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**IDENTITY-ORIENTED BRAND POSITIONING:  
AN ANALYSIS DRAWING ON  
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY OF A CONTEMPORARY  
VISUAL ARTS ORGANISATION**

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**PhD**

**2021**

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VISUAL ARTS ORGANISATION**

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of the requirement of the  
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## **Abstract**

This thesis contributes to arts branding theory by developing a conceptual framework for understanding and managing branding procedure in a contemporary visual arts organisation with particular reference to an artist-led organisation.

The aim of the study is to examine to what extent commercial branding theory is applicable for a contemporary visual arts organisation, whether and how much theory extension might be required. The research seeks theory extension for current branding theory in order to facilitate visual arts organisations.

The theoretical framework is based upon communication theory and branding theory, special attention is paid to brand positioning theory and the cultural branding inquiry.

The author spent two and a half years conducting an ethnographic inquiry within a visual arts organisation in the North East of England. The study generates data from interviews, extensive participant observation, and the examination of organisational documents and artefacts. Iterative analysis is employed as the major data-analysis method, supported by discourse analysis and visual analysis.

The study finds that stakeholders' identity significantly influences branding for an arts organisation, especially an artist-led organisation in the North East, therefore current commercial branding theory is to be adjusted. To remediate this unsuitability, a theory extension is developed for the branding in the arts sector, so that better understanding and brand management can be achieved.

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## **Declaration**

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas, and contributions from the work of others.

Any ethical clearance for the research presented in this thesis has been approved. Approval has been sought and granted by the Faculty Ethics Committee on 29 July 2015.

I declare that the word count of this thesis is 83,768 words.

Name: Jin Wang

Signature:

Date: 18 March 2021

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

This chapter overviews the issues in the arts and the arts-marketing research, elaborates the reasons and justifications for why this study is undertaken. It introduces the research aim and objectives before moving on to explain the structure of this thesis.

### **1.1 Issues in the arts**

The organisations in the arts have often been seeking solutions to overcome difficulties caused by decreased funding. A report by ICM and SQW on behalf of the Arts Council England shows the potential impact of Brexit on the arts and culture sector in 2018, stating that there is “a widely-held perception that Brexit will have a negative impact on the arts and culture sector in England”, because of “the lack of access to EU funding” and other negative impacts (ICM, 2017, pp. 75-76). The reduction of budget in the arts and cultural sector has caused a “tough challenge for cultural organisations which operate close to the edge of financial sustainability. It is clear that libraries, galleries, and community arts and culture face huge challenges. For instance, one-in-five regional museums has either closed, or plans to close, a part or branch of their museum”. “Councils face at least two more years of very steep budget decreases, followed by a continuing period of very constrained finances”(Harvey., 2016, p. 5). The arts is identified as a part of the cultural industries and is justified upon its social and economic returns, for

example, boosting the local economy, regenerating local community or enhancing public engagement (Colbert, 2017; Lee & Lee, 2017). Written in the ten-year strategic framework (2010-2020), Arts Council England indicates the importance of self-sustainability for a contemporary visual arts organisation: “as pressures increase on public funding, arts and cultural organisations need fresh approaches which enthrall audiences and attract new sources of income”(Arts-Council-England, 2013, p. 3). While facing various challenges, operating an organisation in a more efficient way has become a task for contemporary visual arts organisations, particularly acute for artist-led organisations.

Considering that the basic function of an arts organisation is to sustain individuals and communities, helping society to live and work more creatively (Colbert, 2017); contemporary visual arts organisations are expected to interact with artists and audiences, to show artworks, to promote artists, and to attract more audiences (Zorloni & Ardizzone, 2016). As such, knowledge and understanding about the artists and the audiences are key for the organisation to achieve their goals of running a more efficient operation (Colbert, 2017; Kolb, 2013). Under these circumstances, marketing tools developed for commercial purposes, such as brand and branding may offer some answers for hard-pressed artists/managers in the arts.

Brand, as a concept, has been introduced and been evolving for a long period of time. Its connotations and evolution will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3. One of the brief definitions is given in 1948, it depicts brand as “a name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of them” by which “to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors” (Alexander, 1948, p. 205). This definition, approved by the American Marketing Association, is still in use today.

Researching into brands, branding studies provide business perspectives and solutions for artists and art managers to understand certain industries, for example, the art world (Dall'Olmo Riley et al., 2016; Ikram et al., 2021). Branding studies consider organisations as corporate brands (Heding et al., 2016). The people with whom a brand interact are seen as the stakeholders of it and, the groups that are formed as a result is considered the cultural group of the brand (Cuomo et al., 2020; Fill, 2013; Gambetti & Quigley, 2013; O'Reilly, 2005). Corporate branding research focuses on studying the relationships between a corporate brand and its stakeholders, bringing knowledge and understanding to the managers of the organisation. In this way, guidance can be provided for future practice of brand management (Fetscherin & Usunier, 2012; Maon et al., 2021; Melewar et al., 2013). Taking a contemporary

visual arts organisation as a brand, branding-oriented research and practice can bring up-to-date knowledge about the organisation's stakeholders and its cultural group for its managers, helping them to gain practical skills. As a result, the promotion for the artists and their artworks can be more effective, attracting more audiences.

In fact, the arts has not been defined clearly and accurately (Abbing, 2008); the ambiguity and inaccuracy of the definition of the arts has been causing issues for marketers. The arts is defined as consisting of a variety of culture-related activities, which involve, but is not limited to 30 fields, including music, dance, drama, film, creative writing, fashion, architectural design and visual artworks (Arts-Council-England, 2013). Walter (2015, p. 47) defines contemporary art as "sculpture, painting and other cultural works that are from the current time, or since World War II". Kolb (2005) classifies the visual arts as products based on painting, sculpture, crafts, or other visual-related artworks, defining visual artists as those who produce artworks with creativity. In academic research, defining art is considered a fundamental issue, because the debate about how to define art is ongoing, and has been highlighted for eight years (Fillis, 2011). This issue will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5. Contemporary visual artworks may not be original, as Fillis (2004) points out, it can be problematic to consider them as original, because research shows that artworks can be a combination of several original works from other artists. Therefore, contemporary visual arts is seen as a wide area that relates to any visual-related artworks created in a period within a current lifespan. However, this definition is not accurate enough to be a reference to classify all organisations operating in this field; as a result, contemporary visual arts organisations are seen as a cluster of operations of various value and importance (Porter, 1998; Rimmer, 2020; Zorloni, 2013). This is too vague a definition for these organisations to identify what types of business they operate in the sector. Consequently, it may be difficult to apply branding tools in contemporary visual arts, as those tools are developed for a clearly defined commercial sector.

## **1.2 Research topic**

The research in this thesis questions whether and how commercial branding theory should be adapted to facilitate the branding development of a contemporary visual arts organisation, particularly one that is artist-led. Furthermore, the sub-questions are to be asked: to what extent commercial branding theory might or might not be applicable for a contemporary visual arts organisation? What might need to be adapted in commercial branding theory to facilitate a contemporary visual arts organisation? How might communication affect the corporate branding of a contemporary visual arts organisation? In the arts, how may the stakeholders of

an organisation assist in its branding? And, how may an adapted corporate branding tool influence the brand advantages of an arts organisation?

### **Motivation for the inquiry**

Working in marketing, I held the position of a creative director in several global advertising companies for over a decade (from 2001 to 2012). The companies I worked for (e.g. JWT, Leo Burnett) are globally renowned companies for marketing communication and branding. In the past century, these companies have built a global network with a variety of brands across different business categories. As an employee, this established network enabled me to have opportunities to work with brands on marketing practice, and experiment with branding implementations, which provided me with first-hand information and knowledge about different markets and consumer groups. This experience enhanced my understanding about people's consumption behaviours and how social conventions and cultural factors may affect each person's thinking and behaviour.

After my career in advertising, the pursuit of my master's degree at the University of Manchester provided me with theoretical knowledge on marketing and management. As my major focused on fashion brands and companies, the course enhanced my interest in the creative industries. I then furthered my studies at the University of the Arts London, focusing on topics surrounding contemporary visual arts, which nourished my knowledge, and made me identify problems regarding branding in the arts. Furthermore, the course introduced me to contemporary visual artists, curators, art dealers and gallery/event managers; the experience opened the door and built the foundation for my branding research on contemporary visual arts in this thesis, and it is timely to investigate the research questions proposed above for my study.

### **A brief review of the field**

There was a 20-year period during which brand management studies were not popular in the arts (Fillis, 2011; Holbrook, 1980). From 1970s to 1990s, only 31 published papers discussing the arts featured in mainstream marketing and management journals (Thomas & Cutler, 2008). "We not only need to define what we mean by art and the arts but also the relationship between artistic goods, the art market, arts management and economic management" (Fillis, 2011, p. 13).

Through observation of the history of brand management, Baumgarth (2018) finds that the collaborations between the artists and brands can be categorised into seven types: commissioned arts, historical advertising, branding by artists, artists as endorsers, artistic

interventions, corporate collections, and corporate resources for artists. For the two categories related to organisations, corporate collections and corporate resources for artists, Baumgarth (2018) notes that research currently focuses on the collections of the artworks by corporates and the resources that organisations are providing to the artists. Here, the eighth type of relationship, corporate branding for arts organisations, is neglected. O'Reilly (2011) mapped 1,500 papers published in major research journals in marketing and management, concludes that current research linking the arts and brands are extremely multi-disciplinary, as he states, there are “seven macro areas (creative and cultural industries, cultural policy, cultural economics, art and business, art and technology, art and sociology, art and aesthetics) and nine micro areas (arts marketing management, artists, arts consumption, music, fine art, film performing arts, literature, festivals) with research methodologies completing the picture” (O'Reilly, 2011, p. 35). Thus, at least 17 areas are found covering arts-and-branding topics. This indicates that currently branding research in the arts is not systematically organised and developed, but instead, scattered around different areas. Therefore, it is necessary to dedicate an in-depth study in one specific area, such as corporate branding in the arts.

Five types of theories are reviewed by scholars to clarify the principle of marketing and branding in the arts: the history of arts marketing, the key branding approaches adopted in the cultural industries, the evolution of branding practice in the arts, business models in contemporary art, and current marketing implications in the cultural industries (Diggle, 1994; Kerrigan et al., 2004; Kolb, 2013; O'Reilly & Kerrigan, 2010; Popescu & Voiculescu, 2020). However, in terms of the contemporary visual arts sector, current branding research focuses primarily on galleries or artists, for example, branding purposes of certain galleries and museums (O'Reilly & Kerrigan, 2010; Pino et al., 2020); the impact of personal branding on young and emerging artists (Lee & Lee, 2016); the investigation about the competition between galleries/art dealers on the contemporary visual arts market (Kompatsiaris, 2020; Zorloni & Ardizzone, 2016); the examination on the economic and political influence of contemporary art galleries (Rodner & Preece, 2015; Zorloni, 2013). Other studies include: the importance of the narrative for an artist's personal branding (Kompatsiaris, 2020; Preece & Kerrigan, 2015); the managerial style in contemporary visual arts galleries (Jyrämä & Äyväri, 2010; Linowes, 2020; Scottish-Government, 2020); the commercial value of visual and linguistic signs of art (Green & Gray, 2020; van Niekerk & Conradie, 2016; Ward, 2017). Although some of the studies discuss brand authenticity and the impact of an artist's identity on his personal branding (Preece, 2015), identity impact on artworks (Rodner & Kerrigan, 2014), and the process of

galleries' reputation building (Fillis, 2003; Pino et al., 2020), these studies pay little attention to branding the practice of an organisation, especially when it comes to artist-led organisations in contemporary visual arts in the north east of England, few studies have been done.

