on a chance meeting with a collector:

Another totally random kind of occurrence was that I met [well known collector] about three weeks before (...) the show and you know and he said ‘oh you know what do you do?’ so I said ‘I’m an artist, blah, blah, blah’ you know he said ‘oh drop an invite to the [office]’ and so, you know, of course I did, I mean who wouldn’t. And I was incredibly surprised that suddenly on the day of the show I got a call from him saying ‘I’m coming down’, and was like cool, great. [Theo.59]

Chance encounters have been largely neglected from the literature on careers and life paths but Bandura (1982) argues that they play a prominent role in shaping the course of human lives and can even branch people into new trajectories of life. Roe and Baruch (1967) found that participants did not describe their career experiences as a succession of logical choices. Instead, most participants focused on the contingencies and external influences that had influenced the course of their careers. Bright et al.’s (2005) study showed that the perceived prevalence of chance events in influencing career decisions is widespread. While we cannot predict the occurrence of fortuitous encounters, Bandura (1982) does try to predict the impact fortuitous encounters have.
He argues that the power of chance encounters to cause enduring change depends on personal susceptibilities to social influence. Personal attributes therefore play a large role but so do the social systems in which the events occur, a closed social system wields strong coercive and rewarding power in which changes will be more likely. Due to the structure of the art world being so predominantly based on social relationships, fortuitous encounters are perhaps even more significant than in other careers, indeed Hart et al. (1971) found that vocational occupations were more often influenced by chance encounters than professional workers who relied on planning and preparation. Moreover, fortuitous influences are more likely to hold sway “in the absence of internal guides and normative consensus” Bandura (1982:751) argues, the fluid structure of the art world and the abstract qualities on which value is decided therefore makes chance events more likely to hold importance.

It is thus of use to look at Bandura’s (1982) criteria in determining whether a chance encounter will make an impact. First of all, skills and interests determine the circles in which people move and the kinds of social encounters they are likely to experience, thus the importance for an artist to learn the ‘language’ of the art world and participate in events such as private views where gatekeepers will be present: “individuals contribute to their own destiny by developing potentialities that afford access to particular social milieus” (750). Bandura continues by demonstrating that chance meetings are most likely to affect life courses when individuals come to like the people they meet or gain other satisfactions from them thus the necessity for artists to be able to both charm and promote themselves in an attractive way when meeting gatekeepers. Rojewski (1999), looks more specifically at how chance events affect an individual’s career development and builds on Bandura’s research. He argues that while the influence of chance on career development is largely indeterminate, an individual’s predisposition, as well as specific reactions to chance events and encounters might be anticipated. Rojewski also stresses that while chance events may not be predictable, they are not necessarily random as people seek out certain types of environments; what is determined by chance is the specific persons with whom they interact while in these environments. He continues to say that the variability in individual career patterns is influenced by the ability of the individual to recognise, interpret, react, control and cope with unexpected situations. Therefore, people can position themselves in such a way as to increase the likelihood of being
influenced, either positively or negatively, by fortuitous events depending on the people and context involved. In order to do this, certain abilities are necessary including social skills, problem-solving and transfer of knowledge. Having a well developed self-concept is also argued to be important, thus the importance for artists to have constructed a strong self-concept and artistic identity at an early stage. It may be of interest then for art schools to provide within their career development programmes, more of an emphasis and awareness of internal priorities, sensitivity to both planned and unplanned situations, an ability to evaluate and act on options when presented and interpersonal communication skills which may maximise the positive impact chance events have on the career, especially since the effects of chance are probably most acutely felt early on in the career trajectory. Existing literature fails to adequately capture the dynamic nature of the art world nor does it take into account chance events and the complexity of the influences on an artist’s career, rather it focuses all too often on a linear and static view of the art world. The marketing literature, as Brown (2005) points out, also fails to take into account serendipity in terms of accident and providence, focusing instead only on analysis, planning and control. As we see in the case of the art market, due to the way value emerges from the relationship between the artist, the object and the consumer, chance plays a strong part in which art works gain access to the market.

5.9 CONCLUSION

Both this chapter and the previous one have provided an understanding of the endorsement process that structures the art market and how art is valued within it. This chapter specifically focused on the social relationships that underlie an artist’s career trajectory and how value emerges from within them following on from previous sociological studies of the art world (Becker, 1984; Giuffre, 1999; Velthius, 2005). By understanding the way social capital is accumulated through the endorsement process and untangling the web of relationships of which the endorsement process is comprised, we can see the underlying ideologies through which art is valued and how these are constructed and temporal in nature. Moreover, it demonstrates the dynamic nature of value and the multiplicity of ways in which it is co-created through the endorsement process, highlighting the importance of collaboration and competition and arguing for a more nuanced and less static view of the endorsement process.
In addition, the importance of chance encounters in this process is demonstrated, while artists can position themselves strategically in order to amass social capital, ultimately their career is largely out of their control which, again, points out the uncertainty associated with artistic careers, both in terms of how they will be positioned by others and in terms of the creative process itself and their talent so artists are never sure as to how good their new work is and what its value will be. Art critic Jerry Saltz (2011) writes that “explaining why an all-white painting or a snow-shovel or a replica of a Brillo box is art involves a complex set of interweaving contexts, accumulated knowledge, and faith” when discussing how to present art to a lay audience; indeed as we have seen, all of these factors and more are involved in the valuation process of art and therefore affect artists’ career trajectories.

Examining the social structure of the art world also allows us to probe into the conflict which is at the heart of artistic identity: critical versus economic. Artists must balance these spheres through their careers, while continuously managing their relationships to keep building their social capital in order to be valued on the art market. As such value is shown to be created in a variety of ways both aesthetic, critical and economic and to be inherently unstable. This chapter has also argued that the art world is currently experiencing a shift towards the economic valuation of art which reinforces the need for artists to be entrepreneurs, actively managing their careers and their brand. This results in a need for skills that are rarely acknowledged in artists: not least of which include networking, marketing, promotion, collaboration and communication skills which artists must use strategically in order to achieve success in the art world. Moreover, some ‘types’ of people are better suited to managing these careers and therefore adding value to their work, than others, research on boundaryless careers has found that personality variables affect individuals’ success and career satisfaction (Kilduff & Day, 1994; Seibert et al., 1999; Eby et al., 2003). How these skills are used to navigate the career is the focus of the next chapter where branding theory will be used to unpick this further; both highlighting the inherent inconsistencies that artists need to negotiate in marketing their product and also in examining the relationship between the artist and the work.
6. Art(ist) Brands

“The art form of the 21st century is marketing... the Sotheby’s auction was the work”
– Germaine Greer on Damien Hirst’s auction, the first auction to focus entirely on one living artist (2008)

As established in the previous chapter, the market is becoming the central mechanism through which art is valued. In line with this, artists have been forced to shape their careers around the market. The growing impact of the market (and this is not limited to the art market) means that brands are part of an increasingly dominant market, economic and commercial ideoscape (Schroeder & Salzer-Morling, 2006). In line with this there has been increasing managerial and academic interest in brands, the process of branding and the value of brands. Consumers are widely considered to construct and perform identities and self-concepts, trying out new roles and creating their identity within, and in collaboration with, brand culture (Schroeder, 2005). Brown (2006) argues that brand culture is in tune with the art-for-mart’s-sake mindset that characterises the postmodern condition whereby everyday life is aestheticised. As such, art provides a rich arena to investigate the branding process as it is an arena in which image and symbol drive brand value. Indeed, branding theory provides us with a lens through which we can further investigate how artists and their work are branded, exposing the complex structure of the art market in which artists must operate and how this contributes to the valuation of art. In the visual arts market, as we have discussed, the value and integrity of the product is inextricably linked to the value and integrity of the artist themselves and is marketed as such. The product is marketed as the embodiment of the artist and as such the brand is both a product of and an influence on artistic identity. Moreover, as a cultural product, the brand meanings are neither static nor totally controllable and contain a number of inherent contradictions that artists must negotiate including temporal, financial, authenticity and other contextual issues. This chapter will focus on how artists construct their brand (not necessarily a conscious decision) in collaboration with other art professionals, examining the relationship between the artist and the product they create, how identity and branding feed into each other and how the brand is consumed in the market. In order to unpack the complexity of branding in the art world, the chapter draws on a variety of branding theories although the emphasis is on cultural approaches to branding as it is found to be the most fitting when discussing art.
6.1 THE ARTIST AS ENTREPRENEUR

As we have covered, networking, relationship-building, word-of-mouth marketing, opportunity recognition and creative thinking are necessary for artists to succeed in the market. All these skills are entrepreneurial skills, and in effect artists are running their own businesses. Although few of the artists interviewed thought of themselves as entrepreneurs they all mentioned that they had to spend time on “the management thing,” involving large amounts of administration, especially as they became more successful when “it becomes even more like a professional enterprise in a way, you know” (which it is) [Chris.62]. A recent survey of American arts graduates found that more than six in ten were self-employed and 14% had founded their own company demonstrating the extent to which artists must be entrepreneurial in constructing their careers (SNAAP, 2011). A successful career is very much based on business savvy, as we have evidenced, artists have to sustain the level of their prices, making sure that they are not too high; gain and keep the backing of the key gatekeepers in the market; achieve critical attention as well as commercial success; and keep one step ahead of the competition, of which there is a lot. This is not necessarily new, Tintoretto is a great example of an artist-entrepreneur, he successfully overturned a Venetian arts establishment that was completely controlled by Titian by identifying a new set of customers (who were less grand than those who supported Titian) and changing the way that art was produced (working much faster than other artists and painting frescoes and furniture as well).

Fillis (2004) examines the artist as an entrepreneurial marketer, suggesting that traditional marketing frameworks fail to recognise the non-linear, flexible and chaotic nature of the marketing environment for small businesses. He suggests that the marketing approach needed in the arts environment is more flexible, closer to customers and more capable of adapting and implementing creative change. This is in line with calls to look beyond production issues in brand management for a wider view of their interaction with the wider culture through time (Bergvall, 2006). As we have seen in the last chapter, artists need to manage their career trajectory through a series of relationships in order to access the market and be valued. This chapter argues that those who are successful in doing so need a strong brand identity and image that is temporal in that it responds to the market as well as allowing the artist to develop creatively and yet is recognisable and stable enough to maintain social capital,
ensuring sales. This follows on from Schroeder’s (2005) research which notes that artists have been using various marketing strategies for years, including the creation of distinctive products, brand extensions into other genres and media, the nurturing of exclusivity, etc. Furthermore, the approach taken here will focus on the ‘corporate’ brand or ‘house of brands’ of the artist within which exist several product lines and individual product brands. This approach is based on the findings set out in previous chapters in terms of the artist’s self-worth and career being rooted in their artistic identity and values. As such the art works created are presented as an embodiment of the artist and artists must market their identities (or a version of it) as well as the products they create: “You’re self-employed, you’re basically a business and the business is yourself, it’s really tricky” [Jude.47].

The way the artist is branded is similar to how Cashmore and Parker (2003) describe the process through which celebrities are made: “...it is [the] commodification of the human form [...] the process by which people are turned into “things”, things to be adored, respected, worshipped, idolized, but perhaps more importantly, things which are themselves produced and consumed” (215). The use of celebrity endorsement has been widely acknowledged in marketing (see Erdogan, 1999), and artists have often been used for this purpose (see Murakami’s collaboration with Louis Vuitton for example). McCracken (1989) in particular, examines how celebrities work as a ‘meaning transfer’ whereby product properties become associated with desirable qualities of the commodified celebrity. He develops a three-stage process where culture and consumption interact, creating a system of meaning movement so some of the meanings of the celebrity become the meanings of the product. This process is useful because unlike most mainstream theories of branding, it takes into account changes through time. In the art market this transfer of meaning is even more important than in traditional celebrity endorsement because the product is actually created by the artist not just endorsed although, again, the experts do endorse the product and therefore are involved in the brand building process. Therefore we need to example how artists capitalise on their social capital in order to be branded. Indeed, one of the major developments in the art discourse of the last ten years has been the ascent of ‘art news’ replacing ‘art criticism’ as the centre of discussion. There has been an enormous proliferation of writing about the art scene, with people much more interested in reading reports on the art world than reviews of
art. This also seems to be true of the wider celebrity culture which Pringle (2004) directly links to the media environment. People are more inflamed by the latest institutional scandal or art-related celebrity sighting than they are by discussion of what, exactly, makes an artwork good. It seems that the art scene has swallowed the art itself.

Reitlinger’s (1961) analysis of auction records from the 18th century demonstrates that to some extent, artists have always been branded as their reputation and status in society determined the prices they achieved. Certain artists achieve a celebrated status and thereby gain the influence to define a whole realm of art and dominate the market. They can take advantage of this by mass producing work in that style which, while limiting in terms of creativity, is financially rewarding. For example, Benjamin West, although largely forgotten in the annals of art history now, made more money than any other painter while alive and his judgment on art was valued more than any other’s in the art world (Flexner, 1967). This follows from the socially constructed character of the art world that has been highlighted throughout this thesis. Certain artists are selected by dealers, curators and collectors who then collectively position them as leaders of the market, thereby redefining what is and is not considered ‘good’ art in accordance with their objectives and using the artist as a short-hand mechanism to represent the quality of that movement or style, thereby branding them. The Impressionists, for example, in conjunction with their dealers and critics, essentially created their own brand name (Wijnberg & Gemser, 2000). The selected artist therefore becomes the representative of that movement. This is why certain artists command several times as much as any other. Other artists who are bound up in the movement then receive brand recognition by being co-branded in their associations, so for example Turner’s followers achieved old-master status in the 1850’s due to the value attached to Turner’s work (Reitlinger, 1961). Both the artist and the movement are branded but although some value can be obtained by being part of a movement, being associated to an artist who is considered a major influence on the movement is much more valuable in terms of co-branding. This is because the artist serves to personify the values attached to the movement and this is what gives the movement its brand equity (although this erodes in time). From a stakeholder perspective (whether at the level of dealer, curator or collector), the brand position of the artist is important in reducing risk when buying art. Brand equity therefore derives
from the social capital the artist has accumulated as we shall analyse further on. An example Reitlinger gives of a market-leader is that of Francesco Guardi who achieved auction records after the Second World War despite not being considered particularly important today. Reitlinger argues that his appeal sprang from a “smart, easily recognised style and an obvious decorative quality” (225). Recognition is a key feature in branding although it is no guarantee of taste which is why Reitlinger can state that “the history of taste (...) is so often bad taste” (241). In fact, the very notion of taste (on which art works are valued) is based on subjective cultural, social and historical contexts whereby certain values or myths are endorsed over others, thus the importance of cultural branding (more of which further on) as more mainstream mind-share notions of branding do not take these changes into account.

Although, as Reitlinger (1961) reveals, artists being branded is nothing new, the extent to which these brands are part of the commercial marketplace is. As the art market has grown rapidly in the past couple of decades, its influence on artists has heightened. While art has always been a commodity, the way art is commodified and the speed of commodification has changed. In a media-driven society, artists require a clear brand position and unique profile to differentiate themselves from the competition. This is part of the wider mediatisation of society and culture that has been observed in various social fields. In mediatised social fields, individuals have a potential advantage when they are media-savvy and able to become a media personality or celebrity (Driessens, 2011). McCracken (2005) argues that the celebrity world is “one of the most potent sources of cultural meaning at the disposal of the marketing system and the individual consumer” (113). Celebrities have been largely ignored in consumer culture theory, as noted by Hewer and Brownlie (2009) but as Pringle (2004) argues, one of the most powerful tools in brand building is celebrity because “celebrity sells” (20). Hewer and Brownlie examine the ‘Nigella brand,’ where Nigella’s celebrity status is exploited as a mode of production in the service of marketing ends, resulting in what they call ‘celebritisation.’