Debates occur in the art world regarding whether and how arts organisations should manage themselves as brands (Christoph, 2010; Kosuth & Siegelau, 1991; Siegelau & Projansky, 1973; Slyce & Siegelau, 2009). Since Tate Modern has engaged a branding consultant for its brand makeover, some arts organisations are trying to rethink themselves as brands, yet they need researchers' studies to support their ideas (Giannopoulos et al., 2020; Phillips & O'Reilly, 2007). In the field of branding for arts organisations, research demonstrates how brand identity and brand images affect an organisation, yet the study conducted was with orchestras, not visual arts organisations, let alone artist-led (Jyrämä et al., 2015). A conceptual framework was developed as an extended theory for some branding approaches, such as the cultural branding approach. This framework, however, was developed for film companies (O'Reilly & Kerrigan, 2013). Social media platforms was found to be effective for arts organisations to communicate with their audiences on unfamiliar art forms, although the engagement was proven challenging to maintain (Walmsley, 2016). Moreover, cultural factors were found to positively relate to the reason why audiences choose to attend events organised by certain arts organisations (Willekens & Lievens, 2016).

Few studies examined the relationship between the identity of stakeholders and the identity of the organisation. For example, in terms of the relationship between organisational identity and branding, some scholars found that the identity of an organisation should be clear, cohesive, compelling and customer-connected, in order for the stakeholders to understand and apply it in branding accordingly (Voss & Grabel, 2018). However, the study did not investigate whether and how the identity of the key stakeholders may or may not influence the organisational identity. Preece (2015) sought to classify the stakeholder group for a brand in the arts, yet the study was conducted on personal branding of an artist (i.e. Ai Weiwei) and not for corporate branding. The fact that Ai Weiwei is an artist not an organisation (e.g. Tate Modern, MOMA) disqualifies him from being considered as a corporate brand, although Preece (2015) believes a celebrity artist, such as Ai Weiwei, should be seen differently from a non-celebrity artist. Further, the classification only produced general categories (i.e. art world, media, public) to the stakeholder group without clarifying how each group may or may not impact on branding. Moreover, the identity negotiation occurs between stakeholders in corporate branding process and the negotiation might or might not add value to an organisation. Previous study found that

the identity of an artist adds value into his/her artwork which acts as an advertisement for the artist (Preece, 2018). However, the study did not show whether identity was negotiated in the value creating process. Morgan (2018) found that values may be co-created by customers and artists, yet the study did not investigate other stakeholders and the way they communicate. Hence, further research is required to contribute to the field.

Few studies were focused on British organisations in the North East England, and fewer studies were focused on artist-led organisations. One study investigated the organisational identity and marketing in the arts, yet is based on the US (O'Reilly et al., 2018). National and personal identity has been found to be positively related to brand identity (Scarpaci et al., 2018; Young, 2020). In ethnographic studies, however, the research was conducted for a Cuban perfume brand not visual art (Scarpaci et al., 2018). The UK government has been trying to provide help for arts and cultural organisations to self-sustain; Arts Council England has given guidance for arts organisations to start their business plan and branding. The guidance perceives arts organisations as corporate brands, pointing out the significance of brand identity (Arts-Council-England, 2016). However, the guidance fails to nuance the differences between arts businesses and commercial businesses, neglecting the uniqueness of artists and artist-led organisations. Consequently, the branding advised was a traditional commercial procedure, which might be problematic for some arts organisations (e.g. artist-led organisations). In essence, the guidance failed to recognise that artists' identity might influence an organisation significantly. In other words, there might be a difference between brain-storming an ethos for a brand and building up a brand based on identity. In order to apply branding tools on an arts organisation, further research is required to gain deeper understanding about why, in arts, the stakeholders (e.g. audiences, artists) choose one organisation over the other.

To address the challenges a contemporary visual arts organisation is facing, particularly the artist-led ones, applicable branding tools may need to be developed for the arts. It is therefore necessary to establish whether branding theories developed for the commercial world may be applicable in the contemporary visual arts sector. Might an extended branding theory be needed? How might a commercial branding theory be adapted for the arts? Are there barriers for branding practice to be applied in the arts? How might these barriers be overcome? This thesis sets out to address these questions.

### **Research aim and objectives**

The aim of this research is to examine how far the branding theory developed for commercial purposes is applicable for a contemporary visual arts organisation, especially an artist-led one, in its corporate branding; the research seeks necessity and possibility for theory extension and application for current branding theory, so that the theory is able to facilitate corporate branding for the organisations.

A set of objectives has been developed to meet the aim of this research:

1. To examine how far commercial branding theory may or may not be applicable in contemporary visual arts, and what might need to be adapted in the theory.
2. To determine, during branding process, what may be the key to be communicated, and affect a corporate brand (i.e. an organisation) and its stakeholders (e.g. managers, artists, audiences, collaborators).
3. To discover what potential brand advantages may be brought to the organisation if an altered corporate branding tool is applied in an artist-led organisation in contemporary visual arts.

### **The significance of this study**

When I was working on branding for different brands, I noticed a difference between how a brand perceives itself and how the brand's stakeholders perceive it. This difference causes stakeholders' misunderstanding for a brand; the misunderstanding is hard to be addressed by changing the text or the visual elements of a brand. Moreover, I found that this misunderstanding became more problematic when the brand is closely culture-related (such as fashion items, artworks). This phenomenon interests me. In fact, research gaps have been identified by branding scholars, indicating that corporate branding strategies are affected by the difference in understanding between the brand and its stakeholders (Hatch & Schultz, 2001). Traditional marketing tools and branding implementation are not always able to address the gaps and solve the issues caused by this misunderstanding. In some cases, the misunderstanding even causes stakeholders' significant resistance to brands, creating branding barriers in business practice (Holt, 2002). To find effective branding implementations, new research methods need to be embraced by branding studies, especially when the research topic is closely related to cultural subjects.

This study shows its significance by applying anthropological methods to business research. Holt (2004) is one of the first scholars who adopt ethnographic methods in marketing and

branding studies. Different from traditional business research methods (e.g. survey, interview), ethnographic methods emphasise being an insider in the subject studied by the researcher (Palmer et al., 2018). Having an anthropology research background, he discovered the merits of applying ethnographic methods in business studies and established the cultural branding approach (Holt, 2005, 2006; Holt & Cameron, 2010). The theory is ground-breaking for branding studies because the employment of ethnographic method provides opportunities to fill the research gap where traditional business research methods could not (Heding et al., 2016). As a branding professional, I realise that branding is a long-term project. It takes a long time for an organisation to increase its brand awareness and establish relationship and loyalty with its stakeholders (Schultz et al., 2005). Therefore, a short-term study does not allow enough time and space for a researcher to observe the effect of a strategy, and to understand the thoughts and feelings of stakeholders. In order to discover how far current branding theories might be applicable in the arts, and in what extent the theories might need an extension, I decide to adopt the ethnographic method, and study a corporate brand for two-and-half years. This long-term study gives me enough time and space to interact with the organisation as a corporate brand, and enables research to answer the questions proposed in current business practice. As the ethnographic method is one of the methods rarely used in the field of business research, it assists business research with a fresh view from cultural study (Daymon, 2011; Saunders, 2016). As a result, this research contributes to the diversity of current business research.

### **Terminology in this thesis**

Although it stems from a business study point of view, this research is an interdisciplinary study, involving insights from different disciplines, such as communication, sociology, and art. While referring to the same subject, the terms used by these disciplines may often bear different meanings. It is therefore necessary to clarify the terminology used in this thesis.

First of all, the term *commercial branding theory* used in this thesis refers to the theory that is originally developed to guide the applications of marketing communication and branding practice for commercial purposes, although, currently, these theories may or may not only be applied in the commercial world. The term, *commercial branding theory*, is to distinguish, as one of the research objectives, the branding theories that are developed for the commercial world from the ones that are developed in this thesis; it is significant to distinguish whether and how much the theory developed for the commercial world may suit the art world, in particular to an artist-led one.

Second, in this thesis, the word *corporate* in the term *corporate branding* refers to all types of organisations regardless of their sizes and types; the meaning differs from the usual connotation of *corporate* in the arts, which normally refer to large commercial enterprises.

Third, in this thesis, the term *cultural branding approach* is specifically referring to the approach established by Holt (2002) for the field of brand management. The *cultural branding approach* is considered a ground-breaking branding school that contributes to the research scale of brand management (Heding et al., 2016), which will be discussed later.

Fourth, in this thesis, several terms used by different disciplines refer to the same subject, or the subjects referred to significantly overlap. For example, the term *target consumer group* is used in marketing communication, referring to the group of people who take actions in purchasing the products labelled by a brand or interacting with the brand during its marketing practice (Egan, 2015). This group belongs to a larger group of people that constitute the term *stakeholders' group*. The former emphasises the purchase behaviour of the group, while the latter emphasises the relationship between the brand and the group of people (Gyrd-Jones & Kornum, 2013; Ling, 2015). Similarly, in this thesis, the terms *cultural group* and *target audience* refer to the same group of people. Only the term *cultural group* stresses the cultural similarity or backgrounds of the group of people, whereas the term *target audience* stresses the attendance of this group of people at art events. The thesis uses all these terms interchangeably, as theories derived from different disciplines need to be reviewed to establish a valid argument and to support new developments.

In addition, in this thesis, arts managers are regarded as the people who work in the arts, yet are not artists, such as, curators, arts marketers, managers of organisations, dealers.

### **1.3 Structure**

The main body of this thesis is structured in six chapters. Chapter 2 and 3 set up the theoretical framework of the inquiry. Chapter 2 focuses on communication theories, addressing the function of communication in branding process. It clarifies how a brand, through communication, may influence the thoughts of the people to whom it relates. Marketing communication theories are paid particular attention in this chapter, as they play a role in branding practice, enabling a brand to interact with certain group of people. Different objectives and strategies of marketing communication are reviewed with explanations of the reasons why the strategies are developed. Online communication is considered as a significant method for delivering branding messages. Its communication mode, function, and

characteristics are therefore reviewed. The chapter particularly analyses how a message is delivered in communication, and how audience may be influenced by online communication. The chapter takes consideration of stakeholders' identity construction and argues that it is a significant motivation for people, although, the motivations of communication for different groups of people may vary according to the shared traits of their group. Therefore, the expectations of people may differ. This leaves my study an opportunity to explore how the relationship can be enhanced between a brand and certain groups of people.

Chapter 3 reviews branding theory and identifies the branding approach employed in this thesis; the chapter clarifies the necessity to employ an identity and cultural approach to branding theory. In addition, brand positioning theory is reviewed to reveal how a brand is positioned for commercial purposes, which prepares for an evaluation of how it might not suit the contemporary visual arts sector. The discussion on brand identity is broken down to two levels – micro recognition and macro recognition, assisting the analysis on the data collected through field work in later chapters. Specifically, the micro level of a brand identity involves the visual elements, the view and thoughts and the culture created in the organisation. The macro level of brand identity for a corporate brand refers to the cultural meaning of the brand. It involves the thoughts of the group of people to whom the brand relates – the stakeholders. The theoretical framework provides angles and opportunities for the theory extension developed later, laying a foundation for the study to evaluate how far cultural factors may influence branding practice for a contemporary visual arts organisation in the North East.

Chapter 4 illustrates the methodology adopted by this thesis. Starting from its research philosophy, this chapter sets out the research strategy and explains the necessity and significance of employing an ethnographic case study for the thesis. With a comparison of the strengths and weaknesses of a single-case study, the chapter concludes that it is most appropriate to adopt a single-case study for my research. Moreover, Chapter 4 describes the design of the data collection and the analysis design. It illustrates how many data collection methods are employed in the study, and how the analysis is to be conducted for valid research results. In addition, this chapter depicts the working process in fieldwork undertaken through detailed explanation of the chosen case, the chapter provides a clear perspective on how this ethnographic case study is conducted, research ethics, and how time is spent to maximise research results.

Chapters 5 to 7 are the analysis chapters, they nuance the differences between the needs of the commercial world and the needs of the arts, discuss the possibilities of applying current commercial branding theories in the arts, and demonstrates the needs of theory extension required by branding research in the arts. Chapter 5 discusses the possibilities of applying commercial brand positioning theory into the arts. It identifies the ambiguity of the definition of contemporary visual arts and the ambiguity of the business category of the contemporary visual arts sector. It reveals the issues caused by these ambiguities and the difficulties of applying current commercial brand positioning theory into the arts. Moreover, by analysing artists' feelings and thoughts, Chapter 5 identifies the resistance of the artists and arts managers to applying commercial brand positioning theory in the arts. It demonstrates the needs of an identity-oriented positioning theory as the theory extension if brand positioning theory is to be applied in contemporary visual arts.

Chapter 6 demonstrates how, in contemporary visual arts, a corporate brand's brand positioning and brand identity are influenced by the identity of its founders, and how other stakeholders may influence the corporate brand's branding process. Starting from the analysis of the view and thoughts of the chosen organisation, and the thoughts of its founders, the chapter demonstrates how significantly the shared identity of the organisation's founders may influence its positioning. By analysing the founders' identity on both social and personal level, the chapter reveals that, for a corporate brand in contemporary visual arts, the founders' shared identity significantly affects the brand identity of the organisation. Moreover, this chapter discovers that, for a corporate brand, the communication between the members of its cultural group assists the branding process by enhancing the brand's positioning and shaping the cultural group into a mindshare group. Cultural myth may be created through the members' identity negotiation caused by the communication, which may subsequently benefit the corporate brand.

Chapter 7 reveals the brand advantages and disadvantages that may be brought by an identity-oriented positioning during corporate branding in contemporary visual arts. The analysis conducted is based on multiple data sources, which enables research results to be linked with both business and cultural factors. Moreover, while the shared identity of the cultural group is discovered creating barriers for corporate branding, marketing communication is found to have the potential of enabling a corporate brand to break through these barriers, which contributes to current brand management research.

Chapter 8 concludes the contribution made by this study. The study closely examines and identifies the branding issues existing in the North East arts sector, suggesting a theory extension to support the branding process. It analyses how identity impacts on branding for a contemporary visual arts organisation, nuances the branding advantages and barriers when employing the new tool. Other contributions include the definition, the business category suggestions, the possible solutions and the research method contribution.

The next chapter discusses the communication theories in relation to the arts.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Communication Theory and its Relevance to Arts Organisations**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter explores how communication plays a role in organisations, specifically in their branding practices. It briefly explores communication theories and draws on theoretical underpinnings to examine relationships between marketing communication, visual communication, and audience groups. It provides insight into strategic thinking for a marketer and points to how effective communication for branding purposes might be achieved. The review of communication theory aims to illustrate a connection between communication studies and branding research.

#### **2.1 Communication**

Communication is a message exchanging process (Baran, 2021; Macauley, 2010; Schwartz, 2010; Solymar, 1999). Communication research in academia is divided into two groups of scholars: the efficiency group and the influence group. For the efficiency group, the messages are the essential products of communication. This group pays attention to how to deliver messages efficiently and effectively (Baran, 2021; Schwartz, 2010; Solymar, 1999). For the influence group, their research entails “how communication processes emerge, proceed, and develop in relationship between sender and receiver” (Schultz et al., 2005, p. 35). The term

mass communication was adopted in late 1930s (McQuail, 1987). Janowitz (1968) defines mass communication as a transmission enabling symbolic messages to be delivered to a wide range of receivers through technological devices such as press and film. This definition does not distinguish the process of communication as a sender-and-response process instead of a sender-only process (McQuail, 2012, 2020). Considering the influence of communication, it should be defined as a symbolic message transmission process in which the interactions between the senders and the receivers and the receivers' responses are both reflected. As communication establishes human beings' daily interactions (Duck & McMahan, 2009; Zelizer, 2008), many scholars see communication as a method by which to achieve functional, social, political and cultural purposes (D'Urso et al., 2014; Duck & McMahan, 2009; Eisenstein, 1979, 2012; Leiss et al., 1990; McQuail, 2020; Zelizer, 2008). In the history of human communication, symbolic meaning occupies a key position, in modern society, with its technological advances, its significance is enhanced (Schmandt-Besserat, 1986).

### **Terminologies**

Several terminologies are commonly used in research: traditional media, non-traditional media, mass media, new media, digital media and online media. It is necessary to clarify them.

*Traditional media* refers to the paper-and-electricity-based media, such as television, radio and print (Dahlén et al., 2009; Pavlik, 2012). *Mass media* is defined by Turow (2013, p. 10) as “the media through which to conduct mass communication”, a “multiple distribution of messages through technological devices”. The technology devices include the internet. Hence, mass media can be a combination of traditional and non-traditional media (Harris & Sanborn, 2013; McQuail, 2020; Rydenfelt, 2021). The term *new media* is created to differentiate internet-based media from traditional media (Green, 2010; Lister, 2009). The term *digital media* refers to a wider range of media, including all computer-readable devices (e.g. digital cameras, DVDs and CDs) (Seb, 2014).

In comparison, the term *online media* is adopted to define the media generated through the internet, accessible through digital devices (Anonymous, 2021; Okazaki & Romero, 2010). In other words, new media is online media, although since 2006, along with the dramatically increasing number of internet users, new media is no longer new (Davidjants & Tiidenberg, 2021; Graham & Cook, 2010). Therefore, this thesis adopts the term online media. Online media includes yet not limited to websites (e.g. organisations' websites, online newspapers, online magazines), social media platforms (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, IGTV, TikTok, Twitter,

YouTube), blogs and content communities (e.g. Tumblr, Pinterest, Reddit), e-mail, networking and instant message tools (e.g. Snapchat, WhatsApp, Zoom, Microsoft Team, Skype) (Baran, 2021; Green, 2010; McQuail, 2020).

### **2.1.1 Effectiveness**

Media effectiveness refers to how message receivers can understand the information sent by message senders. It is a term related to media efficiency, illustrating how quickly information can be received by a message receiver (Moustafa Leonard et al., 2011). Online media is more effective than traditional media in some fields. For example, in terms of political usage of media, blog is surpassing television, radio, and print, and is becoming an increasingly powerful tool for political parties (Meraz, 2011).

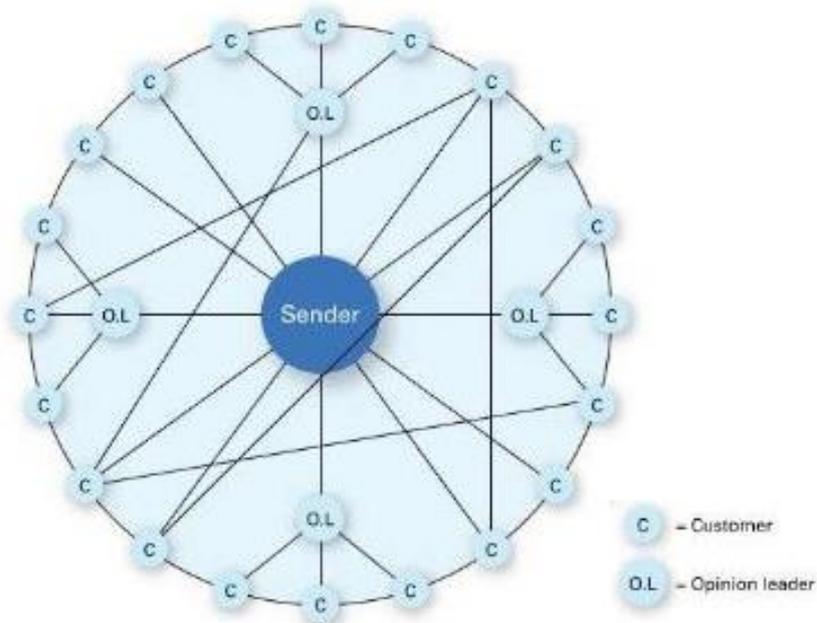
In *traditional media* (e.g. books, newspaper, television and radio), message senders are usually a group, for example, an organisation or a company. Messages are usually centralised and hierarchically produced and delivered by a group of message senders (Turow, 2013). This communication mode is called *sender-receiver mode* (Turow, 2010). Messages are sent to a large group of message receivers, who have little chance to give feedback or interact with the senders (Valcke & Lenaerts, 2010). However, the communication through online media has adopted a completely different mode, one that requires different strategies for message senders (Royle & Laing, 2014).

#### **Online communication**

Online communication benefits brands through the unique characteristics of online media. Dahlén et al. (2009) find that online media shows greater effect on some brands compared with traditional media in relation to consumer-perceived value, and that newer brands benefit even more from using online media. A higher rate of repurchase and positive word-of-mouth are achieved by consumer-perceived value. Greater effectiveness stems from a user-generated communication mode in online media.

In online media, messages are not centralised, nor hierarchically produced and delivered by a message sender (Shirky, 2008). Audiences can be message senders and receivers at the same time. In web 2.0, audiences read a post and leave comments spontaneously. During communication on social media platform, audiences can instantly interact with the content generator, and, their posts and comments can be accessed by other audiences at the same time. In other words, audiences can be influenced by the opinion leaders instantly (Momtaz et al., 2011; Valcke & Lenaerts, 2010).

**Figure 1 Online communication mode**



Source: Smith and Zook (2011, p. 128)

As far as posting content and driving public attention are concerned, Shirky (2008) finds that message receivers contribute as much as message senders in *user-generated communication mode*.