To return to the art world, Kerrigan et al.’s (2011) study of Warhol as a celebrity demonstrates how Warhol purposively built his art and celebrity persona into a brand that could be commodified and distributed. Indeed, Warhol’s brand is the most successful example of an artist as a brand in the art market, and is still strong twenty-five years after the artist’s death as evidenced by his continuous presence in
Artpiece’s top 3 annual ranking of top artists calculated by auction revenue since its creation in 2003 (Artpiece, 2003-11). He is the classic example of the recognised and respected artist brand, and was the most honest about his intentions to do so, never denying his obsession with art as a business and getting publicity to achieve prominence. According to this model of the artist as brand, reputation, image and credibility are intangible assets that can mobilise forms of social attraction from followers and fans to develop a sustained visibility that results in brand equity. The artist brand is therefore socially constructed and negotiated as the result of social interaction and can then be produced and consumed. Warhol profitably made use of the media in creating his brand, using his eccentric personality, edginess and style to create an aura of mystery which became a key element of his brand identity. This is why it can be said that “Warhol’s life has become his defining work of art,” the boundaries between his brand identity and his life are indivisible and indeed it is not just the product he created that is consumed but the artist himself and his celebrity (Kerrigan et al., 2011:25). Warhol understood the inherent instability of identity and continually re-imagined himself according to branding logic in order to continue generating attention and awareness and capitalising on his celebrity (one way in which he did this was by endorsing other brands). Moreover, as Warhol became his own brand manager he acted as a house of brands building up a portfolio of brand extensions, willing to endorse a variety of products by no means limited to the art market in order to further increase his brand awareness.

Although not all artists purposively brand themselves as Warhol did, this thesis argues that if they are successful in the market, they have been branded to a certain extent. Following on directly from Warhol’s branding initiatives, the marketisation of art became more and more prominent, as noted in the previous chapter. In the UK, this can be largely traced to the rise of the Young British Artists (YBA) in the 1990’s. Hirst, the star of the YBAs acknowledges that “Andy Warhol made it cool for artists to deal with money” (Hirst, 2011). The YBAs in fact serve as a line in the sand, the interviews conducted showed a marked generational gap from pre- to post-YBA as noted in the first empirical chapter, in terms of artists’ attitudes to the market, to production and to how they manage their careers which has had an effect on the art produced. The pre-YBA model of an active embrace of low-profile and non-success has largely disappeared. While the older artists interviewed were
terrified of “going into production” or doing anything “for money” [Henry.66], the emerging artists readily admitted being “fairly ambitious” and wanting “money and I want to be able to live” [Theo.6; Alexander.4]. In fact, according to one definition, the transition from small to mid-sized business comes at fifty employees, so by that measure artists such as Jeff Koons or Damien Hirst are well on their way to being corporations. As art has become increasingly commodified the power structure of the art world itself has changed as discussed in the review of the literature:

*I suppose, you know the world has changed an awful lot in art, more than other worlds I think, maybe technology as well has changed that much, but art has REALLY [her emphasis] changed, what it’s become especially in Britain where it’s public entertainment largely in some ways.* [Erin.53]

The speed of commodification or what one artist called the “sausage machine” has picked up extraordinarily, whereby living artists are now regularly sold at auction, the number of art schools and artists has risen dramatically, and artists’ expectations have been shaped by the market success of artists such as Damien Hirst [William.60]:

*When I graduated in the late 70’s there were no careers to be had in art, there was no money. And I was in my 40’s before I began to in any sense make a living out of it, and given that in the early 90’s you had Damien Hirst and Rachel Whiteread and that whole so-called YBA thing, making lots of money just out of college, that was unimaginable when I graduated and the problem now is that students expect that, we had no expectations.* [Martin.40]

In fact, Damien Hirst is the best example of the artist as entrepreneur, he realised that nouveau-riche collectors would pay extraordinary sums for art and upturned the art world by selling his work directly through Sotheby’s, successfully making £70.5 million on the day that Lehman Brothers collapsed (Greer, 2008). The difficulty with this model is that art is sold on an increasingly utilitarian or instrumental level which could be unsustainable as it presumes an ever-increasing rise in the economic value of the art market for both artists and collectors. In order to survive within this model, artists need to brand both themselves and their products as commodities for the market. Emerging artists are therefore much more aware of the market than their predecessors, art schools providing marketing classes to prime students to professionally enter the art world, organisations provide information about
sponsorship and funding opportunities so, as one artist commented, the market has become an “unquestioned background reality” [Faye.3]. This translates into increased pressure to develop the brand (and the artistic identity which is at its core) rapidly and conform to the market:

*I think [the art market] can be very influential. It’s such a conspicuous presence and I think it plays a bigger role in what happens now than it ever did in the past. I think it is inevitable that that will filter into what sort of work gets made or what sort of work gets exposure.* [Matt.11]

Those who do not play along with the market structure will lose out as one art school tutor commented:

*And I do feel for them, and it’s a very dangerous time, (...) I sort of am aware of students, the difficulties they have after graduating, students that are really very talented but aren’t the ones that will brand themselves, it is a difficult, dangerous time.* [Faye.44]

As set out in the literature on the art market, the rise of the Chinese contemporary art market is also largely the result of commodification and branding initiatives. This thesis argues that the main reason that Hong Kong artists are still emerging and are overshadowed by the international success as their mainland peers who command much higher prices, is because they are not part of the same ‘branded’ genres that have done so well at auction. Their work tends to be less political, less high-impact or in-your-face and more conceptual than the mainstream:

*The Chinese mainland market versus Hong Kong arts is like night and day, here it is much more reflective and introspective. Less about political statement. No Mao, no bright red, smaller work, more impressionistic palate choices.* [Leo.4]

While the numbers in terms of attendance and sales at the Hong Kong Art Fair have been phenomenal, with its $11,000 entrance fee in 2010 there were only about 14 Hong Kong galleries in attendance of which only two actually showed Hong Kong artists. As one disgruntled local artist, whose work was in the fair but had to get representation by a Beijing gallery to do so, argues: “the art fair doesn’t promote Hong Kong art or local artists it’s just about making money” and speculators know that money is found in mainland artists rather than Hong Kong artists [Iris.11].
market is constructed and controlled by the major international players and they leave little space for young, emerging, domestic artists thus the difficulties of being a professional artist in Hong Kong as discussed in the first empirical chapter [April.3].

Because, as we have seen, the Hong Kong art market is auction-led, auctions determine the interests of any local collectors that do exist, they follow the market patterns of the early adopters, (who largely consist of the expatriates who have been collecting since the 90’s (Joy & Sherry, 2004)), playing it safe and finding confidence and affirmation in the branded mainland artists who are “on the rise,” as one local artist put it: “it’s like buying stock, it's just about investment” [Peter.3]. Hong Kong artists are rarely seen at auction (the first time they appeared at all was in Spring 2009 at Sotheby’s) and the galleries mainly show the saleable, mainland Chinese artists which sees them accused of “cashing in on mainland art to make a quick buck” by local artists [Amy.5]. Demand, stays rooted in the branded mainland work, as one dealer complains: “I have been told to sell Chinese [mainland] artists but there are no original ideas at the moment. But I could make more money so it’s tempting” [April.5]. The discourse of creativity versus sales is therefore as problematic in the East as it is in the West. Moreover, unlike in the West, collectors in Asia do not tend to start cheap, when they have money they go straight to the most important categories of art, either ceramics or Impressionist work, bypassing the cheaper local, contemporary work which is where Western collectors usually start their collections and develop their tastes [Debbie.5]. This is much like general consumer trends in Asia whereby luxury products are extremely popular (Husic & Cicik, 2009). The collector-base for contemporary then, is generally younger and less risk-taking than that found in the West as they are intimidated by contemporary art due to a lack of art education [Jehan.3]. As in the UK, we see that being branded as part of a movement such as ‘Cynical Realism’ is extremely advantageous and again, location matters, so being from Hong Kong does not have the appeal of Beijing artists [April.8].

As we have seen the success of the Chinese contemporary market is a new phenomenon, dating back to the early 2000’s and although Chinese, its development and framing happened in the West. In terms of artist creation the West has been the tastemaker, branding certain elements of contemporary Chinese art as innovative and valuable and marketing it as such based on Western stereotypes of Communism and the East as noted by Robertson (2008). Indeed, even now, most of the big galleries in
China are run either by foreigners or Chinese citizens educated abroad [Emilia.10]. As the major branded blue-chip galleries such as Gagosian and White Cube are moving in, we can see a growing division between local artists and the art market. While money is being made in the Hong Kong art market, it is doing little to develop the Hong Kong arts scene, thus the importance for Hong Kong artists to band together to promote a Hong Kong identity (that is differentiated from that of the mainland) which is why their work tends to be characterised by local markers such as Cantonese inscriptions, a preoccupation with space, and local popular culture references.

6.2 Brand Identity

Russell Belk’s seminal paper on the extended self argues that “we are what we have;” in the case of artists however, this thesis argues that it is more of a case of ‘we are what we make’ (Belk, 1988:139). As we saw when discussing artistic identity and notions of authenticity, artists invest considerable self-worth in their work, defining themselves as artists first and foremost. This is why O’Reilly (2005) argues that the creative process is self-orientated as much as it is product-oriented. Indeed, the literature on professional identity necessarily discusses personal identity, so for example, Pratt et al. (2006) find that identity construction is triggered by the need to reduce gaps in terms of a mismatch between what professionals do and who they are. Just as Belk found there to be a diminished sense of self when possessions are lost or stolen, artists also seem to experience a diminished sense of self when failing to create work (whether due to lack of time, money or inspiration) and in failing to achieve recognition. Important works function as reminders and confirmers of artists’ identities, serving as markers in their life histories:

*Making art is a pivotal moment. Making certain art works takes you up another level or whatever (...) so they would be major moments I would say.* [Jude.35]

As we have shown, loss of power or control over the art is potentially traumatic due to the fact that it is very much seen as a part of the self (for example when artists first get representation or when their work is sold at auction which is why so many successful artists often buy work back¹¹). Through the process of creating their art, artists manage their identities and the process works two-ways because the way the art is

¹¹Hirst, for example spent £500,000 buying back a medicine cabinet he had sold to Saatchi for £500 (Robecchi, 2010).
received in the market also becomes internalised and part of the identity which is why
the artistic identity and notions as to what constitute an ‘authentic’ artist changes as
artists become socialised into the art world. So getting a good critical reception will
allow for a greater sense of self-worth and status while failing to do so will lead to
diminished self-worth and status both in artists’ own eyes and the eyes of others who
judge an artist based on their work: “no one came [to solo show] and it was all a bit
soul-destroying” [Sarah.73].

The art work essentially acts as an advertisement for the self, both to others
and through the circular process through which artistic identity is created and
managed, to the artist themself. Art works therefore function as anchors for artists’
identities in a similar way to how material possessions do so for consumers, the
uniqueness and authenticity of the work being at the root of the identity concept (Belk,
1988). When the artists interviewed discussed their careers they frequently discussed
the product as an extension of themselves, for example one artist discusses working
with a dealer “who decided he was interested in selling me” [Erin.50]. The artist needs
to be as marketable as their products, so one of the artist’s interviewed suggested he
was in a difficult position as a: “middle-aged, white, middle-class male, it’s not
exactly got easy marketing or sexy written all over it” [William.58]. This
phenomenon also explains the emphasis artists place on long-term success and
becoming a part of art history as the work is a way for artists to achieve continuity
and outlive their physical existence. Belk further hypothesises that as the individual’s
core self and identity becomes stronger, the less need there is for possessions to form
a part of the extended self which could explain why, as artists become more secure in
their artistic identity through critical and commercial success, selling becomes less
painful and control can be relinquished to a certain extent.

In the case of the artist then, identity is actively constructed out of the works
of art produced and is also consumed as such:

*But it’s what people read into what an artist represents in terms of value, you
talk about a Damien Hirst rather than a work about Damien Hirst, people want
to buy into him, it’s kind of creepy really.* [Faye.46]

There is a need for coherence between the brand identity of the product and that of the
artist thus the need for artists to buy into certain stereotypes of the artist which can
cause significant distress for the artist. The brand functions as a symbolic device through which consumers can buy into this identity and as such comprises both the art work itself (which in effect is the face of the brand) but also the whole past history of the artist and their career trajectory which have formed the artistic identity. As with CEO brands (Bendisch, et al., forthcoming), the personality of the artistic brand is largely based on the personality, or at least perceived personality of the artist. Dion and Arnould (2011) find that the legitimacy of a charismatic creative director is essential in luxury retail strategy and at the centre of the brand, this is also true for the artist. This links back to the notion of Benjamin’s ‘aura’ or cult value (1968), again illustrated by the forgery or reproduction which is of no value because it lacks the hand of the creator that is present in the original. “The presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity” Benjamin argued, so any reproduction, however perfect, lacks the essence of the original and its authority (220). Part of the appeal of authenticity is in the fantasy that one may own and capture the aura of the work itself which allows the buyer to share in the power of the object’s authority. One artist who understood this is Gavin Turk, one of the YBAs whose Royal College of Art degree show in 1991 featured an empty studio with a ceramic plaque on the wall stating “Borough of Kensington/Gavin Turk Sculptor/Worked here 1989-1991,” (figure 6.1 below) a direct attempt to construct a reputation despite the absence of any actual ‘work.’ The plaque functioned in branding the artist, the name ‘Gavin Turk’ becoming connected (before its time) to an iconography of artist myth-making and the marketing of heritage. Later work created life-size waxwork self-portraits of himself in a number of familiarly iconic guises, including Che Guevara, a direct reference to the way artists are portrayed as heroes and the way in which reputation is gained and status conferred. However, most artists are not as comfortable as Turk is, Hodgkin, for example discusses his “total incomprehension” when he realised that “when somebody buys a picture by Cézanne, they don’t buy a picture of some apples, they don’t buy a picture of Mont Ste Victoire (...), they buy a Cézanne” (1981). Any gap between the brand identity and the artist’s reputation and image will therefore undermine the brand’s credibility and reputation which is why artists must keep behaving in a way ‘fit’ to their brand identity as they are interdependent, staging charismatic authority. The works and the cultivated persona of the artist become interchangeable and part of a singular trademark.
Self-marketing and person branding have become popular in the personal development industry, especially in the US. However, they do not figure very largely in the academic marketing literature and there has been a call for more research in the area to determine the differences between them and traditional product brands (Bendisch et al., forthcoming). Bensisch et al.’s (forthcoming) analysis of CEOs as brands is a notable exception, it argues that personal brands are different from other brands because personality is at the core of a people brand. Conventional product and corporate branding techniques may therefore be inappropriate or inadequate for people brands. Brand identity is therefore particularly important to people brands, and brand equity comes from congruency between the brand identity as viewed from the creators’ perspective and the brand reputation as perceived by stakeholders. The brand is only of value therefore if it appeals to multiple stakeholder groups and achieves a long-term reputation, in fact the person brand is not the person, it is the public perception of the person and their abilities. Identity enjoys high value in brand circles. Companies, organisations and brand managers are all exhorted to create, maintain and express a coherent and compelling identity (Schroeder & Salzer-Morling, 2006). At the core of an artist’s brand then is the artistic identity. This is the central ideology or platform from which all the work evolves, while it contains a number of complex and contradictory concepts, in order to be successful it must be communicated clearly. This identity articulates who the artist is and what they stand for compared to others and is therefore the conceptual anchor for both differentiation and belonging, operating as the central thread for the work and making it recognisable as by that
particular artist. Of the artists interviewed, even those who did not consider themselves commercial were found to have a central concept holding together their body of work, what makes the work commercial is the way this identity is branded.