Studies have proposed different perspectives on how to motivate online users to post positive content for an organisation. Three benefits are found to motivate online users, entertainment benefit, social benefit, and economic benefit (Gummerus et al., 2012), with mind-reading added to the motivation behind social benefit (Carpenter et al., 2011). Supporting the findings, Utz et al. (2012) agree that social benefit motivates online users, although Ma and Chan (2014) argue that sharing knowledge and altruism are key motivations leading online users to post, review, and comment. Gummerus et al. (2012) classifies motivations into community engagement benefit (CEB) and transactional engagement benefit (TEB). The former is partially activated by social and entertainment needs, the latter is fully mediated by the two.

Self-identity construction is a significant motivation for online users, especially for young people's online behaviours (Davis, 2011). Through online expression, young people's self-multiplicity could be limited in order to follow social norms, so that their social interrelationship can be enhanced (Davis, 2011). DeAndrea et al. (2010) also find that users' online expressions are strongly influenced by culture, due to the identity-construction needs.

As an essential factor, symbolic meaning can affect people's online expression significantly (Calvert et al., 2003). In other words, identity is socially constructed through communication, and taste, as a symbol of social status, is culturally educated by communication (Bourdieu, 2010).

For an arts organisation, although its reputation may be increased quicker through online communication (Dahlén et al., 2009), little research has been conducted on how the reputation may be enhanced. Especially when an organisation is new, the question rises whether online communication might strengthen its identity to the audiences. Further study is needed.

### **Concerns**

Although some scholars consider online media as an effective and efficient way to communicate and interact with audiences, others express concerns. These concerns are mainly related to organisations' reputations. For example, it is too easy for users to leave negative comments and reviews online, and such reviews can be searched by other users. Hence, an organisation's reputation can be damaged if it has lost control over their negative reviews. Misunderstanding audiences' cultural backgrounds can also endanger an organisation as a brand (Zhan et al., 2009). Moustafa Leonard et al. (2011) note that cultural tendency is an essential factor when it comes to choosing media for marketers. Their analysis is based on the impact of misunderstanding of organisational culture, social culture, occupational culture and individual characteristics. Their findings are supported by Bolton et al. (2013), who also finds that generation is a variation that impacts on online-communication results.

Other research suggests that traditional online promotion may not be effective. For example, banner advertisements were not found to be effective, as they originate directly from traditional media and lacks interactivity (Kim & Moon, 2020; Robinson et al., 2007). Also, the purchase rate through banner advertising is low (Fulgoni & Mörn, 2009; Yang et al., 2020). There may be two reasons underlying this. First, there is a lack of reliable methods to measure the effectiveness of online media (Fulgoni & Mörn, 2009; Simanowski, 2019; Srinivasan & Sarial-Abi, 2021). Second, there is a lack of marketing tools to identify the target-consumer group for communication (Fill et al., 2013; Majeed & Lee, 2021; Srinivasan & Sarial-Abi, 2021). Therefore, the *user-generated mode* is recommended by researchers for online communication, in terms of building organisations' reputation, interacting and encouraging their audiences to create content (Dijkmans et al., 2015; Huang et al., 2020; Müller & Christandl, 2019). However, little research has been conducted with regard to the communication in arts

organisations, despite the fact that some tracking and assessment tools were found to be helpful to increase communication effectiveness. Those tools are searching engine marketing (SEM), social media marketing, and affiliation (Booth & Matic, 2011; Fill et al., 2013; Kriechbaumer, 2019; Li & Filobos, 2020). How might an arts organisation, especially an artist-led one, strenghtens its branding image through online communication? This question will be explore further in Chapter 6.

### **2.1.2 Communication strategy**

#### **Significance**

Corporate-communication studies indicate that strategic communication brings internal and external benefits to organisations. An internal communication strategy enables people working in different departments to focus on the general aim of the communication and assists organisations to control the overall quality of management (Argenti, 2013; Gronstedt, 1996). In corporate communicaiton, clarifying individuals' tasks and targets are found to be significant (Argenti, 2013).

External identity building has become a primary concern for organisations since the 2000s. (Cornelissen, 2014). However, culture, media and other barriers make it difficult for organisations to clarify their identity through communication, and these barriers commonly lead to misunderstandings. As such, a communication strategy enables organisations to decide clearly on what message to deliver and how to deliver it (Cornelissen, 2014, 2011). Supporting this finding, other scholars point out that, through a planned and designed process, messages can be delivered effectively; the successfully delivered message may help an organisation to position itself in the mind of its stakeholders and in the sector (Goodman & Hirsch, 2010; Harlan & Marc, 2010). The opportunities arise when online communication is guided by a clear strategy. Audiences could then be turned into genuine advocates for an organisation (Abzari et al., 2014; Pelsmacker et al., 2013). Nevertheless, little research has been conducted to establish whether this approach works for an artist-led organisation.

Information delivery in communication should differ according to the characteristics of organisations, especially when the organisations are from different regions and in different stage of development (Rabino et al., 2012). Despite the trend of delivering uniform messages under the force of globalisation (Levitt, 2010; Ohmae, 1987), using uniform messages is not beneficial for organisations that seek to enhance their financial performance. Therefore, researchers discourage organisations from using the same messages on different platforms

(Aref et al., 2002; Buzzell, 1988; Jain & Griffin, 2011). Moreover, a uniform message is difficult for audiences to understand when they come from different cultural backgrounds or have different psychological needs (Boddewyn et al., 1987; Kelly-Holmes, 2008).

In short, an appropriate communication strategy is based on clarified communication purposes and a clear positioning of the organisation. This will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

#### **Factors that influence communication strategy**

Communication strategy relates to task and media richness. Media richness theory discusses media's capabilities and the purpose of content (Daft & Lengel, 1986). It studies why and how a certain medium is chosen over other media (Ferry et al., 2001). Rich media, such as social media platforms, can transmit videos, audios or generate instant communication. Less rich media, such as email and a company's web-site, can only transmit limited types of information (e.g. texts or images) (Erra & Scanniello, 2010). Instant face-to-face communication is considered as the richest media, followed by video, audio, image then text only (Otondo et al., 2008).

Considerable research has shown that media richness affects the effectiveness of communication (Harris & Sanborn, 2013; Jacob et al., 2010). Audiences' information acquisition level is task-related; it varies according to the purpose of the communication (Badger et al., 2014). Whether or not the delivered content matches the communication task influences the information acquisition significantly (Badger et al., 2014). Rich media, such as social media platforms, are appropriate media for delivering complex and personal information (Ferry et al., 2001). Less rich media, such as a company's website, have a higher recall rate in terms of the overall image of an organisation (Badger et al., 2014). As such, more complex tasks, such as forming organisational identity, can be conveyed through rich media (Cable & Yu, 2006; Erra & Scanniello, 2010). Supported by sociological studies, identity building can be a complicated task which relates to the sector of the organisation, it also relates to the social situation and the culture background of audiences (Wang, 2020; Young, 2013). For instance, McCracken (1990) indicates that showing status is an essential motivation in modern consumption and communication. Bourdieu (2010) concludes that *taste* is a result of systematic education, a type of communication that reveals social class and other underlying conditions. Therefore, communication strategies need to be set specifically according to the traits of an organisation (Ferry et al., 2001; Mason & Leek, 2012).

What is notable is that social media platforms vary according to their functions and their audiences. From blogs (e.g. Tumblr) to networking tools (e.g. Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter), to content communities (e.g. TikTok, Instagram, IGTV, YouTube, Pinterest), from texts to instant communication (e.g. WhatsApp, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Skype), media richness can vary significantly. The choice of media platform relates to an organisation's communication purposes and its audience group (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). In some exceptional cases, less rich media, such as texts and emails, may still generate extensive in-depth conversations in large groups (Du et al., 2010; Pignata et al., 2015). Therefore, to investigate how communication assists branding practice for an arts organisation, communication via different media will be examined in Chapter 6.

Social context significantly influences communication process as well, which is supported by various theories, including social influence theory (Fulk et al., 1990), social definition theory (Markus, 1994), channel expansion theory (Carlson, 1995) and critical social theory (Ngwenyama & Lee, 1997). In a social context, the motivation of audiences is a key factor in communication (Carpenter et al., 2011; Gummerus et al., 2012). In terms of communication effectiveness and social context, McCracken's (2005) study stresses that there is a strong relationship between social motivation and communication strategy, especially when it comes to social status and cultural tendency related consumption. As a result, the *push/pull strategy* was developed to examine communication in a social context.

### **Push/pull strategy**

The *push/pull strategy* is derived from marketing strategy, where *supply-push* and *demand-pull* are the two driving forces for product/service innovation (King et al., 1994). This concept has been adapted into marketing communication theory (Ailawadi & Farris, 2020; Fill, 2013). The theory classifies these two communication strategies into two channels (Ailawadi & Farris, 2020). In a *push strategy*, information goes down through a channel from the publishers (e.g. organisations, institutions, enterprises) to the end-users (e.g. audiences, customers) (Fill et al., 2013; Tambe et al., 2020). In a *pull strategy*, information goes up via a channel from the end-users to the publishers to deliver a message (Tambe et al., 2020).

In the arts, the application of push/pull communication strategy should be differentiated from other industries (Egan, 2015). Based on studies of audiences' response conducted by Li (2000), Chiou et al. (2010) and Shih (2006), Table 1 listed the benefits of using the *push/pull strategy*.

The *push strategy* is commonly adopted for building relationships with end-users (e.g. audiences), while the *pull strategy* is mostly chosen for motivating purchases; however, the *demand-pull* may also be a good motivation for organisations to fix certain issues or to adopt new tools (Chau & Tam, 2000; Munro & Noori, 1988). For an arts organisation, to improve the effectiveness of communication, strategies need to be flexible according to tasks. Further investigation is required in later chapters on how a push/ pull *strategy* might be applied in branding by an arts organisation.

**Table 1 Push/pull communication strategy**

| Strategy | Publisher                                | Communication model                  | Communication goal         |
|----------|--|--------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Push     | Organisations, institutions, Enterprises | Publisher-to-subscriber model        | Relationship building      |
| Pull     | End-users (audiences, customers)         | Data transfer initiated by end-users | Purchase, giving feedbacks |

Source: Author’s own elaboration combined from Fill (2013), Juvva (2000) and Shih (2006)

## 2.2 Marketing communication

### Purpose

“Marketing communication can be described as being every form of communication relevant to marketing” (Copley, 2014, p. 2). It is “A process through which organisations and audience engage with one another” (Fill, 2013, p. 18). Participants in marketing communication “seek to develop and present messages before evaluating and acting upon any responses.” (Fill, 2013, p. 18). Marketing communication is an audience-centred activity despite the various historical interpretations about the scope and function of it (Egan, 2015; Keller, 2013; Munsch, 2021; Rossiter & Bellman, 2005).

Engagement, audience, and response are the three key factors in marketing communication research. In the early years, marketing communication was developed to persuade people to make purchase. It was thought to focus on promotion for products and services (Keller et al., 2012; Noris et al., 2021). Hence, in this stage, marketing communication theory is product oriented. The communication mode is sender-receiver mode, based on traditional media (Egan, 2015; Smith & Taylor, 2004). At the same time, the information delivered is also product-oriented (Fill, 2013).