Indeed, De Chernatony (2001) goes so far as to argue that the route for commercial success is to be found in the creation of strong brand identity. While identity has an internal focus, brands have an external focus and are formed around this identity. Brand identity therefore evolves from the artistic identity which is personal and individually-driven and the brand identity takes into account value added from various stakeholders which influence the artistic identity in a cyclical process. Bendisch et al. (forthcoming) argue that this can lead to ‘role stress’ if the expectations of the brand identity conflict with personal values. The potential conflict of personal (artistic in the case of artists) and brand identity is unique to people and is of particular importance for artists due to the tension between art and commerce. Person brands are therefore complex, especially as they are inextricably linked with the brand of their various stakeholders. Successful brands create worlds that consumers buy into and this is particularly true for art which has little utilitarian value. The way this brand is constructed and managed temporally is therefore extremely important and the rest of this chapter will focus on how the brand must negotiate certain underlying contradictions of the art market, shaping and re-shaping their identities. Therefore branding theory is found useful here not so much as a guide as to how to create a successful artist brand but as a lens through which we can understand how artists operate in the art market.

Mainstream branding theory is used for the analysis in terms of focusing on the ‘added values’ that make an art work or artist valuable as well as generic notions of brand identity and brand positioning that differentiate the brand from its competitors, all applicable to the art market. However, this theory is found to be too limited in scope, treating brands as removed from culture and consumers. Cultural branding theory, as developed by Douglas Holt (2004), is therefore also used as it allows for a more multifaceted understanding of branding and allows us to consider the various contradictions artists must overcome in their careers. Moreover, as art is a cultural product, it is essential to emphasise how meaning is produced and circulated on a macro-level, and, as we have seen this is affected temporally. Inspired by cultural studies (see Lury’s (2004) analysis of brands operating as a force in the organisation
of production since the mid-19th century, for example), this perspective broadens the focus of analysis from an individual consumer level, or the simple transaction between a marketer and a consumer to a macro-level. In this sense, the brand is a “cultural artefact moving through history” (Holt, 2004:215). Cultural branding theory also allows us to consider the identity projects of consumers as the brand is a storyteller that connects with these. Consumers are seen to construct and perform identities and self-concepts within and in collaboration with, brand culture in the wider brandscape (e.g. Borgerson & Schroeder, 2002; Soloman et al., 2002; Thompson & Arsel, 2004; Salzer-Morling & Stannegard, 2004). This is found to be applicable to the art market due to the symbolic values associated to art works. Cultural branding therefore allows us to consider how value is co-created and co-consumed and how this is related to identity issues, although we are extending this to not only include consumers but also the producers due to the link between the artist and the work they create. We shall start our analysis of branding theory in relation to the art market where we left off in the last chapter, focusing on social networks and relationships.

6.3 **Internal / External Stakeholders**

The brand management literature places much emphasis on issues of brand image, this thesis argues that while these are of course important, it is external and therefore to understand brands we must first look at the internal, brand building process through which a range of actors contribute to the brand identity and image. Brands need to take into account the needs of everyone in the value chain and these various stakeholder perspectives constantly interact and influence each other reciprocally as we examined in the last chapter. The art brand has to operate on at least two different levels: the organisational level for ‘insiders’ or gatekeepers who work with the artists to help promote the product, influence consumers by defining brand criteria requirements and provide information for the wider consumer category of collectors, essentially bestowing or rescinding the brand’s authenticity and legitimacy (for example dealers and curators) and the wider consumer level (including collectors) which are essentially ‘followers’. As we have covered, relationships are key to artists’ success, this is because it is through these relationships that the brand attains added values. The difference between a brand and a commodity can be summed up by ‘added values’. A brand is more than just a sum of its component parts.
It embodies, for the purchaser, additional attributes, which, whilst they might be considered to be ‘intangible,’ are still real, as such authenticity is considered a central component of a brand (Heding et al., 2009). Towle’s (2003) research on celebrity branding emphasises these intangible assets in terms of reputation, image and credibility.

In the art market, much of these added values come from the endorsement of experts. Over time, ideas about the product from this network of relationships accumulate and fill the brand markers with meaning from which value is achieved. A brand emerges when these collective understandings become firmly established. As established in the previous chapter, value in the market comes from these relationships in line with viral branding where if the brand succeeds among certain tastemakers or gatekeepers, it spreads like a virus. Art brands are created primarily through artistic values and identity but it is the quality of how these are communicated that decides whether a brand will live or die. Indeed, Hede and Thyne (2007) find that brand communications are essential in establishing the authenticity of literary heritage attractions. This is why relationships are so essential to artists. The value in these relationships for the artist is that they are able to propagate the artistic identity to the mass audience, not just providing access to the market but also filling its markers with meaning and giving the work value. Moreover, if they are already branded institutions themselves (major galleries, collectors, museums, prizes etc.) they can draw the artist’s brand into an existing myth or reinvent the brand myth by repackaging them. Brand management is not only about building brands but also brand leveraging in borrowing brand value through associations with other brands (Uggla, 2006). In fact, the whole endorsement process through which art works are valued can be considered one massive co-branding initiative. We have already examined how social capital is transferred between art professionals to add value to the art work; particularly important are galleries in terms of co-branding as we shall discuss in a moment. Brands in this sense provide consumers with the added value of increased confidence and these relationships can be indicative of a low risk product.

One of the key features of a brand in branding theory is its use as a risk reducer (Roselius, 1971), brands in the art market also serve this role. Collectors generally seek to make decisions based on a few pieces of selective information (Velthius, 2005). The extent to which they will seek information about brands and the
extent of the information search are influenced by an array of factors such as time pressure and previous experience. Novice collectors, especially those from emerging art markets who are looking towards art as a financial investment, are likely to rely on market results in their purchasing behaviour and follow the advice of experts at auction houses or major galleries and museums as will be discussed in more detail further on (Melikian, 2009). This is why the artist has to rely on others in order to become branded and to fight through the considerable ‘noise’ in the market.

All this contemporary and modern art that people want to buy into it but they don’t know much about it necessarily so they rely upon sort of the credit rating agencies which are the curators and the museums to see whether it’s ok or not. [William.62]

Again, this highlights the insularity of the art world, whereby the pyramid of trust is needed in order for the artist to access a market. It has been found that of all the marketing variables, it is the brand name which receives the most attention by consumers and is a key influencer of their perceptions of quality (De Chernatony, 2001). This is certainly true in the art market where collectors spend millions on the top branded artists at the top branded galleries, art fairs or auctions. Established brands are an insurance against financial risk, as one gallerist argued “the art market as a whole is just too timid to step outside that idea of what is commercial” [Lucas.24]. Brand equity creates cues to memory and the brands provide a summary of information for consumers, they are used as a form of ‘mental shorthand’. Moreover, by buying within the prestigious brands, collectors feel their status is increased through cultural capital, gaining credibility and authority (De Chernatony & McDonald, 1992). Bourdieu’s notion of cultural capital (1984) explains how power and status is conferred in social relations. Possessing a work of art means possessing objectified cultural capital, something which distinguishes art works from most other consumer goods. On a wider level, one can ‘consume’ a work of art (in terms of understanding its cultural meaning) only if one has the proper conceptual or historical cultural capital, whose transmission does not necessarily accompany the sale of the work. Therefore while the gatekeepers of the art market have considerable cultural capital in terms of their art historical knowledge, collectors must acquire cultural capital and they do so to varying degrees. If collectors decide to continue collecting more in-depth they will start to become more informed, learning how to interpret art
and evaluate different styles. With more experience, the collector will become more confident, critical and sophisticated, experimenting with other artists and galleries, the vast majority of collectors however, do not get this far and remain loyal to a few key experts for their decisions, happy to stick to objectified cultural capital rather than true cultural capital.

Due to the endorsement process through which art is valued, once a brand has been heavily bought into by investors (which can be collectors or dealers), they will continue to validate it in order for their investment to retain its value. This is only achieved by the very top artists or ‘names,’ one of the artists interviewed aptly noted that this was not his case: “it’s not like I’m some sort of name” [Theo.93]. In fact, as we have covered, once the brand is established as a financial investment the artwork is no longer being judged, it is still going to sell at a high price as there is a lot of money and promotion making sure that it works. The classic example as we have seen is Damien Hirst. As a brand, Hirst is impervious to art criticism, he is an entirely commodifiable asset whose status is so strong it can now withstand what art criticism says about the work. The brand was built on critical values in that it achieved value from gatekeepers due to its innovative characteristics but money has taken over and the only thing that will affect the value of the brand now is market forces which work much like in the housing market or any other type of market asset. So although value judgments about art start out as subjective judgments based on critical criteria, there is a methodology to follow in the business of it due to the investment-behaviour of collectors.

As we have noted, dealers in particular are essential in managing the artist’s career, especially concerning the marketing and branding of the product. The reason artists are not considered serious until they have representation: “if you don’t have a gallery then you’re probably not selling work then you’re probably on quite a low level let’s face it” [Jude.39], is due to the importance of the gallery in marketing the work. In fact, if we continue with the example of Hirst, his success is as much due to his London gallery, White Cube and their PR strategies and control and support of his market (often buying his work at auction to ensure its value stays up) as it is to his own efforts. The dealer is therefore a key figure in the branding process, they package and place the artist in the market, generating the awareness necessary to start building the brand and attaching the notion of quality to it. They are also the ones who tend to
‘label’ the artist, positioning and differentiating them within certain movements or styles which gives the artist instant brand recognition (although the artist may have positioned themself already, the dealer’s positioning is considered more authentic as it is external). Dealers also perpetuate the vision of the art world as a populist world (more on this below when we look at the critical/commercial tension), even though they are commercially-driven businesses, they build up a mystique around the art to perpetuate the myths which is why they use terms such as ‘placing’ instead of ‘buying’ or ‘selling.’ These myths are more likely to be believed by consumers when they are coming from others rather than any self-marketing by the artist.

In effect, the brand is created by the dealer as their name substantially raises the value of the brand equity (this varies according to the dealer but any dealer is considered better than none). Due to the importance of dealers in the distribution network of the work, when choosing to work with a dealer, artists need to identify dealers’ objectives and align their brands with those dealers whose aims most closely match their own. This is in line with corporate branding where the values, beliefs and aesthetic sensitivity held by all the employees (or in this case partners) of the company (in this case the artist) become key elements in terms of the credibility and relevance of the brand to external stakeholders (Schultz & Hatch, 2006). How the artistic identity and strategic vision of the artist is embodied and expressed by these art professionals is key to the success or failure of a brand. If the people the artist works with do not mirror their brand values it will cause underlying identity issues for the artist which will be damaging in the long-term. Their behaviour can support or damage the brand. Strategic brand management (Elliott & Percy, 2007) examines identity issues involved in brand ownership but in this case, brand ownership is more nebulous than the mainstream literature accounts for. While theoretically the artist owns the brand, other actors such as dealers make that difficult. The difficulty for the artist is that at this point the brand is a bit of a Frankenstein, no longer controlled by its creator. In fact, this is the reason many of the most successful artists such as Warhol and Hirst are considered by many to be victims of their own success, as the business takes over, control is in the hands of the dealer or the business manager and they are primarily interested in profit-seeking. As dealers continue to position the artist in the market, trying to generate ever-higher prices, the artist loses their creative freedom and as their artistic identity can no longer be attached to core notions of
artistic freedom and authenticity they must root it to notions of commercial success, thereby achieving the transformation from the naïve, creative innocent purist to the market-savvy, mercenary entrepreneur-profiteer. This, of course is simplifying things but there is an adjustment that has to be made as the artist becomes a brand, moving from the critical to the commercial. Ultimately, the brand has a life and meaning of its own, distinct from the artist’s identity who gave it existence. This is especially visible looking at how the value of an artist’s work changes after their death, most artists who were celebrated while living are now forgotten and their work of no value, only a few, select artists of the past still communicate successfully and make record-breaking sales at auction. The art that passes the test of time has maintained its key added values which are rooted in history, rarity and craftsmanship. Contemporary art does not hold the same values due to a change in the discourse of authenticity moving away from technique, thus the importance of stories, image and marketing in the branding of it which will be explored further in this chapter.

As we have discussed, achieving a coherent brand image becomes even more difficult when artists start selling internationally to different markets, brand meaning is known to change across different cultural contexts (Eisingerich & Rubera, 2010). While galleries may help to package the art differently for different markets, artists need to be aware of the need to balance their brand between global coherence and local adaptation. This involves centralised brand leadership but not necessarily a single global brand. As one established artist discussed “there are different triggers that will make things work” in different countries. So while:

In Spain it’s the mentality of the artist, that’s what people want to know about, they want to know who you are and what you feel and think about the world and here [in the UK] they want to know about the product, you know what’s the product and how are you going to deal with the product. [Erin.55]

So in a way, she suggests it is more about “how the thing is placed” rather than the actual product, which again highlights the importance of relationships in the art market in managing the brand. A great example of how a brand is constructed is New York artist Joe Bradley, whose prices have increased by 1,100% in four years. This is largely due to his dealers who got him the attention of a curator who included Bradley’s work in the Whitney Biennial, which then led to inclusion in Saatchi’s
“Abstract America” exhibition. Now showing with a branded dealer Gavin Brown, Bradley’s work sells at auction, exceeding the estimates placed on it (Kazakina, 2011).

Brands work in a number of ways not least of which are: as a commercial sign conveying value, as a symbolic sign communicating self-image and as a sociocultural sign associating consumers with particular groups of people. De Chernatony and McDonald (1992) remind us that the mental vision of the brand that the buyer has may be different from the intended marketing thrust. The brand is not made in the studio but in peoples’ minds, so while legal ownership may belong to the artist, emotional ownership resides with the stakeholders as well as the artist and this is what makes the brand powerful. Branding therefore needs to be appreciated in terms of both the input and the output process. In the art market, brands serve as symbolic devices not just for artists as we have covered but to consumers. Collectors buy art for investment but also to communicate something about themselves, buying into the artist’s symbolic universe. It is now accepted that consumers personify brands and when looking at the symbol values of brands, they seek brands which have very clear personalities and select brands that best match their actual or desired self-concept in line with hedonic consumption (De Chernatony & McDonald, 1992; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). As a result, when choosing between competing brands, as well as there being an evaluation based on the attributes of the art or artist, a more covert assessment also takes place based on social and psychological considerations. Consumers assess the meanings of different brands and make a purchase decision according to whether the brand will say the right sort of things about them, they are chosen for their representationality (De Chernatony & McDonald, 1992). They do not just base their choice on rational grounds, such as perceptions of artistic criteria (which they usually do not have the necessary knowledge to assess), beliefs about value for money or availability. Instead, they recognise that to make sense of the social circles they move in, and to add meaning to their own existence, they look at what different brands symbolise. For example, they question how well a particular brand might fit in with their lifestyle, self-image and social expectations whether it helps them express their personality, and whether they like the brand and would feel right using it, they will only buy it if it will enhance the conception they have of themselves and support the desired self-image in conveying cultural capital (De Chernatony & McDonald, 1992; Zukin, 1990). Brands as symbols act as efficient
communication devices, enabling people to convey messages about themselves and helping them cope with the social roles they are playing. The brand personality is the unifying device that differentiates brands and allows consumers to communicate values through them. These key values are used in the construction of individual identities and serve for image-building as will be discussed further on by looking at Holt’s (2004) notion of iconic brands.

On the socio-cultural level, by buying into a brand, collectors are communicating that they wish to be associated with the kinds of people who are perceived as consuming that particular brand. As argued by Keller (2003), consumer knowledge about brands is multidimensional and the meaning of a brand is fundamentally linked, in the consumers mind, to the brand’s relationship to people, places and things, meaning comes from these linkages. Brand loyalty is largely held together by the relationships between these different types of customers (Holt, 2004). Customers are loyal because they are locked into a social network. Much of the value of the brand is imparted by other constituents, not just the one-to-one relationship with the brand. Managing the brand therefore requires managing relationships across the network. Traditional brand management pays insufficient attention to brand builders, which is why this study is therefore more in line with Vargo and Lusch’s (2004) new dominant logic for marketing which focuses on the co-creation of value, relationships and networks. Rather than being embedding in the output, they acknowledge that value is participatory and dynamic, defined by and co-created with the consumer. The utility of goods therefore comes from their use as artefacts around which consumers have experiences. Thus the importance of managing network relationships. Vargo and Lusch also acknowledge an increased emphasis on brand identification, value perception and the role of social and relational norms in value creation all of which are appropriate to the art market where it is widely acknowledged that value comes from both economic and social factors. Buying art gives collectors a feeling of exclusivity due to belonging to a restricted club, as one artist says collectors buy a Hirst because “they want to be part of that “thing”” [William.57] This is in accordance with Leibenstein’s (1950) luxury brand research suggesting (following on from Veblen (1994)’s early work) that the utility derived from a product might be enhanced by external effects, such as the quantity of goods consumed by other persons or relating to the fact that the product bears a higher rather
than a lower price tag. Indeed, price is rarely the most important variable influencing the purchase decision. Going with too low a price makes the buyer question the price and there is a feeling of ‘you get what you pay for.’ As art brands are bought predominantly to enable consumers to say something about themselves, it is important for artists to maintain the brand identity and group members associations of the brand. Paradoxically, therefore, the more the brand gets purchased, the more its identity needs to be permanently recreated to keep that sense of exclusivity alive which is why we will explore the issue of temporality further on. Now, however, we will explore further issues that affect brand identity.

6.4 Innovative / Consistent

Another requirement for a successful brand is that an artist must create a ‘world’ or ‘identity’ that is coherent and consistent but still allows for enough room for development. As one artist identified:

*You can see it’s the same hand if you get into, you know get into the sort of world I’m interested in and whatever. I think there’s a certain sort of Aspergery type of thing to an artist who is not just repeating an idea, you get into their world you know and while they are trying to figure out what their world is, you know someone like Charles Avery for example is the best example.* [Theo.104]

It is only by creating these types of “worlds” that artists can successfully negotiate between the need to stick to their core values which define and communicate the brand’s positioning with a strong and clear voice while still being able to develop creatively within this. While this is true for all brands, it is of particular importance in the art market as the value of art comes from its innovative qualities and as we have seen, the artist’s identity and subjective measures of success come from their originality in line with prevailing notions of authenticity. However, the artist must tread a fine line between total innovation which risks being rejected by the market because of an unacceptable degree of newness and strangeness, and banality which will not garner the artist or the work any value, critical or commercial. Authenticity in the art market refers to the degree of embeddedness of a certain work in an artistic framework as discussed in chapter four, although theoretically there are no limits to the creative freedom of the artist, only those innovations which are already defined as art are accepted. The audience is largely indifferent to anything which looks like
something new and different yet anything too similar to previous work will be considered a poor example of whatever work it may be referring too and dismissed as derivative. This means that although the brand is production- and artist-led (rather than the traditional marketing model of following customer wishes or needs) it must be built on existing market codes in order to stimulate demand in line with most innovative, new products. Brand innovation must continually use a psychological framework that is familiar to the market:

*But Damien Hirst almost really hit it on the head, you know, his work is almost so sort of generic, it’s now generic him but it’s a bit like saying do you like McDonalds, it doesn’t matter, it literally doesn’t matter, it is and that’s great, that’s an interesting thing and I also think that Picasso is possibly the same thing,* [Theo.107]

These artists have been successful because their work has been framed as holding innovative characteristics yet also following on in the larger art historical perspective, in Hirst’s case for example, following on from Duchamp’s conceptual art.

Artistic identity based on innovation can be problematic for the brand in other ways too. The identity being communicated to a large extent decides the size of the market available to the artist. There are limitations for certain media as we saw in the first empirical chapter, with the difficulties involved in selling video, performance and installation works, work that is ‘commodity-like’ such as paintings are more likely to make money while working in more ‘difficult’ or ‘innovative’ genres cuts out much of the market for the work. This is in part due to the fact that as a luxury good, part of its value for the buyer is in positioning themselves as the owner of the product and as such must be visible. Works that are based on performance or video are not as successful in the art market because once bought they are not easily visible, unlike paintings or sculptures, Fitchett and Saren (1998) call this ‘Dasein Value’ after Heidegger, whereby there is value to experiencing the physical presence of the art work (linked, as we have seen, to authenticity) and this value is shared, thus, again, demonstrating the socially constructed nature of value. Moreover, the label that is attached to the artist predisposes their placement in the market, so one artist can say that curators for prestigious shows or dealers selecting artists for their galleries decide: “well we’ve got one kooky guy who dresses up in stuff, we don’t need another one”
As we have discussed, this is starting to change with the marketisation of the art world, value is shifting to the reputation of the artist themself, rather than the work and the market is therefore starting to embrace new media, however, for now at least, paintings and sculpture are still more successful on the market.

Holt’s (2004) notion of iconic brands argues that the most successful brands use identity myths to achieve iconic status, thereby allowing their consumers to address identity desires and anxieties. Hewer and Brownlie (2009) use this theory to demonstrate how the ‘Nigella brand’ exploits multiple competing positions in circulation around the identity myth of domesticity. These brands have identity value as they are valued for what they symbolise. A brand, Holt tells us, performs myths through its associated stories. In art these stories are told by the work itself but also by the artist, the dealer, the critics, the curators and the collectors who come into contact with the work. The story, as we have examined, is therefore only partly controlled by the artists themselves. It seems certain ‘stories’ are more likely to be successful than others and therefore picked up and perpetuated by the other actors in the endorsement chain as discussed in the first empirical chapter. These include myths about innovation which is, as we have seen, the primary criteria for quality in the art market, and more general myths about populist worlds where commercial values do not exist (another major contradiction in the brand developed further on). This fits in well with the myths or stereotypes generally associated with artists who are considered to be living on the periphery of the modern world, passionate eccentrics who communicate underlying needs that are not acknowledged in modern life. In this sense, artists are seen as acting out lifestyles that we consider to be in a “full, totally free manner” as fitting for stars in Debord’s analysis of celebrity (1994:29). Holt (2004) argues that for a brand to have identity value, the story must be at the centre of strategy because the quality of the myth drives the brand’s identity value and Brown (2003) exemplifies this by demonstrating how storytelling is a central part of Madonna’s brand success.

In the art market, these stories are based on the notion of authenticity explored in the first empirical chapter. For the brand strategy to influence market results, it must therefore direct what kind of story the brand will tell and how that brand tells it as explored in the first empirical chapter. Artists who play up certain of these values
in their artistic identities, in terms of the necessity for the artist to be seen as ‘authentic’, while dealing with contemporary issues are more likely to be successful:

*I think someone like Dash Snow is a really good example of someone who was suddenly sort of celebrated for being fundamentally f***ing miserable.*  
[Theo.103]

Here, Dash Snow is used as an example of an artist who fits into the dominant view of the authentic artist, someone who is on the edges of society, young, extreme and therefore a suitably tragic figure (we shall discuss these stereotypes associated to artists further in the next paragraph). The YBAs, to look at another example, found success by producing work focusing on current issues centred around consumerism and materialism while promoting a self-image with working-class, underdog associations. In this sense, we see how artistic identities are constructed and manipulated to fit in with the dominant values of the art world. This myth, is what, Holt argues gives brands their distinctive and favourable associations, generates buzz and brings them core customers with deep emotional attachments. How the artist is perceived is therefore key to the value of the work they create, Bendisch et al. find in their analysis of CEO brands that a favourable stakeholder perception can enhance a CEO’s status which in turn can increase their income and contribute to greater equity of the CEO brand. This is also applicable to artists, as we have discussed, being dismissed as derivative or commercial can be extremely harmful to the status and resultant value attached to artists and their work.

We have already noted the importance of certain stereotypes or myths about the artist and how these are incorporated into artistic identity. In this sense, it is interesting to look at Barthes (1957) work on mythologies, where he argues that words and objects are signs that have a mythological meaning or cultural subtext that underlies their primary linguistic meaning. This mythological meaning appears natural, eternal, true and necessary to the consumer instead of arbitrary and historically contingent. The task of the mythologist is to delve beneath several layers of meaning to uncover the ideological structure at the base, exposing the deceptive innocence of mythical speech as a sham. This process restores a sense of ‘history’ and political relevance to naturalised images which are actually motivated by the ideological and power structures of society. Gaertner’s (1970) study of recurrent
patterns in artists’ biographies suggests certain myths get picked up, the most popular of these can be classified as: the ‘rags-to-riches’ life story; the ‘young genius;’ the ‘tragic artist’ where suffering is a characteristic or condition of artistic experience; the artist as ‘bohemian’ who lives in opposition to society, trading artistic freedom at the price of poverty; and the artist as ‘crazy’. This links back to Holt’s (2004) notion of iconic brands having value due to their ability to communicate certain myths such as that of the ‘frontier’ (which is at the heart of the American identity). Gaertner argues that the pattern of the artist as bohemian in particular has become so persuasive that artists have sometimes adopted it consciously, he cites Gauguin as an example and indeed Gauguin participated in the myth of the artist as outsider but he also became the victim of it as he could not return to France because the myth of the outsider in the exotic location of Tahiti was so popular, his reputation and value was now based on the expectation of paintings of Tahitian girls. Gaertner’s argument is that while there is little proof that artists are more likely to succumb to madness than any other profession, there is no doubt that madness in the popular mind is the prerogative, or curse of the artist. So while the patterns are established inductively, once established they tend to influence actual models of being and behaviour. Whether these patterns have an objective existence is in doubt but because they are clichés, artists tend to live according to one or the other of these patterns, “I try not to put my personal life into my art but it bleeds in, I can’t help it” (Perry, 2010). This is in line with Holbrook and Bradshaw’s (2007) analysis of the Romantic myth of the artist as a self-destructive icon. They suggest that the artist inherits a role to perform, a role which is imposed or at least valorised by the marketplaces and in this case, requires the artist to live and die by extremes. Furthermore, they argue that as the marketplace becomes more and more important in our existence, the more we desire a non-commercially constituted existence for which we look towards artists. In fact this bohemian mythology is often worked into branding strategies, positioning the product as an authentic, populist product in line with Holt’s cultural branding (2004) that will be explored further on. Therefore, the artist as outsider speaks to our desires to live freely, unshackled by societal pressures, acting out the lifestyle we cannot have. The danger, as Holbrook and Bradshaw note, is when these myths are lived and have a human cost. However, if the artist can position themselves within these myths, using them for their role identity while not buying into them too much and integrating them into personal identity, they
stand to win in the marketplace, as Turner Prize winning artist Grayson Perry recognises:

*These roles are clicking around your head as an artist as we’re all making up our identity from a kind of mishmash of things and the most important role for me is that of the ‘outsider artist’ untainted by the art world, the pure spirit of being creative. I have to remember to be like that as I get more popular.* (Perry, 2010)

Although these myths about artists have always existed (though they have changed through time as we shall examine later), as artists are becoming increasingly celebritised and commodified the media is becoming the primary vehicle through which these myths are played out. We have already mentioned that Kerrigan et al. (2011) argue that artists such as Warhol are framed and narrativised through the lens of celebrity iconography and their brand is constructed through media attention. This is a circular process whereby as they generate more media attention they achieve increasing brand awareness. Artists are aware of this process, Grayson Perry, for example, discusses how it has worked to his advantage to have an easy title that can create headlines, in his case “transvestite potter.” “I am the tranny potter, it’s something I live with, it’s my brand name” (Perry, 2010). These titles instantly refer to the artist so for example if you mention “shark in a tank,” people instantly know that you are referring to Damien Hirst. Hirst himself, an artist who has always exercised close control over the works he sold and to whom he sold them, has said that “I was becoming this sort of Damien Hirst character, I was this slightly mythical thing” (Garfield, 1993).

*I won’t deny that being a tranny has been very handy, but like most artists, they will exploit the circumstance whether it be their race or their sexuality or their class, all artists will to a certain extent cash in on who they are even if it’s something quite boring and invisible.* (Perry, 2010)

There is a certain “pressure, you are pushed into slots in the media landscape. Curators like to frame the artist in certain ways too” (Perry, 2010). People like a narrative and therefore the most successful artists will play on these myths in order to be framed by both the art world and the media in order to achieve brand awareness. So, for example, the artist-as-crazy-person makes a good story which people will
remember. So everyone knows that Van Gogh cut off his ear, as art consumers we focus on his mental illness in the last years of his life, ignoring the rest and feel we ‘know’ him. Another example is the myth that artists are the products of creative genius that is associated with youth, in fact there are as many examples of artists who created their greatest works in old age as those who were young prodigies but the gradual innovations made over a lifetime are less conspicuous than sudden breakthroughs. Perry continues to say that:

*I get asked, do you think you’re more famous for your image than your work because my image eclipses my individual works but popularity translates into power and opportunities, I don’t think it’s a small thing to have media presence, marketing is important and artists need to recognise that.* (Perry, 2010)

These narratives refer back to notions of taste discussed at the beginning of the chapter. Artists who are successful on the market are successfully positioned within these narratives which gives them control over the market, this however does not mean they are the most interesting artists which is why many of the most financially successful artists of the past are long forgotten (as Reitlinger’s (1961) analysis of successful artists of the 1700’s makes clear). Moreover these narratives are temporal and may not continue to be attractive. Gaertner (1970) shows that the myths surrounding the artist have changed through time, so while we now think of the artist as a ‘sick genius’ endangered by disease, drugs, drink, suicide, madness and early death, in Victorian times there was the concept of the ‘healthy artist’ considered physically, morally, spiritually and psychologically superior. This he suggests, is in line with Levis-Strauss’ (1955) notion of myth and counter-myth, in that our way of comprehending the world is dialectical and so patterns are simply revived in ever-changing configurations. Every myth has a life of its own with numerous deaths and resurrections. So the myths that currently operate, although they may seem eternal and fixed will eventually change. Gaertner therefore argues that the myth of the ‘inspired artist’ who is the instrument of voices and intents speaking through him/her will eventually become the artist as ‘business person’ calculating, mercenary who creates for a specific market and does not believe in inspiration but in steady, skilful work. This does seem to have some truth to it as Bradshaw et al. (2006) find a contradiction in the literature between recent studies challenging the mythology of the bohemian artist whose work is appropriated and re-routed according to the logic of
commodification (Guillet de Monthoux, 2004; Schroeder, 2005; Brown, 2005; Brown, 2011) and those commenting on Romantic artists loyally holding out and resisting marketing and commerce (Abbing, 2002; Kubacki and Croft, 2004; Bradshaw et al., 2005a). They find that artists balance both discourses, and use the Romantic myths in their career construction and sense of self while still taking control of their careers and positioning themselves in the marketplace. So while as Gaertner (1970) notes biographies still excuse artists for their ‘mercenary’ or ‘un-artistic’ ways, the artist as entrepreneur and as brand is becoming more acceptable although it must still be embedded in the notion of the artist as somehow ‘outside’ or mainstream society, so even artists brands such as Warhol and Hirst although completely commodified, retain value from their reputation as somewhat ‘crazy’ or ‘dangerous’.