The later stages are image-oriented, in which communication methods are carefully constructed to assist audiences to build a clear understanding of the identity of a product or an organisation, so that the image of a brand can be set in its audience's mind (Kapferer, 2012; Munsch, 2021; Smith & Zook, 2011). By creating a clear brand image, the audience's purchase experiences are enhanced and, the product value is increased; as a result, the audience's loyalty can be enhanced (Chiou et al., 2010; Copley, 2014; Yen & Lu, 2008). In this stage, user-generated communication becomes widespread, communication becomes more interactive, messages are delivered more efficiently (Noris et al., 2021; Pavlik, 2012). The push/pull strategy becomes commonly used in this stage (Chiou et al., 2010), meaning that information delivered starts to differ according to the audience groups in order to adjust to different individuals and attitudes (Abzari et al., 2014). As a result, the symbolic meaning of a brand becomes a key factor for communication strategy (Copley, 2014; Rosenbaum-Elliott et al., 2011).

The current stage is relationship oriented, linking an organisation and its stakeholders together. A large and growing body of literature has adopted relationship-oriented marketing (Cornelissen, 2011; Fill, 2013; Schultz et al., 2005). Here, the stakeholders can be the audience, customers, and other related organisations (Cottafava & Corazza, 2020). Building relationship with stakeholders can reveal their particular aspirational preferences (Chernev et al., 2011; Copley, 2014). Once the relationship is built, a highly bonded relationship between the brand and its stakeholders can be constructed, and a preferred style of marketing communication can be clarified too (Saviolo & Marazza, 2013).

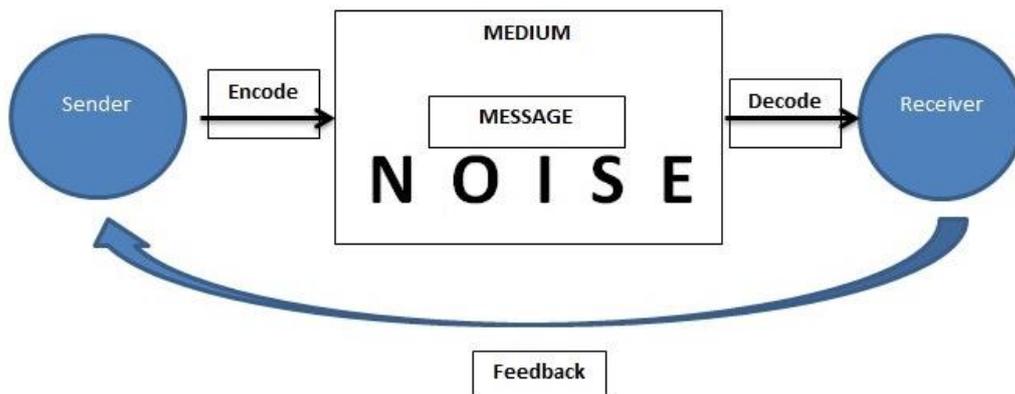
Therefore, to fulfil the purpose of building a bond between a brand and its stakeholders, each strategy needs to be set according to the task and attitudes of the stakeholders.

### **2.2.1 Task**

Marketing is a process of social management in which an individual or an organisation's needs can be satisfied through value or product exchange (Kotler & Armstrong, 2001). However, the exchange, for stakeholders, can be either transaction-related or relationship-related, or a combined with both (Brown, 1995). Collaborative exchanges assist brands on building long-term relationships with their stakeholders, so that the strategic exchange of values can benefit all (Baron et al., 2010; Dwyer et al., 1987). As such, the principal task of marketing communication can be exchanging messages of values with stakeholders (Smith & Zook, 2011).

When messages are delivered to stakeholders, interference can be caused by background noise or distractors, as there are many competing messages, (Egan, 2015). Based on the communication model developed by Shannon and Weaver in 1949 (Chandler & Munday, 2020), Schramm (1955, pp. 23-27) created a basic communication model to guide the understanding of how messages are delivered, and how audiences provide feedback to the message sender. Figure 2 shows that the messages are delivered through an encode-and-decode process. At the same time, the process faces interference noise. Accordingly, marketing communication is divided into four types: unplanned communication, planned communication, product-based communication, and service-based communication. The unplanned and planned communication consider the way a message is understood (decoding process). Product-based and service-based communication consider the purpose of the sent message (encoding process) (Hughes & Fill, 2007).

**Figure 2 Basic communication**



Source: Model created using information by Schramm (1955, pp. 23-27) based the on communication model developed by Shannon and Weaver in 1949 (Chandler & Munday, 2020)

Current literature pays particular attention to planned communication, such as advertising, sales promotion, public relations, direct marketing and personal selling, especially in relation to traditional media (Fill, 2013; Fill et al., 2013; Smith & Taylor, 2004). Unplanned communication, such as word-of-mouth, can provide significant value for organisations as well (Hudson et al., 2015). Even though, without a strategy, unplanned communication could result in a negative impression. With appropriate strategies, however, unplanned communication can generate positive impact on building the reputation and relationship between an organisation and its audiences (Baron et al., 2010; Hur et al., 2011). Therefore, exploring unplanned

communication is necessary to see how an arts organisation might be communicated as a brand on daily basis.

In marketing communication, “customer engagement” is to encourage “particular behaviours” (Cabiddu et al., 2014, p. 176). The engagement provides organisations with more business opportunities in a socially connected world (Goodman, 2012). Consumers’ brand loyalty can be enhanced by this engagement (Gummerus et al., 2012). The engagement can be improved if the organisation sets its communication strategy according to the needs of different target-audience groups (Matthews, 2012). Four major paths, differentiation, reinforcement, informing, and persuasion are summarised in Table 2.

**Table 2 The tasks of marketing communication**

| Task            | Sub-task                          | Explanation   |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| Differentiation | Positioning and segmentation      | To make a product or service standing in the category                       |
| Reinforcement   | Reminding and reassurance         | To consolidate and strengthen previous messages and experiences             |
| Informing       | Educate consumers, make awareness | To make known and advise of availability and features                       |
| Persuasion      | Purchase or further enquiry       | To encourage further purchase-related behaviour or enhance the relationship |

Source: Table elaborated by information collected from Fill (2013) and Copley (2014)

### 2.2.2 Targeted communication

To apply appropriate marketing-communication strategies for arts organisations, certain theories may need to be reconsidered as they may not apply to online audiences. *Marketing Mix Theory*, or termed *The 4Ps theory*, was invented by McCarthy (1960). It is one of the most influential and commonly used theories in marketing until today (Beene, 2013; Brooks & Simkin, 2012; Fill, 2013; Hamid et al., 2014; Kapferer, 2012; Keller et al., 2012; Kotler & Keller, 2016; Tapp & Spotswood, 2013). *Marketing Mix Theory* divides marketing factors into four Ps: products, price, place, and promotion. The proponents of *Marketing Mix Theory* believe that, in order to achieve a successful marketing result for a product, marketers have to set it an appropriate price range, place it in the right place and then, offer a suitable promotion campaign for it (McCarthy, 1960). However, The 4Ps theory does not suit the evolving environment in which marketing occurs (Berry, 1990; Gummesson, 1999; Tapp & Spotswood,

2013). The 4Ps theory assumes that the external environment of marketing is uncontrollable, whereas present-day research considers it may now be managed by a communication strategy (Fill et al., 2013). The 4Ps theory also does not fit social media, as consumer behaviour changes dynamically (Tapp & Spotswood, 2013). *The 4Ps theory* “sits inside the organisation and looks out on the world (or consumers)” (Fill, 2013, p. 9). This, does not fit the environment of online communication (Tapp & Spotswood, 2013).

*Long-tail Theory*, however, raises concerns about the online attention each products/service might receive, inspiring marketers to bring out targeted communication strategy (Anderson, 2008; Qin et al., 2020). Since a greater variety of products/service options are available online, each of them might receive less attention (Anderson, 2008; Yuhui & Yan, 2010). Long-tail Theory proposes that, for online marketing, communication should be tailored according to each targeted audience, which leads to the concept of targeted communication (Egan, 2015). Targeted communication has proven to be more efficient in achieving communication goals (Dahlén et al., 2009; Egan, 2015). It leads to a higher level of engagement with audiences (Noris et al., 2021; Pelsmacker et al., 2013). A contemporary visual arts organisation might adopt targeted communication on social media platforms as a tool to assist its branding practice.

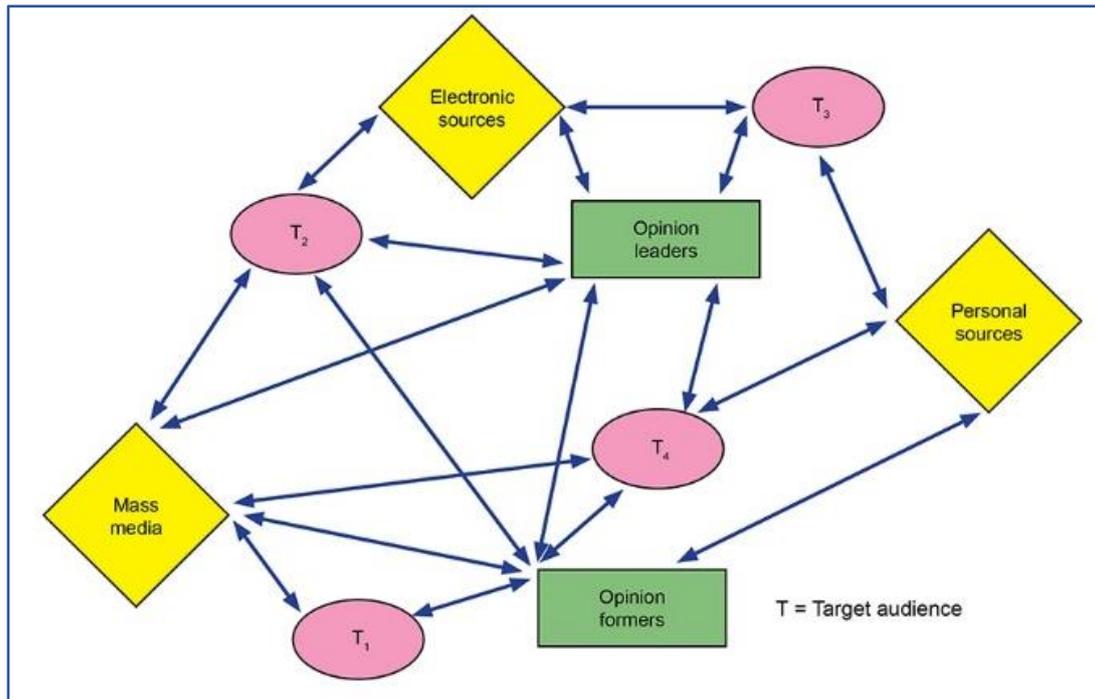
In targeted communication, organisations normally engage with a variety of stakeholders, who may be customers, business partners, government institutions or other entities (Argenti, 2013). This engagement is explained by *involvement theory* which evaluates how much risk and relevance is perceived by consumers when making purchase decisions on a product/service (Rossiter et al., 1991). Communication influences the intensity of their involvement, which will affect people’s purchase decision (Andrews et al., 1990). If a product/service is more expensive and is consumed less frequently, purchasing the product will be more risky for people (Fill, 2013). Therefore, people may need more knowledge about the product before they make purchase decisions. Since buying artworks and visiting galleries are less frequently occurring events, these activities may involve more risks for them. As a result, more knowledge about the organisation who organises the activities can be demanded, although, many of the people who receive these communications might not even see themselves as consumers.