Holt (2004) argues that consumers who make use of the brand’s myth for their identities forge tight emotional connections to the brand, which is where the value of the brand comes from for them. This thesis argues that as well as having value for consumers, artists themselves resolve identity anxieties through their work. Once the brand reaches the market and is consumed, it feeds back to the artist and contributes to further identity-building. For example, one artist describes her reaction to a review:

_They said like ‘quite banal but also enchanting’ and I was like ‘oh great enchanting but banal umm,’ I don’t know I was thinking maybe that’s not so good but actually that’s kind of really, you know, some other people have kind of picked up on that and I can see that’s what I do and I’m quite happy to be read in that way, because it’s kind of like I’ve moved into this ‘extra mundane’, which is a title for what I’m doing where you’re you know, taking the mundane, you’re taking, you know, living at home with a baby, is quite isolating for the first year so a lot of it is a lot domestic things but then you’re pushing this kind of domestic life into another dimension almost through the kind of installation process._ [Elizabeth.23]

Although the artist had never considered her work as ‘banal’ or ‘mundane’ before and found the term insulting at first, she realised that it could be used as a useful label to identify her work and she used it to steer her new work in that direction. In fact an artist’s life is very much invested not just in their artistic identity but in their brand identity, and their life becomes a part of the brand so any other aspects of themselves
is somehow attached to the brand, so one artist’s job working in a shop becomes “a big field project” which leads to his artistic identity being based on the “fetishisation of mass produced objects and how much we find ourselves in the things that we consume” [Chris.63]. The boundaries between identity, brand, self and work are extremely blurred and the relationship between the identity and the brand therefore works in both directions. In fact, as the artist starts to achieve success it can become difficult for the artist to separate the brand image from their own identity which is why they can get caught up in certain stereotypes such as the ‘live fast, die young’ ideology which one of the young artists interviewed was trying to escape from.

6.5 Of the Moment / Timeless

Holt (2004) argues that traditional marketing is not flexible enough to understand the branding of iconic or cultural brands, their success comes from their ability to create a story which is in alignment with society’s identity desires and to stay relevant it must shift according to the historical context. These concepts are extremely relevant to art brands, as we have seen the art world is based on temporal notions of authenticity. Moreover, to gain attention an artist needs to capture the imagination of the gatekeepers of the art world and in order to maintain their careers they need to successfully continue to authentically communicate their artistic identity since continuity is directly linked to authenticity, while still moving forward in some way to satisfy their own subjective measures of success. In cultural branding, as Holt demonstrates, customers buy the product to experience the stories generated from the identity, the product is simply a conduit through which customers can experience the stories that the brand tells. In line with the wider economic and social context the brand must make significant shifts and revisions to continue to tell relevant stories in line with the identity. While brand identity is considered stable in the mainstream branding literature, in fact it is not fixed and just as brand image is volatile and shifting, so is identity. In fact, brand identity needs to be fluid in order to reflect the dynamic nature of the market (Csaba & Bengtsson, 2006). Artists in particular, as innovative cultural producers must continue to be relevant:

And of course it sort of shifts in a way because after a while one may become quite a large part of the conversation but then the conversation is going to move on, it’s going to be a different formulation of what one wants. I’m still at the
stage of wanting to be part of the sort of, of trying to become part of an ongoing conversation but I do find it rather, it’s a bit of a moving target this one, and it keeps on dragging itself away from you. [William.67]

Artists therefore constantly have to edit their brand image in order for it to stay relevant and yet appear timeless. There is continuous pressure to adapt to shifting market developments and stakeholder preferences but this has to be balanced against an equal need to preserve the uniqueness of the brand in a coherent and credible brand communication over time. This means not being enslaved by trends or fads in the art market but not being left behind either. As we explored in the first empirical chapter, moving too far from the core brand identity will lead to a negative brand image, as this move will be considered ‘inauthentic’ but not developing in any way is similarly limiting. Due to the link between the artist and the product, this dilemma has a psychological impact which more traditional product brands do not have. Therefore, in building a successful brand, artists need to link the brand to an association that has enough flexibility to provide a platform for both current positioning and subsequent leveraging.

Consumers welcome consistency and reward it with loyalty and as such the brand’s core identity values should not be tampered with (De Chernatony & McDonald, 1992). This is why it becomes very hard for successful artists to move in new directions, it dilutes the brand, thus the ‘trap’ discussed in the previous chapter. The audience’s expectations limit what they allow the artist to do. Working outside of that brand image for example with commissions can therefore be freeing:

*I made this thing for her garden but it never went into the portfolio because I didn’t really think it needed to make sense with the rest of the work, it was just fun.* [Alexander.37]

In order to keep their reputation and brand intact however, working outside of the brand image can only be infrequent:

*I try to make sure that everything that I’m doing is somehow related to my practice, you know.* [Chris.57]

Artists who do decide to turn their back on the core values they have become known for rapidly lose out. For example, one of the artists interviewed had become
celebrated for his sculptures, as a result he was represented by a major gallery in London and won the Turner Prize. However, these opportunities did nothing for him in terms of achieving his subjective notions of success and artistic identity so instead of continuing to make the work that had made him successful he moved away from his gallery to have more freedom to pursue his interests. Essentially he left the brand because he did not want to be part of the “circus” of the art market (it is important to note that the artist himself would not characterise his career as a brand, as set out at the start of the chapter branding theory gives us a conceptual framework allowing us to analyse the complexities of artistic careers but is not necessarily something artists use or even consider). He now relies mostly on public commissions to survive which:

Quite a few people in the art market don’t understand what it is, don’t understand what you do, so you have to tell them and it’s not interesting for them because it’s not connected to the market. [Elliot.28]

As a result, his market value has diminished considerably, the artist followed his creative instincts to the detriment of his brand identity. After achieving critical success, he created work to meet personal criteria rather than the expectations of peers or the public. This takes us back to the notion of ‘being’ an artist and the need to achieve self-expression through art whereby this is intrinsically satisfying. In this sense, the marketing of an artist is self-oriented. Again, we see the conflict between the creative and the commercial and how this can affect the career trajectory discussed further below.

Indeed, as discussed, once an artist is highly successful and branded, there is a tendency towards product conservatism because the consumers (collectors and museums) want something that is part of the branded narrative. An artist who does something relatively recognisable and remains within the formal area of their signature style will therefore tend to do better on the market than another who does not. For example, if you compare Damien Hirst and Mark Wallinger who are of roughly the same age, both winners of the Turner Prize and both owing much of their success to the patronage of Charles Saatchi; at auction their work performs extremely differently. While Hirst’s work at auction consistently creates new records for a living artist, Wallinger’s work tends to sell for less than it does in the gallery. While it is impossible to say exactly why this is, it is probable that part of the reason comes from
the fact that Hirst’s oeuvre fits into a few recognisable product lines whereas Wallanger’s work does not fit into any coherent brand image, his work is extremely difficult to categorise and each new piece is an entirely new visual solution, usually in a new format and therefore extremely difficult to recognise as being by one particular hand and therefore difficult to brand. Recognisability is crucial to branding and indeed, much of the value of the brand is due to it acting as a shorthand assurance of quality. Hirst has been successful by producing a few product lines within a recognisable brand which appeal to different segments of the market (from a diamond skull that sells for £50 million to prints selling in the low-thousand range for entry-level collectors).

As the market becomes more and more important, the tendency to pigeonhole artists for an easy sell strengthens and that is how the branded galleries operate as discussed in the previous chapter. The majority of collectors look for simple, striking and strongly differentiated work that is rapidly communicated and easily recognisable, we have already noted changes in buying behaviour with the growth of art fairs in the literature review, which is part of the reason that the work needs to be branded. Warhol, arguably the most branded artist in the world was on show at 28 stands in Art Basel 2010 (Pollock, 2010). In the overcrowded art market, it is easy for anyone who is not an expert to get confused, successful brands present buyers with a few high quality markers of value and collectors rely on this in their purchase decisions. This is in line with dissonance reduction buying behaviour where the consumer’s lack of knowledge between competing brands leads to confusion (De Chernatony & McDonald, 1992). Without firm beliefs about the advantages of any particular brand, a choice will most probably be made based on other reasons, such as the advice of experts or friends as they can only afford minimal search effort in purchasing. This is the typical case for novice collectors who wish to invest in art, usually for the status and social ties produced by the brand, and explains the importance of major dealers in artist’s career trajectories as they have the broadest international coverage and are trusted sources.

Branding is inherently difficult for artists because of these limitations. Emerging artists working without dealers especially have difficulty in editing their brand image. This was often verbalised in the interviews in terms of the cv or website which presents their brand image to the world.
I think there’s only a few that I’m happy with, there’s lots [of failures] that were part of the learning process again that you edit out it’s like having this website, I’m always wondering whether I should, I quite like the fact that it’s an archive of a development, that it has really early work that are very different to what I do now but there’s still some crossovers in the, where I use materials or objects that are interesting but from a purely kind of, I don’t know what word, marketing seems like a ridiculous word to use, but in order to represent what you do now so people can get a glimpse I think it would be better if I just had sort of 10 images of recent works, it’s difficult, decisions like that when you think actually less is more, but then I feel like if I strike it off the website, I strike it off my, I kind of deny that it ever happened or something. But I make work at quite a fast pace so that is not a problem but yeah it’s about how you represent yourself, it’s important. It’s about showing, being able to edit things, yeah I think I need to edit the website. [Alexander.36]

While this may sound relatively straightforward, getting the brand image right is crucial and the emerging artists interviewed were very conscious of this:

I worked hard at making it simple, big pictures really is the key. I don’t send out an email now without a big picture in it either, people don’t read, they just want to look at pictures, it’s saved me, big pictures, it’s been a major step in my trajectory. It’s true. [Sarah.69]

The other temporal dimension is related to the artist’s career trajectory, art like all products has a life cycle and different marketing activities are needed according to whether the brand is new to the market, or is a mature player in the market. Emerging artists need to lead the market, at this stage there is little brand recognition and artists need to use their social capital to achieve this. Once the brand image has been communicated, the artist needs to ensure it will be managed over time in order to maintain the brand as the brand is under considerable pressure (which is when we see frequently dips in the career trajectory). Numerous competitors will all be trying to win greater consumer loyalty and more market interest. At this point the artist has a number of possibilities in order to keep growing the brand. One option is to extend the brand’s meaning and recognition to new product lines for example working in a different format such as sculpture instead of painting. However this addition should
be taken into careful consideration to make sure any addition to the product range will enhance the total brand image. If it will dilute the original positioning and identity it will probably cause more damage than good, as we have already covered. Another option is to target new market segments or even new markets to increase the perceived presence and status of the brand but this entails careful positioning. Like any marketer, the artist must continually track consumers’ views, as a high-representationality and low-functionality product, the brand must keep a continuous presence in consumers’ minds by responding to the wider context in which it is situated (Heding et al., 2009).

6.6 Critical / Commercial

The artist’s brand identity as we have explored is based on the artistic identity of the artist, and is influenced by other stakeholders as it is created and managed throughout the career trajectory. Moreover, in a further process of cyclical adaptation brand image influences brand identity, which is why critical responses to the work are so crucial to artists’ careers. As we have discussed, the brand identity expresses the vision and uniqueness of the brand and is based on notions of authenticity (Heding et al., 2009). As we have repeatedly pointed out, there is a fundamental schism in the art world between the critical and the commercial. Ultimately, artists need to have a saleable product in order to survive, so paradoxically, in order to succeed the brand has to make this non-commercial identity commercial. Artists who do not create a saleable product will be penalised as they will not be positioned in the market and this positioning can be at odds with the artistic identity’s need for innovation as discussed above. For example, artists generally are more interested in the process of making art than the end result: “I don’t really like making works that are finished, I always want to leave it,” which is hardly suitable for buyers [Sarah.75]. Therefore, the art work is somewhat unique in that while the brand’s identity is based on core values of authenticity aligned to the anti-commercial, the brand’s positioning must embrace the commercial.

Kapferer (2006) defines luxury brands as those brands that are constantly seen to justify a significantly higher price than the price of products with comparable tangible functions. Such a definition suggests that this big price gap measures something intangible, these intangibles are reputation and brand image. This is why
authenticity and social capital are so critical in art. In line with Holt’s (2004) idea of populist worlds separate from commerce in which iconic brand images are situated and performed, the art world, although having a market structure, refuses to acknowledge economics in any straightforward way. Credibility comes from actions being motivated by belief and values rather than commercial interest. Indeed, although artists themselves may be motivated by monetary factors at least to some extent when creating work, their authenticity depends, to a large degree upon being seen as non-commercial entities. Consumers of the brand want to believe that artists really live in populist worlds, separate from the modern world of commerce and by consuming the work themselves can bring some of these values into their own lives (despite having to submit to market forces in order to consume the work!). This is where the continuing, underlying Romantic ideology of ‘art for art’s sake’ resides and why it continues to operate despite market mechanisms taking over. Too much success or concern about economics can be detrimental. This is why controlling distribution and production is so crucial to an artist’s brand:

But then it got to a stage where, you know, I was showing the same thing lots of times in the same, you know in kind of London or something or like people were almost seeing my name around too much, it was like oh you know, you shouldn’t.

[Chris.61]

Artists have to be careful as they gather more success not to forego these values entirely, especially if they want to keep some level of art world credibility as other artists will not accept artists who have ‘gone into production’ thus the widespread derision of artists such as Damien Hirst as shallow and opportunistic, “he’s become such a ridiculous product” [Martin.42]. The danger for successful artists is that there is increasing pressure to generate ever improving profitability, and so they tend to prioritise short-term gains at the expense of longevity. In fact, even Hirst, who has been incredibly commercially successful, sticks to the prevailing authenticity discourse saying “I always look at money not as a motivating factor but as an element in the composition. You can’t ignore it, but you’ve got to be very careful that it’s not motivating you” (Hirst, 2011). Although becoming more successful with investors and collectors, the gatekeepers of the art world will stop endorsing the brand if it is perceived as too commercial, damaging the critical value of the work (although as we have seen this may have no effect on the economic value of the work). It is therefore,
usually better in the long-term for an artist to sacrifice broad-based popularity in order to keep their distinctive ethos. One of the emerging artists interviewed, for example received funding to produce work on a large scale but decided that this would not be in keeping with his artistic values and identity:

*I also don’t think that my work lends itself to being produced, as I worked out quite quickly with the [previous work]. [Theo.105]*

There is a further tension in the fact that the work comes from an extremely personal place, the artists interviewed talked about having an “intimate relationship” with their work and yet they also need it to be generic enough to be able to include consumers in the symbolic world of the brand [Elizabeth.24]. Artists generally find that “going into production” is “too impersonal (...) you’ve got to keep really close to it and not dissolve it into a sort of industry” [Martin.45]. So while visibility and production are key in terms of establishing brand equity, production alone is not sufficient to maintain or boost brand equity (which is why producing too much is considered dangerous). In the positioning of their brand, artists must differentiate themselves in terms of their core brand identity yet also create work that can be positioned within the market, therefore there must be some sort of trade off between brand identity and positioning (in line with Sujan and Bettman’s (1989) study on brand positioning in the marketplace that examines discrepancies in positioning). Bhat and Reddy (1998), find that brands can indeed be successful even when positioned according to a variety of dimensions (they explore functional and symbolic positioning). Art brands must therefore also work on a variety of levels in their positioning due to the structure of the art market which contains both critical and commercial spheres.

**6.7 Career/Product**

The final underlying contradiction of the brand is to be found in the relationship between the career and the product. Despite the importance of the artist and their entire oeuvre in the sale of art work, each art work created must still sell as a separate, divisible product on the market and must have value as such as we discovered in the previous chapter. Within the ‘corporate’ brand of the artist which infuses the art with added values therefore, each piece of art is its own ‘product brand’ and as such holds value as a stand-alone, independent, authentic work. This is why the
underlying identity needs to be rooted in the authenticity myths of the art market explored above, the very integrity of the art work is dependent on this. Paradoxically, it is due to the very fact that the art work is seen as the “extended” self of the artist and imbued with their identity that when on the market the object can be treated as independent. The career brand infuses the product brand with personality, reputation and value.

This chapter has focused on the notion of the artist as brand, in line with current research looking at the person as brand which is usually concerned with celebrity brands (Brown, 2003; Kerrigan et al., 2011) but also for example, with CEO brands (Bendisch et al., forthcoming). The assumption that a person can be branded is controversial and raises arguments due to the fact that notions of branding come from the capitalist discourse and vocabulary, and is therefore taken in the literature as an unexamined ideology, a background reality that everything has to conform to and is unquestionable. That the artist can be a commodifiable, fetishised, dehumanised product is extremely questionable. McDonald and Vieceli (2004), for example, have discussed the ethical dilemma in treating the individual as a product through branding. However, it is interesting to look at branding from a historical perspective which demonstrates that branding has been commonplace in the absence of capitalist economies and has not developed solely as an instrument of commerce but rather has served a variety of social purposes. Eckhardt and Bengtsson (2009)’s paper on the history of branding in China finds that brands were important agents of consumer culture as early as the 10th century. Indeed, brands were used as symbols to differentiate products and demonstrate their quality and authenticity, holding powerful cultural symbolism, fulfilling an innate human desire for status and stratification. This wider view of branding is useful in relation to notions of ‘person as brand’ as it takes into account the cultural and social aspects of branding, not simply the economic. Ultimately however, the underlying tension in the branding conception, the tension between person and object, remains, and it has to be remembered that the artist brand is not in fact solely the embodiment of the artist in object-form but rather the result of various stakeholders’ images collectively constructing a brand around an artist. Therefore, rather than focusing on how artists develop their brands (as this is not always consciously done), branding is used here as a heuristic device, as a lens through which to look at how art is marketed through social interaction and the
fluidity of meanings that is produced, communicated and consumed through this process.

6.8 CONCLUSION

Research has shown that established brands have distinct benefits in terms of increased profile, differentiation, customer attractiveness, visual recognition and investor confidence (Balmer, 2006). This is found to be true of art brands which essentially serve to personify the work. However, in order to be successful, these brands need to be flexible as their identity is a work in progress, playing different roles at different times for different stakeholders and drawing upon the social and cultural context. This chapter argues that the power of the brand lies in its ability to infuse a contradictory system of values rather than have a definite positioning. In fact, as Brown (2006) argues, ambiguity is central to the magical aura that surrounds legendary brands. As such they are reflexive and dynamic rather than fixed and essential. Conventional marketing fails to take into account how brand meaning is negotiated by both producers and consumers through contextual effects such as time, space, personal history and cultural process. Moreover, although notions of identity are central elements in marketing theory in that there has always been a recognition of patterns of social difference affecting consumption, segmentation and targeting as well as consumer behaviour there has been little research focusing on how producers negotiate their identity through marketing. This is of particular importance for artists due to the fact that the central part of their identity formation comes from the product they create as we have covered in previous chapters. The identity and reputation of the person brand and the artist brand are interdependent. This means that when marketing, the value and integrity of the product is linked to the value and integrity of the self which can cause underlying identity issues and stress.

Although the notion of branding may be problematic when attached to artists, it does serve to show the process by which successful artists’ careers transform from their beginnings as outsiders to the market focusing on their individual creative process to entrepreneurs who must produce to satisfy their own markets and therefore negotiate with a range of professionals, not least of which are the dealers who represent them. Conventional notions of brand ownership are therefore found inadequate, not only is the brand and its values co-constructed by a variety of actors
which goes beyond simple producer-consumer relationships but who is in control of the brand changes according to both the status of the artist’s career, the life-cycle of the product and the wider structure of power relationships in the art world. Moreover, this chapter demonstrates that conventional notions of branding fail to acknowledge the complexity of branding narratives, ignoring the value of authenticity and personality in branding, and overlooking the macro-level context through which what is considered valuable changes over time. Indeed, this thesis seeks to highlight how the macro-level context defines value; those that control the market control the perceived meanings of the work, the narratives that get picked up as ‘authentic’ and therefore the value of the work. Focusing on cultural branding allows us to unpick the inconsistencies within the art world that artists must navigate to have successful careers as well as the relationship between the artist and the product. As such, we find that branding theory is a useful tool to look at the way value is attached to art works in the art market, taking into account the full range of meanings they communicate both tangible and intangible. The following chapter will provide a discussion of the main contributions of this thesis, reflecting on the theoretical and practical implications of the findings and the limitations of the study.
7. Conclusion

“A picture is nothing but a bridge between the soul of the artist and that of the spectator.” - Eugene Delacroix

This thesis is an account of artists’ career trajectories in the visual arts sector. It has examined the process of value creation in the increasingly financial and global environment in which the arts market operates in both the UK and China. It has endeavoured to untangle the relationship between the career and the product, examining the marketing and branding of both the fame of the artist and the aesthetics of the work and therefore the way value moves from ‘the soul’ of the artist to that of the viewer, to borrow Delacroix’s term. This concluding chapter provides a summary of the main issues discussed in the previous chapters, answering the research questions. The second half of the chapter discusses both the theoretical and practical contributions of this research as well as the limitations of the study and prospects for further research. The main aim of this study was to understand how artists construct and manage their brand image and how identity and authenticity is negotiated throughout this process in acquiring value. This entailed:

1. Examining in detail how authenticity-driven careers are shaped over time and how artists are legitimised through the accumulation of social capital.

2. Exploring how artists define subjective career success in their brand image in negotiating between financial and non-financial recognition for their practice.

3. Determining the relationship between an artist’s career and the product they create.

7.1 Summary of Research Findings

The purpose of the study was to fill in important gaps in the existing literature relating to how visual artists’ access the market and are legitimised by it, as outlined in Chapter 2, by empirically examining artists’ career trajectories. The study has been a bottom-up understanding of the visual arts market in terms of how artists negotiate the value of their work through relationships and issues of positioning and branding. The research questions were explored by analysing the relevant literature and through semi-structured interviews and observations of art market professionals in both
London and Hong Kong. The purpose of this has been to consider the skills necessary for artists in negotiating their careers within both emerging and established markets. This thesis has thus, not only presented rich evidence for reflecting on the variety of career-management skills and competencies needed for success in the art market in terms of social capital accumulation, positioning and branding but has also revealed the complexity, fragility, temporal and chance-based nature of these careers.

As research around creativity and the arts has been entering the business literature recently, a review of related literature was the first task of the thesis. Chapter 2 therefore provided an analysis of the current literature on the endorsement process through which art is valued as well as a brief survey of the current state of the visual arts market. It argued that applying a career perspective on the endorsement process would allow for a richer understanding of the temporal and fabricated nature of value in the visual arts market.

Chapter 3 presented the methodology for the study, arguing that a combination of semi-structured interviews and observation would allow for an in-depth analysis of artists’ career trajectories. The analytical framework for the multi-level analysis of the arts market was also set out to ensure a holistic perspective of the market was taken while keeping the focus on artists and how value is attached to their work. It was argued that a symbolic interactionist analytical approach is most suitable when examining the arts market due to its social network structure.

Chapters 4 to 6 presented the empirical research process and research findings. In Chapter 4, an overview of artists’ career trajectories was undertaken. This highlighted the main career contingencies in artists’ careers and exposed tensions between the contingencies artists highlighted as pivotal in their careers and those considered important by the art market and other art professionals, demonstrating the importance of subjective notions of success. It also allowed for an analysis of the way artists construct, manage and maintain their artistic identities, central to their careers. Issues around positioning, control and power were revealed, highlighting the temporal and fluid nature of artists’ careers and the necessity of constantly re-establishing oneself leading to a suspension of emerging status while negotiating the peaks and troughs of the career trajectory. The key issue however was found to be the fabricated
nature of authenticity in the art market, which is neither static nor set as assumed in the literature.

Chapter 5 examined the endorsement process a work of art goes through more closely by looking at the relationships that characterise the art market and how they create value. Indeed, managing relationships is key to whether an artist’s work will reach the market and how it will be valued on it, as such it is essential for artists to negotiate with peers (who will champion the artist), experts (the gatekeepers) and a wider audience (who offer final legitimisation) in order for their work to be considered of value through the accumulation of social capital. The endorsement process was found to be much more complex than described in the literature, instead of a simple progress of career contingencies the picture that emerged was extremely hazy based on chance encounters and overlapping networks, with exposure emerging from an accumulation of social capital over time which resulted in brief moments of attention, leading to new opportunities and platforms for further exposure if managed properly. The chance element also served to further highlight the risk inherent in artistic careers.

Chapter 6 investigated the notion of branding in artistic careers. Taking branding as a lens through which to examine these careers was found to be useful in understanding the relationship between the career and the product and how value emerges from this interdependent relationship. Looking at notions of brand identity highlighted to what extent marketing of the product relies on marketing of the artist as embodiment of the product. It also further exposed the inherent contradictions artists must navigate during their careers, not least of which is the chasm between the critical and the commercial.

By re-examining the set of eight criteria used for coding the data as listed in the methodology, we can delineate the scope of the study and review the key findings.

1. Art School - Art school is evidenced in both the literature (Buck, 2004) and the data analysis as the conventional entry point for the artistic career trajectory. This is due to the network structure of the art world set out in the literature review, with art school being pivotal not so much in terms of learning the craft but in forming the relationships that will become pivotal contingencies in the career. This is true not only in terms of the tutors, dealers and curators that attend the graduate shows and select
the emerging artists they consider to be ‘up and coming’ but also for peer relationships. Indeed, peer relationships are under-examined in the literature, this study emphasises their importance as the starting block for artists to build the social and cultural capital they will need in their careers. Art school provides artists with a context in which they can absorb the organisational boundaries of artistic careers, learning the key values and vocabulary of the art world and in the process moving from ‘outsider’ to ‘authentic insider’. This study demonstrates that knowledge of the context of the art world is essential to frame the work in order for it to access the market and have value attributed to it. Artists who do not go to art school find it much more difficult and take longer to access the networks of the art world that will bestow legitimacy upon them. Moreover, while at art school making connections seems to be a relatively natural process, artists who are outside of the conventional training route tend to demonstrate more calculated and deliberate networking behaviour as more of an effort is needed to be recognised. Additionally, it should be noted that the importance of art schools seems to have risen dramatically in the past fifty years, as the artistic career has become more popular and institutionalised. This has also meant more of a demarcation between different art schools with certain prestigious institutions in key art world hubs such as London providing much more opportunities for entry into the art market than those in cities that do not register on the art world ‘map’.

2. Artistic Identity Construction – There is very little literature on artistic identity development, (with the exception of Bain’s 2005 study demonstrating the importance of myths and stereotypes of artists on their identity construction) and this thesis seeks to investigate the construction, management and projection of artistic identity by building on the occupational identity research set out by the Chicago School and further built up in psychology, cultural studies, sociology and careers research (Bandura, 1982; Lips-Wiersma & McMorland, 2008; Gill & Pratt, 2008; Hesmondhalgh, 2002). By using the branding framework to consider brand image and identity, this thesis demonstrates that artists must construct an artistic identity that is visually distinctive and coherent so that consumers can recognise and buy into their work. In line with Bain’s findings, the importance of using and communicating myths is found to be particularly important due to the symbolic nature of the art works produced. Cultural branding (Holt, 2004) provides us with a framework to unpick the
distinct strands and inconsistencies that form the artistic brand and result in its ‘value added’. The study demonstrates how important it is for a distinctive (and authentic, in line with the art historical context discussed in the previous point) artistic identity to be developed and managed throughout the career in a temporal manner. While this identity must allow the artist room for development of the work, any significant deviations from the image projected will result in disconnect, undermining the credibility and reputation of the artist. Moreover, the artistic identity is co-constructed with a variety of art world actors, particularly the dealer, who are pivotal in projecting the right image for the artist to accumulate social capital, access the market and add value to the product. By considering the artistic identity, the indivisible relationship between the career, the product and the artist themself becomes apparent which provides a further understanding of the anxiety and tensions associated with artistic careers, as the self is also consumed as well as the product.

3. Self-marketing – As has been repeatedly pointed out, as boundaryless careerist working on and negotiating between various projects with different groups of people, artists must engage in self-marketing behaviour. While this behaviour may not be consciously performed, it is evidenced in its most basic form in the construction of the authentic artistic identity. In order for their work to enter the art market, as we have discussed above, artists (and the professionals they work with) must contextualise the work, framing it within the ideological discourses of the art world. As the artistic career becomes more prevalent and the art market more commercialised however, more strategic and obvious marketing behaviour is being displayed. While the authentic artistic identity still relies on the anti-commercial Romantic discourse, the norms of the art market do seem to be shifting somewhat as emerging artists demonstrate more tactical behaviour in the type of work they produce, how they display it and how they manage their careers and professional relationships. The art versus commerce dialectic is still however one of the key narratives that underpins the art world (the implications of this will be further discussed below by referring to the Frankfurt School’s critical theories) and therefore also underpins artists’ careers and their work, and artists need to have the ability to negotiate between the two spheres.

4. Dealer Representation – This research follows on from previous work on the art market (e.g. Velthius, 2005) in highlighting the pivotal role of dealers in artistic careers. What this analysis reveals is the contingent role dealers play by encouraging,
supporting and developing artists as creative individuals on the one hand, while also creating a market for their work which entails a certain amount of influence on the work that is being produced itself while also creating a conversation with collectors and curators to cultivate the artist’s career and their market. They are therefore the linchpin between the creative and commercial spheres that artists are trapped between. While previous studies of the art market note the importance of dealers, they fail to demonstrate the contingent nature of this relationship, as well as the interdependence between artistic career trajectories and dealerships.

5. Gathering Critical Reviews – While the art press has bemoaned the loss of status of the art critic whereby commercial market values are replacing critical judgment, an analysis of value in the art world makes evident the importance of the critical discourse in the art world. Economic value, as indicated by Currid (2007), emerges from social value and this study reveals the importance of relationships in accumulating the necessary social capital for the work to access the market and have an economic value. While the art world has shifted towards more commercial values, as noted by a review of the art press in the literature review and expressed by the rise in status of major collectors and auction houses to the detriment of critics, legitimisation still depends upon critical values for the moment at least, due to the Romantic discourse centring on authenticity. Moreover, while critical reviews may no longer be the basis on which collectors make judgments (as noted in the art market analysis, art indices are taking over (Coslor, 2009) and critics legitimising powers have been largely lost, reviews are still considered vital to artists, especially at the start of their trajectories when they are still forming their artistic identities. Artists’ use these reviews to contextualise their positions within the art world, using them as a springboard on which to continue to build their identity (often using the reviewers’ comments as markers as to how to present themselves to the art world, often adopting certain terms directly to label their work within the art world discourse, as seen with the artist who embraced the term “mundane”). This is part of the circular process whereby artists must construct and reconstruct their professional identity in line with how they are perceived and positioned, and critics, as the traditional expert figure of the art world, form an important part of this cycle. However, as artists develop and their artistic identity becomes more clear-cut, the significance of critical reviews diminishes and once the artist is established on the market and their work becomes a
commodifiable asset, reviews become largely trivial as artists are now receiving their symbolic capital from elsewhere and re-evaluate their success in economic as well as social/symbolic terms.