Consumer involvement was first classified by Houston and Rothschild (1978). Personal factors are found affecting a consumer’s involvement (Zaichkowsky, 1986). Using theorised measurement developed for marketing communication research, four categories are given to measure how much involvement may affect communication: routine, burden, passion, and

entertainment. Among these four, the category of passion, where products are attached with symbolic meaning, may cause “high ego and social risks”, hence the category of passion relates to “high risk and high reward product”, with which “people are emotionally engaged (Andrews et al., 1990; Fill, 2013, p. 98). As contemporary visual arts may be highly imbued with symbolic meaning, its consumers should be considered emotionally engaged, the arts related activities should be considered involving high ego and social risks. As discussed, communication should vary according to the target-audience (Goldsmith & Emmert, 1991; Hall, 2020; Huang et al., 2010; Lin, 2013); therefore, communication should be adjusted according to arts-consumers’ emotional and psychological needs. For products that involve high ego and social risks such as artworks and exhibitions, what kind of information would be most demanded by consumers? What information is required before consumers would want to take action? An exploration about personal and social impact on the arts will be taken in Chapter 7.

Online users/audiences can give feedback quickly; they connect with others to exchange information. These conversations create opinion formers and opinion leaders. Online media provides the opportunity to both opinion leaders and opinion formers to influence other audiences (Levin, 2020; Momtaz et al., 2011; Smith & Zook, 2011). In this process of influence, the users gain chances to clarify their identities, so do any involved products/services (Maja Konecnik, 2012). The interactional model (figure 3) explains how the users/audiences are influenced by opinion leaders and opinion formers (Fill et al., 2013).

### **Figure 3 Interactional model of communication**



Source: Fill et al. (2013, p. 37)

The interactional model is a simplified reflection of how information is exchanged online in multiple dimensions, without being a complete reflection of reality. In addition, interaction is about reactions to the communication (Fill et al., 2013). Figure 3 shows that information goes from mass media and online media to different audiences, including opinion leaders and opinion formers. During this process, opinion leaders and opinion formers feed information intensively back to their target audiences. In this way, target audiences gain extra information from them, and this process of influence affects the target audiences' opinions about products/services (Kaiser et al., 2013; Levin, 2020). Personal traits and language use have also been proven to affect audiences' response (Chung & Ahn, 2007; Levin, 2020). Therefore, to study branding in an arts organisation, personal traits, individuals' needs, and language use should all be investigated.

### 2.3 Visual, social, and symbolic factors

How do audiences understand an arts organisation through communication? This question should be addressed from visual, social, and symbolic perspectives respectively.

Visual communication is rooted in vision, visibility and visual culture. Vision refers to the human eyes' capability of seeing, although its definitions can vary according to the period in which it is defined (Crary, 1990). Visibility indicates the way in which vision is constructed, including "how we see, how we are able, allowed or made to see, and how we see this seeing

and the unseeing therein” (Foster, 1988, p. ix). Visual culture focuses on the social conditions where visual objects are based on the influence that visual objects generate (Rose, 2001). Visual communication is not based on one but a variety of communication theories, clarifying the process of understanding and the effectiveness of communication (Baldwin & Roberts, 2006). Visual communication introduces “a holistic approach” for audiences “to integrate visual and verbal and intuitive and rational proficiencies”, meaning that visual communication never stands alone and is always integrated with other modes of communication (Williams & Newton, 2007, p. 4). Here, visual culture, on which visual communication is based, not only refers to images but also refers to how images are examined.

There are three levels clarify the potential barriers and misunderstandings that can arise in visual communication: the technical, semantic, and effectiveness level (Baldwin & Roberts, 2006). The technical level refers to how accurately messages are delivered. For example, how the messages should be encoded and decoded. The semantic level concerns what type of code the messages should use. For instance, how symbols convey the meaning in visual communication (Rose, 2001). The effectiveness level focuses on how the messages influence people’s behaviour. Within the three levels, problems that relate to the semantic level interact with the other two. As discussed, basic communication involves an encoding-and-decoding process. Audiences’ psychology and cultural backgrounds affect the decoding process, particularly, in the understanding of the content (Lester, 2000). The decoding process will subsequently affect the effectiveness of visual communication (Winkler, 2009). To solve this problem, the choice of media should vary according to the audience-group’s social identity (Joyce, 2014). In other words, the audiences’ characteristics, their social identities and their needs should be understood before effective communication can be achieved (Selwood, 1992; Tyler, 1992).

Content, colour, spatial organisation, focus, light and expressive content are a number of factors that can affect the result of visual communication (Rose, 2001). These factors are elements that involve images and have symbolic meaning (Morgan & Welton, 1992). In marketing communication, visual signs and symbols (e.g. icons and logos) are key elements used as common methods to distinguish organisations and products (Ilicic et al., 2021; Kotler & Keller, 2016). At the same time, an audience’s decoding process largely depends on his/her conventional knowledge, which relates to symbolic meaning. For example, a red light means “stop”, a sign with a diagonal cross means “no entry” (Klettner, 2020). Hence, the symbolic meaning of visual signs plays a significant role in effective marketing communication (Egan,

2015; Giovanardi et al., 2013; Klettner, 2020). Visual communication should prove particularly useful if it is done with those who have interest in visual arts.

People tend to attach to the things they have experienced before (Ruddock, 2001). When an image is put in front of an audience, a basic factor, empathy, will lead them into the decoding process (Morgan & Welton, 1992). This is due to the psychology of audiences, which is another reason why the study of cultural backgrounds of audiences is key for achieving effective communication (Stefaniak & Baaki, 2013). Empathy is a “complex mixture of psychological flexibility and skill at interpreting signs” (Morgan & Welton, 1992, p. 51). However, due to the unique creative process of different artists, artworks, such as paintings or sculptures, may prove difficult for audiences to generate empathy based on their own experiences or cultural backgrounds. From a visual communication point of view, the decoding can fail when the audiences do not respond with empathy to artworks, meaning that in this situation, the communication is unsuccessful (Ruddock, 2001). Therefore, it is significant to investigate the audiences’ experiences to study how cultural backgrounds might affect the understanding of the artworks/visual signs presented by an arts organisation.

Visual content imbued with symbolic meaning can profoundly influence audience’s consciousness and unconsciousness (Williams & Newton, 2007). Van Leeuwen adopts semiotic theory in the study of visual communication and propose social semiotics as a method to investigate the relationship between the visual and the social (Van Leeuwen, 2005, 2011). Social semiotics theory provides a way to investigate how social factors can affect audiences in visual communication by taking people’s thinking and behaviour as codes of semiotic resources (Adami, 2015; Jewitt & Oyama, 2001). Through decoding social behaviour, visual resources (images) can be interpreted from a semiotic perspective. From a social semiotic perspective, the interpretation of images is highly related to the social bond between audiences (Blythe, 2003; Jain & Griffin, 2011). Audiences’ perceptions of an image reflect their social position and social power expressed through the image (Kress & Leeuwen, 2006).

Three major identified dimensions that can analyse visual communication are representational, interactive and compositional dimension, which relate to the three key factors in visual communication: people, place and things (Kress & Leeuwen, 2006) . Here, an interesting similarity can be found when three key factors are compared to the marketing *4Ps* (people, place, product, promotion). Visual communication and marketing communication both see “people”, “place” and “product (things)” as key factors that trigger audiences’ reactions.

Therefore, people (the message sender and the message receiver), place (the media platform), and product (the content) should all be investigated in this thesis to determine how branding communication of an arts organisation may be affected by visual, social, and symbolic factors.

Narrative creating is one of many measurements an organisation can adopt to achieve goals of visual communication (Abimbola & Balmer, 2012; Preece & Kerrigan, 2015; Zorloni, 2013). A narrative enables an organisation to distinguish itself from other organisations; establishing a narrative through visual communication develops symbolic meaning of an organisation, which may construct its “conceptual-structure”, namely, identity (Díaz-Peralta, 2018, p. 130; Park & Moon, 2020; Preece, 2015; Taku, 2019). When audiences are familiar with the characteristics of an organisation, a narrative can make an impression, develop engagement, and increase involvement (Megehee & Woodside, 2010). Therefore, developing a narrative for an organisation may help audiences to classify and identify the organisation and, at the same time, the audiences are given opportunities to identifying themselves through the development of the narrative. This process facilitates the identity construction for both the organisation and its audiences (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001). Through identity construction, the audiences may reach greater empathy with the artworks presented by the organisation, the construction helps the audiences decode images (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001; Kress & Leeuwen, 2006). In addition, interactive meaning enables the audiences to get closer to the visual resources psychologically and consciously, whilst the compositional meaning enables the audiences to identify themselves either collectively or individually (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001; Tyler, 1992). Hence, the relationship between the decoding process of an image and the construction process of identity should be studied in this thesis to determine whether narrative plays a role in branding communication in the arts.

Factors influencing visual communication and those influencing marketing communication bear many similarities. In marketing communication, audiences’ identities affect the effectiveness of communication (Pelsmacker et al., 2013); in visual communication, audiences’ identities influence the way they decode visual works (Jain & Griffin, 2011). As a significant factor in visual communication, audiences’ identities and social status are found to strongly influence the media and content chosen in marketing communication (Aghaei et al., 2014; Baron et al., 2010). Therefore, the identity and social status of both content creators and the audiences need to be investigated.

## 2.4 Audience group

The effectiveness of communication is affected by audiences. When it comes to people's consumption behaviour, audiences are seen as consumers in marketing communication. Hence, audience groups are seen as consumer groups (Pelsmacker et al., 2013; Varey, 2002; Vyncke, 2002). Social status, attitude, and behaviour are the three aspects involved in people's consumption (Saviolo & Marazza, 2013). These aspects are all relevant to one another, as each aspect can be influenced by the other (Solomon, 2015). Based on people's shared social status and ideology, *Trait Theory* classifies the traits of different audience/consumer groups, according to their needs and preferences (Egan, 2015). In 1980s, Young and Rubicam, a worldwide advertising company, commonly known as Y & R, developed the *4Cs* (consumers) as a consumer typology, classifying the traits into four groups: performers, mainstreamers, succeeders and aspirers (Egan, 2015, p. 57).

**Table 3 Young and Rubicam's 4Cs consumer typology**

| Name                 | Description                                | Tendency to purchase          |
|----------------------|--|-------------------------------|
| <b>Performers</b>    | Self-fulfilment rather than status         | Own brands, natural products  |
| <b>Aspirers</b>      | Seeking status and self-esteem             | Symbols of achievement        |
| <b>Succeeders</b>    | Successful but need to control their lives | Quality (actual or perceived) |
| <b>Mainstreamers</b> | Basic need for security and belonging      | Established products/brands   |

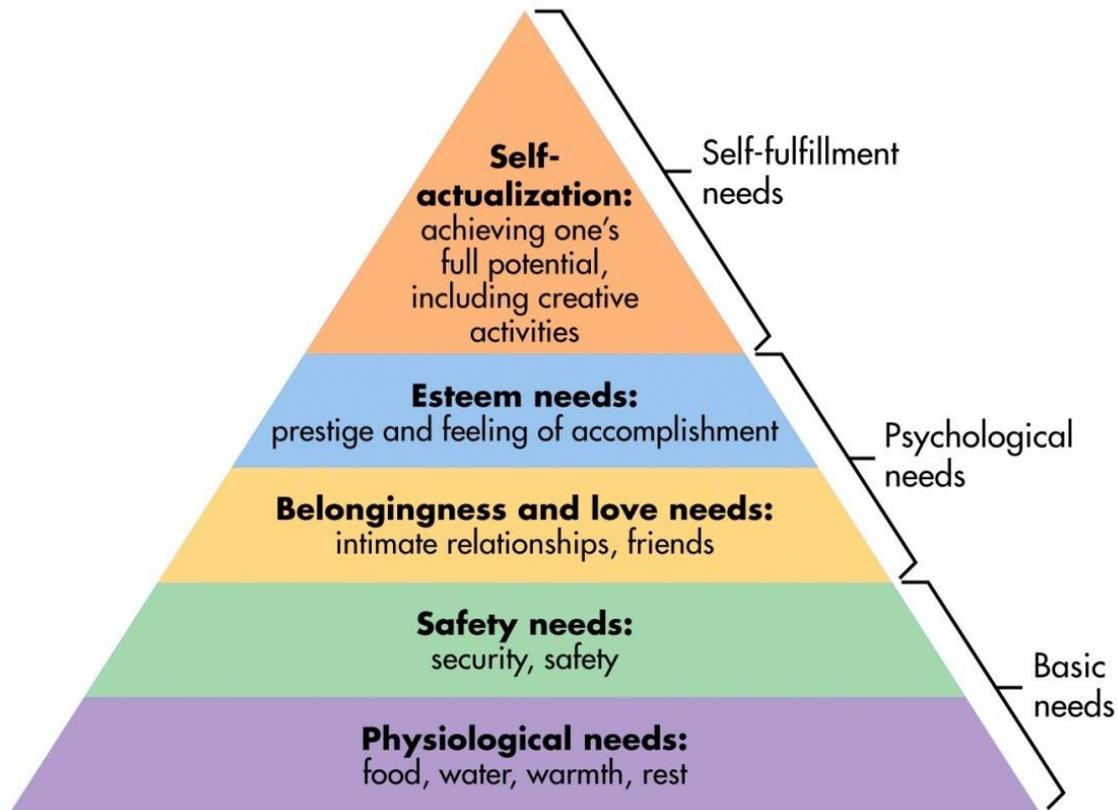
Source: modified based on Egan (2015, p. 60)

Based on social status, four consumer groups are classified in the *4Cs* typology. The purchase intentions within these four groups vary from functional purposes to symbolic purposes. Among these groups, the *performers* have a distinctive trait that values self-fulfilment over social status. Hence the motivation and purposes in this group will be self-fulfilment-oriented. The *aspirers* and the *succeeders* are highly social-related. The *aspirers* favours symbolic achievement related products/services that reflect their status-seeking and self-esteem intentions. The *succeeders* pursues quality-related products/services which reveal their needs to control their lives. The motivation of these two groups is beyond the function of products/services. In comparison, *mainstreamers*' motivation is more function-oriented. For the arts, it might be worthwhile to consider these categories during marketing communication

in branding practice, as they may assist in understanding the needs and the motivations of its audiences, even though they might not identify themselves as consumers.

Moreover, people's attitudes can be a strong driver as well (Sheth et al., 1999). Apart from social status and perceived values, consumer behaviour studies show that repurchase action is more significantly related to consumer's attitude, rather than purchase satisfaction (Mittal & Lassar, 1998; Reichheld, 1993). Attitude is a "tendency to respond and react to something in a consistent way" (Egan, 2015, p. 60). The attitudes of consumers are formed based on their motivations, which largely influences their consumption behaviour. As a fundamental factor for consumers' consumption behaviour, motivations are generated by different human needs, which are results of the differences in their social status (Alderfer, 1972; Sathish & Rajamohan, 2012). One of the tasks of marketing communication is to persuade target audiences to take the action of consumption. Therefore, attitude becomes a strong driver of consumption behaviour. When the attitudes relate to the needs and social status of a target-consumer group (i.e. target audiences), the needs and social status need to be discussed to understand how the attitudes are formed. Copley (2014) suggests a basic procedure for studying consumption behaviours: think (perception, cognitive, attitude) → feel (affective) → do (behaviour). Here, one point is clear, the action of consumption is not taken before the complete of people's thinking and feeling process (i.e. motivation) (Copley, 2014; Fill, 2013; Levin, 2020). People's motivations are set on different levels of human being's social status and based on different human needs, as Maslow (1954) explained in his classic theory the *Hierarchy of Human Needs*.

#### **Figure 4 Maslow's (1954) Hierarchy of Human Needs**



Source: Adapted from Maslow (1954)

Maslow's classic hierarchy was originally designed for the academic discipline of psychology. However, it is commonly adopted to explain the motivation of consumer groups/audience groups in marketing communication (Egan, 2015; Kapferer, 2012). As Figure 4 depicts, the higher the level in the pyramid the needs are located, the more self-fulfilment-oriented they become. In the context of consumer behaviour, this explains why consumers may have different attitudes toward particular products or organisations. Different human needs result in different motivations, which lead consumers to different attitudes (Bargh, 2002; Dibs dall et al., 2003; Somogyi et al., 2011).

To understand motivations further, *ERG theory* (Existence, Relatedness and Growth) allows the needs from various level to be pursued simultaneously, suggesting that if a higher level of needs is not fulfilled, consumers may opt for a lower level of needs, and the needs from different levels are allowed to be pursued at the same time (Alderfer, 1972). Apart from motivation, people's consumption behaviour is also influenced by cultural tendencies and their reference groups (Copley, 2014; Somogyi et al., 2011). Here, "reference group are those groups with members whose presumed perspectives or values are used by an individual as a basis for

his/her judgements, opinions or actions”, for example, family, colleagues, certain cultural groups (Copley, 2014, p. 55).

In Maslow’s hierarchy, the motivation for each level reflects the consumer or audience groups’ social status, while the reference groups for each level reveal the power of social bonds. In other words, social factors are highlighted by both consumption and communication studies. However, little research has been conducted on how social factors may influence an arts organisation and its brand. This gap will be explored in Chapter 5.

To sum up, this chapter explored communication theories, showing how relevant they are to arts organisations in particular. It examined how online communication has changed the landscape of messaging, and demonstrates how visual, social, and symbolic factors may affect the result of marketing communication. Visual communication and human needs were discussed in this chapter to show how audiences’ identities and the traits of audience groups may influence the result of the communication. Little research addresses the influence of social factors on branding in the arts. Therefore, exploring this topic in the context of a contemporary visual arts organisation, especially an artist-led one, is an uncharted area for research, which is key for my study. Before exploring social factors, it is significant to establish how branding theories may play a role in corporate branding in the arts. Hence, the important area of branding and branding theories will be reviewed in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Branding Theory and its Relevance to Arts Organisations**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter explores branding theories, identifying the key factors that affect corporate branding. It selects those theories that prove applicable to the research into arts branding and their applications in an arts organisation.

#### **3.1 Definition and evolution**

Brand, like many other marketing terms, is an evolving concept, whose meaning has significantly altered since it was first introduced (Fill, 2013; Kapferer & Valette-Florence, 2018; Kapferer, 2012). Research shows evidence that brand phenomena were first encountered at the start of human civilizations (Wengrow, 2008), since symbols and signs were historically used as specific marks to record different transactions of business and commodities. Signs are also found on seals attached to commodities to distinguish dispatch information for trademarked commodities (Moore & Reid, 2008; Wengrow, 2008). Special signs had become proto-brands as early as Harappan, Mesopotamian or Indus Valley civilizations, due to their importance to communication in early history (Dutta, 2012). In modern society, visual elements are still used, although further elements must be taken into account to understand the meaning of a brand (Kapferer & Valette-Florence, 2018; Keller, 2013; Rees-Roberts, 2020). In 1948,

the American Marketing Association approved the definition of brand as formulated by Ralph Alexander:

A name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors. (Alexander, 1948, p. 205)

Kapferer (2012, p. 12) redefines brand as a name that creates “community value around it”. Here, value is defined as “the transitory and enduring benefits relative to the costs that are generated by and that accrue to organisations, individuals, and society” (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012, p. 3). Value creation of a brand should be associated with consumers (Feldwick, 2002). A brand should be a “promise which frames its position in the minds of stakeholders” (Fill, 2013, p. 326). In other words, a brand influences not only its end-users, but also the people with whom the brand forms relations – the stakeholders. For example, consumers, employees, managers, and business partners. Currently, brand is seen more as an abstract concept than a tangible item (Rosenbaum-Elliott et al., 2011).

Brand is a carrier for cultural meaning which creates added value to products or services (McCracken, 2005). At the same time, it is a symbol-related concept that reflects the personal and social identities of its stakeholders (Chuenban et al., 2021; Rosenbaum-Elliott et al., 2011). Consuming certain brands may assist consumers in recognising, negotiating and forming their personal and social identities in their cultural groups. Bourdieu (2010) proposes that consumers’ personal status, social class, and cultural group to which they belong can be defined through their consumption on particular brands. Therefore, in branding research, approaches are developed to investigate how the symbolic meanings of a brand can be delivered (Rosenbaum-Elliott et al., 2011). These approaches may help researchers to evaluate how, through consuming certain brands, consumers may form their identities, and how brand identity may enable one brand to appear different from another.

On a functional level, branding provides benefits for a product or a service; it adds values that may stimulate consumers’ purchase intention (Aaker, 1991; Abzari et al., 2014). On an operational level, branding is to convey the unique features and benefits of products/services to the stakeholders (Kapferer, 2015; Kotler & Keller, 2016; Merrilees et al., 2021).

Branding is clearly intertwined with management and strategy; it is also called brand management in branding research (Merrilees et al., 2021; Temporal, 2010). Current research indicates that branding is a process in which a brand is established and managed (Fetscherin &

Usunier, 2012; Fournier et al., 2012). To establish or maintain a brand, significant contributions from communication and management are required. These contributions may help a brand to find its consumer groups (Vyncke, 2002), to align its identity, to increase its public visibility (Balmer, 2008), to build its reputation and to maintain a relationship with its target consumer group (Podnar & Balmer, 2013). These objectives require considerable planning, management and execution over time. As a result, branding is a long-term exercise (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2009).

### **3.2 Branding approach**

#### ***Principle***

As all marketing theories, branding theory evolves to reflect the changes that constantly occur in the market; it is fundamental (Franzen & Moriarty, 2009). However, since 1985, two major overriding paradigms have been presented in branding research, reflecting two different points of departure: positivism and interpretivism (Heding et al., 2016). The positivist paradigm considers branding purely as a process that focuses on strategically managing information during communication. It studies branding from a more functionalist perspective, and, in the context of communication, emphasises the sender, not the receiver. From this stance, a brand is a lifeless artefact, owned by the marketer, who manages the communication between the brand and its audiences. Hence, the positivist paradigm believes the information exchanged in branding communication is controlled by marketers (Burghausen & Balmer, 2015).