6. Exhibition at Museums – Due to the importance of the critical sphere that has just been referred to, museums are still considered the pinnacle of the endorsement process as they symbolise the authenticity of the Romantic discourse of ‘art for art’s sake’, entirely divorced from commerce. The value of museum exhibitions and particularly of museum acquisitions, for artists, is that they represent a long-term recognition, establishing the artist’s place in art history and ensuring the work’s continuing potential. In reality however, the commercial and critical spheres are becoming more blurred with dealers and collectors on museum boards and as the prices for contemporary art continue to rise, museums may no longer be able to acquire the best examples of the era, leaving them in private collectors’ storage away from public eye (Hope, 2005). This feeds back into the production of the work, although the type of art produced may not be consciously created to respond to the market, it needs to do so to secure the artist’s living and as artists can no longer rely on public subsidies to survive the art they create will necessarily change.

7. Inclusion in Significant Private Collections – following on from the previous point, collectors are becoming more and more important in the art world, the top collectors can now make or break a career, taking over some of the legitimising roles critics previously held. This is reflective of the rise and marketisation of the contemporary art world presented in the literature review (Thompson, 2008). What this power shift translates to for artists is a change in the valuation of art from a critical, technical perspective to an investment-led and branding discourse; this phenomenon is particularly visible in the emerging markets as the analysis of the Chinese art market demonstrated. This is why artists need to brand themselves and their work to achieve recognition, the more recognisable and attractive the narrative created is, the more chance the artist has of being noticed on the market. This is also visible in the new ways in which art is being bought and consumed; particularly with art fairs where high set-up fees mean galleries tend to exhibit only their most ‘safe’ (read ‘branded’) artists and collectors buy based on instant recognition, acquiring impulsively and often following their peers, finding confidence in numbers. This type
of consumer behaviour is also witnessed in auctions which have rapidly become major players in the contemporary art market.

8. Resale at Auction – Much as collectors have risen in stature in the hierarchy of the art world, so have auctions. Although it is only relatively recently that auction houses have started to trade in contemporary art, the auction powerhouses Christie’s and Sotheby’s are now crucial cogs in the art market. Indeed, they now account for a large percentage of art market transactions, particularly when seen in terms of revenue (Artprice, 2009). Like art fairs, they represent a new way for collectors to buy contemporary art, offering cultural capital to anyone who can afford to buy into the market and are designed to encourage impulsive purchases and conspicuous consumption. On the one hand these changes have meant that artists have more opportunities to make a living out of art as there are more avenues open to sell their work but this is not entirely unproblematic, only a small part of the sale value of the work eventually filters down to the artist (often none at auction) and as certain narratives get picked up as ‘fashionable’ artists can often find themselves thrust to great heights (gaining cultural and economic capital) and then lose it all just as quickly. This is particularly damaging for emerging artists whose reputations are more fragile, if they are resold by collectors or fail to sell at auction their market value plummets and it can take a very long time to recover (if recovery is even possible). This change in emphasis in the art world towards market-value gives rise to a short-termism which generates additional pressure on artists who need to achieve longevity in their careers.

These eight criteria served as the framework for analysing the empirical data, representing the endorsement process through which artists could accumulate social capital in order to access the market. The data itself corroborated with the literature review, in that all of these stages are indeed necessary for an artist to be successful on the market. However, it also confirmed the validity of the theoretical framework in that by focusing the analysis on artistic career trajectories, the logical succession of these various steps is complicated. A linear progression is not what comes out in the data, rather artists must negotiate, cooperate and collaborate with a range of actors in different contexts to ensure that their work is attributed value on the market. The ephemeral nature of the key contingencies in artists’ careers and the resultant pressures involved in their marketing activities is what is missing in the current
literature on the art world. The theoretical and practical contributions of this research are set out in further detail below.

7.2 Theoretical and Practical Contributions

As has been indicated above, this thesis enhances our understanding of the art market by analysing the various ways in which art is valued. At the very heart of this are the multitudinous and fluid notions of value itself, which is found to be both social, aesthetic, critical and financial. As such, the study contributes to the arts marketing literature by providing a reconsideration of the very notion of their being one unchanging value in the arts market based on fixed criteria. It also demonstrates how inextricable the link between the artist, the career and the product are in the valuation of the work and how the relationship between them changes throughout the career trajectory. In order to manage their career, artists must position themselves in line with prevailing notions of authenticity in the market, consuming and responding to them (indeed in some cases manipulating what these notions are in their favour, the Impressionists being the most striking example but other groups such as the YBAs doing it to a certain extent too). Therefore, as artists integrate into the art world through a socialisation process, which they must do to enter the art market and have their work valued, the way their work is positioned in the market feeds back to their self-worth and the work they produce in an interactive cycle to negotiate their place in the market. In this way, both their career and their work become extensions of the artist’s self. The unpredictability and unease that arises as a result of this process is one of the key features of artistic career trajectories. By using branding theory to conceptualise this process as the artist building a brand that incorporates both subjective and objective notions of success, with a brand identity reflecting the image of both the artist and the work, balancing the critical and commercial spheres of the art world, provides us with a clearer picture of the way value is constructed and emerges in the art market. Although branding is linked to the commodification of the art market, it is also about how brand identity is used to organise production, exchange and management in artistic careers. This explains why, to a certain extent, the product is conceived of as the embodiment of the artist, which again, highlights the anxiety issues involved in artistic careers as artists have to sell themselves, or at least a projected image of themselves as ‘authentic artists.’ The implications of these findings are discussed further below.
From vocation to career

As established in the literature review and through the interviews, the notion of a career as an artist is a relatively new phenomenon. This came out in the empirical analysis in terms of a generational shift, the emerging artists interviewed were much more strategic in planning for their careers long-term and expected a certain level of financial success whereas their predecessors had set out with no expectations and no hope of any kind of financial return. As the concept of a career as an artist has become established, due to the professionalisation and financialisation of the art market, resulting in a subsequent increase in the number of artists coming out of art schools (Menger, 1999) and therefore more competition, the necessity of career management skills and specifically, marketing, needs to be acknowledged. However, while marketing is necessary for long-term survival on the market, artists must not be perceived as overly strategic or commercial and therefore have to hide their marketing behaviour. Indeed, this anti-commercial attitude is one of the criteria for authenticity on the market and it is so ingrained that artists are, for the moment at least, often unaware of how they market themselves although they do engage in marketing behaviour.

Interestingly, for a thesis about the art market and how art is valued, there are few observations on aesthetic skills or criteria. In fact, this thesis argues that while aesthetics cannot be ignored (especially as we have seen they come into the marketing and branding of the art work in terms of style, media, originality, etc.) aesthetic skills and talent are less important than other skills in terms of communication, networking and marketing for art market success. This is a result of the underlying shift in the way art is legitimised as authentic and valued, a move from artistic skill that is acquired through training to the more abstract notion of innovativeness, knowledge of which (in terms of how it is defined and how to position one’s work as innovative) is acquired through socialisation into the art world. One can hypothesise that the financialisation of the art world may herald a new shift so that the commercial will become more readily accepted in the prevailing conceptions about the authenticity of the artist. Indeed, there are already signs of this becoming more acceptable as museums (who traditionally hold the jurisdiction as to what is ‘authentic’) work more and more closely with corporate sponsors and private collections as the power shifts towards these players. As artists will create work more consciously for the market,
innovation may become less valued than branding in terms of instant recognisability reflecting a change in the way art is consumed (in art fairs at speed rather than in museums in depth). Here we see how the consumption and production of art feed into each other. On a more practical level, these changes in the market therefore also suggest a powerful argument for career-management skill-based teaching in art schools, not least in terms of social and communication, marketing and promotion skills (and indeed marketing classes are starting to become more common). Moreover, psychological aids in order to manage the insecurity involved with these careers would also be beneficial as well as an acknowledgment of the risks and chance-based nature of the artistic career.

As established, the arts marketing literature has noted how myths surrounding ‘the artist’ have contributed to the marketing and consumption of the product (for example the artist as bohemian in Bradshaw and Holbrook, 2007) in that people buying the object feel like they are also buying into the artist (or their image of the artist at least) and this projected identity then contributes to their own self-image and social capital (Plattner, 1998; DiMaggio & Useem, 1978). This is particularly the case with the visual arts as the product created is usually an original object of which there is only one in existence (although there are exceptions with works in series, but this is part of the reason that these works are worth less). In fact, this notion of originality (being the product of a single artist), as we have seen, is at the heart of the way the art is currently legitimised, in line with Benjamin’s (1968) notion of the aura of the art work. With the professionalisation of the arts market and the subsequent cultivation of the concept of an artistic career, these myths surrounding the societal position of the artist have become increasingly important. Artists therefore must sell a controlled version of themselves for their work to become marketable. Indeed, with the financialisation of the art market it could be argued that the art market has become less about art and more about people. This explains one of the trends picked up in the literature review of the art press, artists can now make a living from careers spent making virtually uncollectible art. Supercollectors collect artists rather than art, the aesthetic content not mattering as much as the fame of the artist and the degree to which the art is instantly recognisable, thus the importance of the branding of the artist. The work is seen by both artist and consumer to embody the artist, thus the quote by Delacroix opening this chapter. One of the key interests of this thesis has
been to untangle the relationship between the product and the career and the artist. As we have established the artistic identity is heavily dependent on the exposure and consumption of the product the artist creates. The way the work is positioned in the market by critics, curators and dealers and the way it is consumed by collectors and a wider audience influences not only the path in which the future body of work takes but also the artist’s identity and self-worth itself which is heavily invested in the idea of ‘being an artist’. This means that artists are to a large extent defined by what they make and how it is received, there is therefore an extension of the self into the work of art and this is what is being consumed by the collector. The way the product is marketed on the art market then, is heavily wrapped up in issues of identity and social interaction (more on this in the next section).

When discussing the relationship between art and commerce in artistic careers we must turn to the work of the Frankfurt School and particularly Adorno and Horkheimer’s (1998) notion of the ‘culture industry’ whereby art that exists in the market is, by its very nature, a commodity. This tension has been explored recently in cultural studies (e.g. Hesmondhalgh, 2002) and in the arts marketing literature in some detail (Bradshaw et al., 2004; Bradshaw et al., 2005b; Fillis, 2006). In line with this recent work, this thesis suggests that while there is still an underlying struggle between art and commerce, this struggle is more complex and ambivalent than Adorno allows for. Moreover, as has been repeated pointed out throughout, due to the historical nature of the Romantic discourse in which this discourse has been steeped, the art market is starting to move beyond this dialectic, as the influence of the marketplace becomes more pronounced in artistic careers, the work created for it presents contradictions and critical responses that Adorno’s work does not take into account. As Bradshaw et al. (2005b:81) argue, the dualism of ‘art vs. commerce’ is useful in as much as it allows for “unpacking and learning about the complex (...) relationship between the two.” Artists like Andy Warhol and Damien Hirst have challenged Adorno’s dialectic, finding inspiration in the crossover between art and commerce and demonstrating great reflexivity in their work which forces us to recognise the creative process at play. Bradshaw et al.’s (2004) study of musicians demonstrates that simply casting an artist as a ‘sell-out’ when they work in the commercial realm (in this case in advertising), means ignoring the ways in which artists find engagement with commerce rewarding from a creative perspective. These
cultural producers are not necessarily alienated as Adorno would suggest. In line with Schroeder (2002), this thesis demonstrates that commerce and the marketplace itself can be an inherently aesthetic site and that therefore artists are in a unique position to question the market through their work.

On the other hand, however, this romanticisation of creative labour whereby immaterial labour is packaged as leisure rather than work in the Western ‘creative economy’ discourse, as set out by Negri (1979) and Lazzarato (1996), does ignore the anxieties, precariousness and difficulties that are found in this study to characterise artistic careers. Numerous recent studies (e.g. Menger, 1999; Gill & Pratt, 2008; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2010) of the working conditions of creative workers have explored these issues but the inescapable point that emerges from this study is that although the work is ultimately a marketable commodity, it is created largely to satisfy personal creative needs and successful artists are adept at using the marketplace to enable themselves to create fulfilling work. The distinction between production and consumption is not clear-cut, indeed this study demonstrates how they merge into the same process. We must therefore move beyond both polarised set of accounts which stress different features of the experience: Adorno’s critical theory on the one hand and Florida’s uncritical celebration of creative labour on the other, to produce an integrated understanding of the multifaceted ways in which artists negotiate between the two spheres. This entails understanding the meanings that the artists themselves give to their labour.

From boundaryless to bounded

As established in the theoretical framework, the notion of boundaryless careers is relevant for artists due to the necessity of being in control of their own career trajectory and the emphasis on social networks, entrepreneurialism and self-marketing and self-branding. However, while some researchers have noted the importance of a clear sense of identity in order to navigate the boundaryless career (Dobrow and Higgins 2005; Lips-Wiersma & McMorland, 2006), this thesis argues that this identity is much more central than the literature acknowledges. In fact, it is precisely because the career trajectory is ‘boundaryless’ and fluid that the identity of being ‘an artist’ or having a career as an artist is extremely bounded and fixed and is also what is marketed during the career as we have discussed above. Therefore, a
large part of the artist’s identity and self-worth is based upon this concept of themselves as an artist, which is why even artists who spend only twenty per cent of their time on their art while working in other jobs continue to consider themselves artists (and thus the difficulties of using census figures about artists as part of being an artist is defining oneself as such, not the amount of money made as an artist). Moreover, the whole notion of the ‘authentic’ artist is extremely bounded and limiting, as it implies that in order for their work to be valued, artists must position themselves according to the prevailing discourses in the art world which emphasises subjective success and puts artists at an economic disadvantage. As we have seen when using branding theory, this reveals inherent contradictions artists must negotiate, not least between the commercial and the aesthetic. In fact this provides some support for critiques of boundaryless careers as “new capitalist career rhetoric” (Humphries & Dyer, 2001) reinforcing the hierarchical structure of society (Hirsch & Stanley, 1996). This thesis therefore argues, in line with Dany et al.’s (2011) research on academic careers, that the career literature must move beyond a simplistic discussion of degrees of boundarylessness embracing wider social issues that impact career choices. While the literature characterises the boundaryless career as providing opportunities for self-expression and personal growth and fulfilment (Arthur, 1994), which this study demonstrates, we must also point out that there are significant problems associated to the boundaryless model in terms of job insecurity, thus the constant anxiety reported by artists. While Hall and colleagues write on the importance of developing an integrated self-identity that is not tied to any one organisation but linked to one’s profession, this thesis demonstrates some of the problems that emerge from investing too much of one’s self-identity in the professional identity (Hall & Mirvis, 1994; 1996). Any attack on or perceived failure of the art work is taken personally by the artist and can significantly harm their wellbeing. As the boundaryless model becomes more widespread this has significant social implications due to the risks involved. Those who find success in these careers have to put into practice the skills discussed above, however minority groups are disadvantaged in terms of social capital in accessing networks and having the confidence to do so. While this was not directly explored in this thesis, it would provide a significant avenue for further research on boundaryless careers and could explain why there is a lack of female and ethnic-minority artists represented in the top tier of the art market as can be demonstrated by a brief glance at the auction data from sales at Sotheby’s and Christie’s.
The career trajectory framework borrowed from sociology allowed us to retain a dialectical conception of subject (the artist) and object (the work) and by applying a marketing perspective on the sociological, self-identity literature the thesis demonstrates the ways in which the artist, career and work are interlinked. This entails a theory of the self borrowed from George Herbert Mead (1934) that incorporates subject and object within a symbolic environment of social relations and recognises the importance of understanding the social framework in which the market is embedded. The study extends the identity literature by providing evidence of how the social system in which we live and work creates a discourse which frames and positions how we perceive ourselves and others; in line with work by Somers (1994) and White (1992) who specify the cultural repertoires of meaning that characterise various symbolic communities. This examination of how artists use their work to articulate and project their identities provides an example of this process in action, extending the identification literature (e.g. Appadurai, 1986; Martorella, 1989; Goldman 1992; Hennion & Meadel, 1993; O'Barr, 1994; Rubenstein, 1995 examine how individuals use various commodities in identity-projects) which has so far failed to focus on the relationship between producers and their products and prioritised the individual to the collective (Cerulo, 1997). By combining a macro-analysis of the art world with a micro-analysis of individual artists’ perspectives the study builds a unique analytic approach to organisational identity, form and function.

The thesis also demonstrates the temporal and processual character of these discursive practices and the way in which identity forms and reforms situationally and conditionally as we are constructed by others and construct ourselves in response to these interactions. Examining the marketing of artworks makes this clear, the art is marketed as the embodiment of the artist and its reception and consumption feeds back to the artist’s identity. As such, meaning and value are complex emergent phenomena continually produced in and by individuals in their interchanges with others within the material world and are by no means fixed (more on this below). What the identity literature tends to neglect are questions of power, as pointed out by Dunn (1997), this investigation of artistic careers clearly shows that there are certain power hierarchies in the art market and artists are at a relative disadvantage (in line with the cultural studies literature such as Foucault’s (1985) work on how socially produced regimes of power and knowledge affect our identities and sense of self).
Taking the Chicago School concepts of role, status and position in a conception of self reveals the ways in which these are socially constructed on the market and, due to the current power structure of the art world, artists must fit into certain narratives of what an ‘artist’ should be which are then actively internalised; they are shaped by society’s expectations and must perform accordingly to negotiate and re-negotiate inclusion into the art world. In this sense the work they create acts as a marker, they are means to the semiotic mediation of the self as a recognised social type: ‘the artist’. While the marketing literature has considered the ways in which symbolic resources aid identity construction and preservation (e.g. O’Donohoe, 1994; Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998; Goulding et al. 2002), this study goes further by delving into how the production of symbolic objects and their subsequent consumption affect identity. While the careers literature has documented the importance of work in shaping people’s sense of self and self-esteem (Carmel, 1997; Brown et al., 2001), marketing has been slow to consider the relationship between the market and the self from a production perspective, this study shows how market value affects artistic producers’ identities and there is significant room to extend this research to other entrepreneurial or small business producers. This thesis demonstrates that it is not just consumers who construct their identities by buying into symbolic products but that artists themselves also create their identities through production of symbolic products and must stage and perform their ‘artistic’ identity in relation to these products to be considered ‘artists.’

Furthermore, while control is central to artistic careers, the way control is characterised in the boundaryless literature differs from the way it was found to operate in this thesis. For artists, control is a sliding scale that varies throughout the career. Artists must surrender control at certain times in their career in order to access the market, most noticeably in their dealings with dealers but also with collectors for example. Negotiating control therefore entails power struggles and it is only artists who have successfully accumulated social capital and established a market who can regain some level of control over the direction their work can take. So in some ways, status in the art market is directly related to control over your work. For example, Damien Hirst’s 2008 Sotheby’s auction was a reassertion of control over his career, bypassing his dealer to sell directly to collectors. However, even in this example of one of the most powerful artists in the world, the dealer still had some level of control.
in that he was bidding on some of the work during the auction in order to uphold the value of the work as he had invested significant resources in the marketability of Hirst ("Dead Cow", 2008). While the traditional boundaryless literature characterises control as fixed and in the hands of the boundaryless careerist, perhaps due to the fact that it still conceives of the market as comprised of traditional organisations within which the careerist moves in and out of. This thesis complicates this picture; as there is no central ‘organisation,’ as traditionally conceived of, in the art market and the artist must instead negotiate between a variety of relationships, control is much less discernible. Again this links back to the notion of job insecurity as control is in the hands of the art market professionals who determine what is authentic and therefore who can and cannot be an artist. To a certain extent, artistic careers are more predetermined than is suggested by the boundaryless career literature as certain individuals in the right career environment will be more likely to be successful (thus the importance of external factors such as class, which art school you are accepted in and personal relationships which are not solely the result of conscious individual choice). The importance of chance-events in the career is also not accounted for in boundaryless theories. These insights on the psychology of artistic occupations in terms of notion of authenticity, socialisation and the rhetoric of failure have wider implications in terms of their synergy with other careers and could go some way to understanding how individuals manage the contradictions of the contemporary career.

From networks to relationships

While this study started as an examination of the network structure of the art world, this was quickly extended to a wider definition of relationships rather than networks. The network concept was found to be limited in terms of its fixed and static nature, focusing on relationships allowed for a more longitudinal, temporal perspective. Indeed, this was much more fitting for a study of the art market which is found to be based on shifting values in terms of what is considered legitimate and authentic. As we have established, the art market is trend-based and is the result of a power-based struggle between factions of the art world who then decide what is considered legitimate as ‘art’. Currently, as we have seen, that valuation has moved towards the financial market due to the power of supercollectors interested in art as both an investment and a trophy. This necessarily affects the art that is produced. While the art market has always been based on the finance of patrons and collectors to
a certain degree, the importance of the commercial has never been so strong, evidence of which can be found in the rise of art investment funds, art fairs and the price of contemporary art at auction. The effects of the recession have so far been limited but it will be interesting to see whether long-term this will create further changes in terms of the power structure of the art market.

The contingent value of relationships due to their value as social capital for artists to access the market has been widely acknowledged in the sociology of arts literature (Becker, 1982; Moulin, 1987; Velthius, 2005 and Robertson, 2005 amongst others). However, the literature tends to take a network-based snapshot of the art market at any one time and focusing on a single relationship (such as that between dealer and artist: see Velthius, 2005). By looking at the value of the art work from a career trajectory perspective, this thesis provides an understanding of how the value emerges through time and as a result of a series of relationships, that interact and are co-created. Existing studies fail to consider that these relationships are symbiotic, status and value is shared and co-constructed. This is why artists’ career trajectories tend to be composed of highs and lows, as social capital attracts further social capital leading to moments of mass-exposure and vice versa. Moreover, taking the artist as the focus of analysis has enabled the research to expose just how complex and circular the endorsement process actually is and the complex process of socialisation and consecration that distinguishes the art world from mere social networks.

Service-dominant logic has gone some way towards broadening the conception of marketing theory to include the influence of all members of the value chain, acknowledging the dynamic, interactive and participatory nature of value. This is particularly applicable to the art world due to the contingent nature of relationships on artists’ careers. However, as noted by Brown (2007) and others, service-dominant logic is still too customer-oriented in that it assumes the product is created for the market and, as Tzokas and Saren (1999) point out, it does not take into account the full variety of ways in which value can be created. In the case of the art market, while artists do position themselves within the market and therefore have to consider the consumer to some extent, part of the process of positioning themselves in the market means creating a new niche in the market due to the valuation of innovativeness and the avant-garde. Also, as stressed above, due to the way in which artists conceptualise their careers, more in line with a vocation than a job, the marketing is firstly self-
oriented, fulfilling basic needs for creative self-expression. Moreover, as discussed, the value of work on the art market emerges not only from business-to-consumer relationships as illustrated in service-dominant logic but from what could be conceived of as business-to-business relationships due to the importance of experts in the endorsement process. In fact, value comes not only from the two-party interaction between customer and supplier but from multiple actors, whereby the value chain can be conceptualised as less of a chain and more of a value ecosystem. Value emerges from these interactions between the various actors and this thesis provides empirical evidence of how value creation is accomplished in the visual arts market through both collaboration and competition. Moreover, this thesis agrees with Brown in that service-dominant logic assumes there is a single dominant logic. This study shows that the way each artist accesses the market is to some extent singular and there are no clear pathways to take as replicable examples. Marketing must take into account the instability of value (seen in terms of definitional changes through time) and therefore the power and knowledge imbalances in the market in order to move beyond these constraints. The art market provides an interesting case study of this, illustrating the complexity of marketing decision-making strategy which proves to be non-linear, chance-based and must take into account issues of identity.

*From the UK to China*

In terms of the structure of the art market, this thesis has shown that there are significant differences between the UK art market and the Chinese art market. As an emerging art market, China suffers from a lack of institutions and critics which are key in educating collectors and is therefore more commercially driven than Britain. This results in significant differences in Chinese artists’ career trajectories compared to those of British artists, so while UK artists do work internationally, leaving London as a base is not without risks and usually results in a loss of social capital and a downward turn in the trajectory, for Chinese artists however, it is necessary to establish oneself in the international market in order to survive. The other main difference is the shape of the career trajectory and the main exit points. While British artists struggle to emerge due to the sheer competition of emerging artists, in China there are numerous platforms that allow for emergence but the cut-off point comes at mid-career, when artists suffer due to the lack of an institutional structure. However, as the Chinese art market originated and was constructed in the West, the underlying
discourses surrounding authenticity, originality and value of both markets, are, for the moment, similar. Validation comes from Western art institutions and Western money, the West largely defined the Chinese avant-garde, choosing for its museums and market the art that fitted its concept of what an avant-garde should be. This is why Chinese brush paintings, for example, are dismissed in the West, not considered “contemporary” although, of course, they are contemporary, just not the Western definition of contemporary. The prevailing Western discourse is why despite these differences in the career trajectory, it is significant to note that for artists of both nations, the struggles they are dealing with are extremely similar and revolve around social capital, positioning and control. It will be interesting to follow how the Chinese art market evolves as Chinese collectors are starting to enter the market and whether this will lead to a shift in the way the art is contextualised and valued which could have global repercussions. For example, there are signs that underlying notions of authenticity and originality are different in China to those of the West with significant implications in terms of copyright and fakes (Ferro, 2011). Again, this only serves to underline the culturally constructed nature of authenticity. All in all, it is clear that the art market in line with the global economic scale is rapidly tilting eastwards.

From authenticity to authenticities

As we have extensively discussed, the very notion of there being one underlying authenticity is easily disproved by looking at a history of the art market (Reitlinger, 1961; Wijnberg and Gemser, 2000). In fact, even within the art market, as well as temporal and cultural differences, there are also different notions of what is and is not authentic art based on the different clusters of the art world in terms of media used, style, school, etc. which then is translated in terms of how the art is framed and consumed in the art market and eventually even what art is produced. As value in the art market is based on the work’s ‘authenticity’ the fabricated nature of authenticity must be acknowledged. Moreover, it is not one authenticity but multiple authenticities at different levels of the art market in line with the various relationships artists must negotiate. Authenticity is what allows access onto the art market and artists must therefore position themselves in line with the dominant definitions of authenticity in order to achieve success.
The multiple and constructed nature of authenticity was highlighted by using branding theory. Conceptualising the artistic career trajectory as the development of a brand and a resultant acquisition of value is simplistic and problematic, in that, as we have discussed, an artist is not a product or an organisation but an individual with a more complex identity and relationship with the market. However, branding theory does provide a lens to deconstruct the various narratives on which an artist’s career trajectory is based and how these interact. As such we have looked at how value comes about through the construction of a story about both the maker and their career and the object they create. Deconstructing the competing narratives and inherent contradictions of artistic brands and focusing on the plurality involved in brand image and identity demonstrates the complexity and temporal nature of authenticity and, therefore, more generally, value. The thesis argues for a less static notion of branding where brand meaning changes over time and is dependent on context, in line with a need for marketing theory more generally to accept the temporal, social and cultural influences on value, allowing marketing a more reactive, strategic role than is found in the traditional, mainstream perspective. In fact, this thesis demonstrates that meaning is determined by an ever-changing network of contextual relationships: physical setting, social function, economic clout, etc.

7.3 KEY IMPLICATIONS:

This research therefore provides a number of implications as detailed below:

Theoretical implications:

- This analysis demonstrates that it is impossible to separate a consideration of the artwork from the macro-level context in which it is produced, distributed and consumed. There is therefore a need for a temporal, social perspective of how value is co-constructed in the art market that takes into account production, the artistic identity and career of the producer as well as the consumption process.

- Marketing in the art market is demonstrated to be a complex process involving a variety of actors and dependent on socially constructed notions of authenticity. As such it is neither linear nor completely rational, but must be continually adapted in line with the social, cultural and temporal context.
Successful artists are shown to be adept at responding to the environment and strategic in terms of their marketing behaviour, negotiating their positioning in the market through managing certain key relationships.

- By examining marketing through a career lens, this thesis demonstrates the importance of considering identity in marketing. While identity has been widely discussed in the marketing literature in terms of consumer behaviour and brand identity, the case of the entrepreneurial creative producer demonstrates how the marketing of the product is inextricably linked to the identity of the artist.

**Empirical implications:**

- It is argued here that in order to examine how value is constructed in the art market, it is necessary to take the artist as the central figure to examine the valuation process from creation to consumption. Moreover, a temporal perspective must be taken to understand why the value of the art work is in constant flux and what factors account for these changes.

- By looking at different cultural contexts, in this case China versus the UK, it becomes possible to see the underlying power structures of the international art market and their implications in terms of what is considered authentic and therefore valued.

**Managerial implications:**

- The boundaryless career is found to replicate society’s inherent inequalities due to its emphasis on access to social capital. It is necessary for artists to manage the boundaryless career, which means taking a marketing perspective on career management. Artists are found to require skills in marketing and branding in order to negotiate control of the value of their work.

- One of the key features of the boundaryless career is found to be the anxiety associated with its fluid structure. However, this anxiety can be eased by developing a brand which can incorporate the various contradictions between personal subjective notions of success and financial obligations on the market.
Limitations and Future Research

A number of limitations of the study must be acknowledged. Primarily, although the thesis emphasises the temporal nature of these careers, the thesis itself had a time limit of three years. Therefore, while some longitudinal data was used this is of extremely short nature. Cross-sectional data was used to provide for a temporal dimension and while this proved to enrich our understanding of the way in which value emerges and changes throughout the career trajectory, it would of interest to follow the same group of artists throughout their careers in further research. Moreover, as the artists were not followed over the course of their careers and being interviewed regularly, the interviews were retrospective which may have meant participants suppressed or embellished events that happened in the more distant past. Although this is a potential limitation, it is also of interest in that by analysing these retrospective accounts, it provided an idea as to how artists renegotiate their artistic identities and notions of subjective success in order to justify their career choices. As discussed in the findings, identity is central to the artistic career and must be aligned to prevailing notions of authenticity for the work to be valued. This thesis did not have the scope to analyse issues of identity in any detail and there is considerable scope for further research in this area. More generally, in terms of research on value creation, the issue of how authenticity is defined and contributes to value in different sectors would provide a valid counterpoint to current discussions of value which tend to gloss over the social dimension of value creation. It must also be noted that the number of artists interviewed is relatively limited, although saturation was reached, the research could be extended by looking at artists in different locations both in terms of key art hubs versus smaller markets and different international markets. Further comparisons of emerging and established markets would also contribute to our understanding of value in the art market as this study is relatively superficial in that it only compared two art markets. Although consumption of art is discussed in this thesis, as the focus is on the producer, the artist, there are extensive opportunities for further study examining the relationship between consumption and value in the art market. More specifically, the difference between consumption of art and ownership of art is undeveloped in the literature as you do not need to own a work of art in order to consume it. Finally, this thesis did not explore the effects of class, race, sex and gender and their intersectionalities. This thesis suggests that the exclusivity and lack
of diversity in the sector may well be due to the nature of the career trajectory and calls for further investigation into these factors and their intersectionalities.
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