On the contrary, the interpretive paradigm sees a brand and its value come from the interaction between marketers and consumers (Hanby, 1999). A brand is considered a living entity with a personality, with which a relationship can be formed (Aaker, 1997; Wilk et al., 2021). The interpretive paradigm pays more attention to people's psychology and social status; it is receiver-focused and culture-influenced (Heding et al., 2009; McCracken, 2005). This thesis not only is investigating whether and how brand information can be strategically managed, but is also examining whether and how stakeholders' perceptions and actions may affect branding. Hence, the interpretive paradigm is adopted.

Before choosing the most appropriate one for the arts, seven major branding approaches should be reviewed. These approaches are all under intensive development in current branding studies. Although overlapping, each of the approaches looks at branding from a certain perspective (Heding et al., 2016). *The economic approach* mainly focuses on how the *Marketing Mix* affects the performance of a brand on the market (Aghaei et al., 2014; Sinapuelas et al., 2015).

*The consumer-based approach* views a brand as being owned and created by consumers. Consumers' minds are assumed to be programmed by marketing actions in response to branding strategies (Keller, 2013). *The personality approach* sees a brand as a kind of person, with personalities. It assumes that brands can be classified according to different types of human personalities of their consumers, and it allows companies to psychologically attract their consumers (Aaker, 1997). *The relational approach* is an extension of the personality approach, which views a brand as not only a person, but also an entity with whom the consumers can form a viable relationship in the long term (Baron et al., 2010; Fournier et al., 2012). *The community approach* adds the study of the communication within a community into branding research, which provides insights into the study of how branding can be influenced by communication in the autonomous communities of consumers (Gummerus et al., 2012; Meister, 2012; Steinmann et al., 2015).

As this thesis focuses on how identity may facilitate branding in the cultural sector (the contemporary visual arts), *the identity approach* and *culture approach* are considered the most relevant and will be employed.

### **3.2.1 The identity approach**

*The identity approach* focuses on how to articulate the identity of a brand on different communication levels, studying why and how communication may affect branding from an identity point of view; it examines how visual elements, such as symbols and signs, may affect a brand's reputation (Heding et al., 2016). The identity approach assumes that branding communication can be aligned and be coherent with branding strategies (Abratt & Kleyn, 2012). Accordingly, this approach assumes that the strategic vision of a brand can help create a coherent brand identity for the brand, and create a desired experience for the brand's target consumer group (Burghausen & Balmer, 2015). The identity approach is a "corporate-level of branding", it integrates "all communications in one unified identity and managing the total experience for consumers across all touchpoints requires a strategic level of brand management" (Heding et al., 2016, p. 48). From the identity approach point of view, an organisation is responsible for designing the experience for its stakeholders during the interaction with them. In order to do this, the information has to be left at appropriate touchpoints for stakeholders to reach, and all of these actions require a branding strategy as a basis. These assumptions need to be explored in this thesis, to examine whether and how the identity approach can be applicable for a contemporary visual arts organisation.

Two major dimensions of identity are studied through *the identity approach*: corporate identity and organisational identity (Hatch & Schultz, 2008; Schultz et al., 2000). *Corporate identity* focuses on the outstanding features of an organisation. Hence, corporate branding looks at marketing communication, graphic design, and strategic management, aiming to create a coherent brand identity for the organisation, visually and strategically (Olins, 1989; Salem Khalifa, 2012). *Organisational identity* focuses on the behavioural impact on corporate brand identity. It mainly examines how employees' and other stakeholders' behaviours may affect brand identity (LePla & Parker, 2002; Parker, 2000).

The identity approach studies branding at a micro level of recognition, in which visual elements and strategic plans are examined. For corporate branding research, an organisation is seen as a corporate brand (Melewar et al., 2013). In corporate branding study, key elements of corporate brand identity, such as the brand's statements, logo, images, published contents, and the interaction between stakeholders, need to be explored to see how the branding of the organisation may be affected by these elements (Hatch & Schultz, 2003; Schultz et al., 2005; Schultz et al., 2000). One of the tasks of corporate branding is to integrate all elements in communication into a form that is able to create value for the brand (Balmer, 2008; Hatch & Schultz, 1997).

#### **Identity in corporate branding**

According to the identity approach, brand identity can become fragmented if communication is not aligned with a branding strategy. In current research, empirical challenges of how to manage the fragmentation of brand identity are increasingly found in collected data (Heding et al., 2016; Mao et al., 2020). Stakeholders in an organisation may have different identities, each of the identities may contribute, although in different ways, to the corporate-identity building of the organisation; however, when the corporate identity is constructed by such variety of stakeholders' identities, it is fragmented and is difficult for the stakeholders to recognise (Hatch & Schultz, 2009; Vinhas Da Silva & Faridah Syed Alwi, 2008). To detect and balance these different identities for corporate branding, two formative frameworks are introduced: the *AC<sup>4</sup>ID test* (Abimbola & Balmer, 2012) and the *corporate brand toolkit* (Hatch & Schultz, 2008). The *AC<sup>4</sup>ID test* proposes that brand identity is not controlled by marketers but negotiated and created through the communication between a corporate brand and its stakeholders. The *Corporate brand toolkit* suggests that, in order to create an aligned corporate brand identity, strategic vision, corporate images, and corporate culture should work together. These two frameworks indicate that brand identity building is a complex process, in which both

stakeholders and cultural factors are significant. To address the cultural significance, *the cultural approach* needs to be considered.

### **3.2.2 The cultural approach**

*The cultural approach* was developed by Holt (2002) to address the limitations of other branding approaches. It examines branding from a macro level with the influence of cultural factors. In the identity approach, culture refers to organisational culture; whereas in the cultural approach, culture refers to the culture that surrounds us all, including ideology, identity, social convention, and social activity. Cultural and social factors have to be considered when a branding strategy is designed (Kolb, 2016; Laroche et al., 2020). Hence, the cultural approach addresses the challenges found in current research from a cultural influence level, a macro level of recognition (Holt, 2002).

This approach addresses issues caused by factors relating to culture, and applies findings into cultural implementations in branding (Holt, 2005). In this approach, culture is defined at a macro level – a social level. At the macro level, the meaning of culture is “intertwined” with communication. A brand is seen as representative of a certain culture. People enjoy a brand and exchange the information about the brand within a group because sometimes the meaning of the brand identifies the people within the cultural group which some researchers call collective representations (Du Gay et al., 2013). The cultural approach clarifies the explicit and implicit meanings of culture for branding research, whilst it analyses the meanings that are produced and circulated in communication (Holt & Cameron, 2010).

Moreover, the cultural approach is developed partially due to the cultural changes caused by the use of internet (Heding et al., 2016). Online communication creates a dynamic environment, which is introduced as user-generated communication in Chapter 2, enabling people to exchange their opinions before they consume a brand (Luo et al., 2015). When culture-related information is exchanged more frequently, cultural issues may be caused by the exchange. These issues may be about differences in ideology, identity, and expression between the brand and its stakeholders. For branding, the issues may become stakeholders’ barriers for accepting a brand (Holt, 2004). As Holt (2002) indicates, ideology and cultural issues should be taken into account in brand building for certain types of brands.

As discussed, the cultural approach stems from an interpretive paradigm. *Consumer Culture Theory* (CCT) is considered as the theoretical foundation of this approach (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Heding et al., 2009). In the cultural approach, brand is seen as an artefact

produced by and negotiated with cultural activities. In this approach, the cultural activities refer to the actions taken by stakeholders to distinguish the cultural group they consider theirs. Here, a cultural group represents a certain ideology rather than reflecting national or ethnic groups (Arnould & Thompson, 2015). As the cultural approach derives from anthropological studies, employing this approach enables a consideration of how people see themselves as a cultural group through the consumption of certain brands. McCracken (1990) points out that individuals negotiate their identities through the consumption of brands that represent certain culture. In other words, culture-related consumption affects people's identity construction. However, how the negotiation occurs and whether the negotiation may contribute to branding are not explored, as few studies have applied the cultural approach to corporate branding in the arts.

Currently, not many branding studies are found under the influence of the cultural branding approach, although there are studies that show knowing how artworks are produced and consumed (the traditions and convention of visual art) can help people to recognise the significance of brand building for the arts (Schroeder, 2005). Some celebrity artists use personal branding strategies to communicate with their audiences, transforming their names into personal brand identities (Fillis, 2003). In this process, narrative is believed to be a way of managing their personal brand-identity (Preece & Kerrigan, 2015). The nurturing of social and cultural capital is also significant for the development of artists' personal branding and their brand identities (Rodner & Kerrigan, 2014). Therefore, it is necessary to explore the context online to investigate how cultural factors (i.e. identity and ideology) may affect corporate branding for the arts.

### **3.3 Brand positioning**

Brand works as a system that has a greater value than the combination of any of its components (Franzen & Moriarty, 2009). For commercial branding studies, to establish the value of the system, a brand needs to identify and differentiate itself from its competitors; this procedure is called *positioning* (Hegner et al., 2021; Hoeffler & Keller, 2003). Brand positioning is the foundation of a branding strategy. A corporate brand depicts the organisation's overall image and value to its stakeholders, in order for the organisation to occupy a distinctive and valuable place in the mind of its stakeholders' group (Kotler & Keller, 2016). "With positioning, it is important to associate unique, meaningful points of difference to the brand to provide a competitive advantage and 'reason why' consumers should buy [consume]" this product/service (Keller et al., 2012, p. 103). By the same token, for organisations in the contemporary visual arts sector, brand positioning is to enable one organisation (corporate

brand) to differentiate itself from other organisations (corporate brands), giving its consumers reasons to choose this one over other ones.

Although the uniqueness of a brand may motivate its stakeholders (Hegner et al., 2021; Keller et al., 2012), commercial branding studies believe that, in brand positioning, differentiation should remain within a frame of competitors, so that a brand's stakeholders can recognise the brand through its competitor group (Franzen & Moriarty, 2009; Kotsi & Pike, 2021). That is to say, the competitors of a brand are seen as the brand's reference group in commercial brand positioning theory. Kapferer (2012, p. 153) links brand positioning to "competitive value", indicating that strategic positioning should answer questions that arise in stakeholders' minds when they compare one brand with another. For example, they may compare the differences between brands and think about the benefit of using one brand. Kapferer (2012, p. 153) describes brand positioning in two stages: the first stage is to find out "to what competitive set the brand should be associated and compared"; the second stage is to clarify the unique characteristic that the brand has. Keller (2013) points out that the purpose of positioning is to identify a brand's target consumer group and to understand their perceptions and preferences, in order for appropriate brand associations to be implemented to build or to enhance the brand. Through positioning, an organisation may overcome the intangible issues that affect its consumers' preferences (Dutta, 2012; Kotsi & Pike, 2021). However, as discussed, a variety of stakeholders are involved in corporate brand. This fact raises a question: whether the stakeholders' perceptions and preferences might be the only factors affecting brand positioning in the arts? This thesis will explore whether and how other stakeholders may affect brand positioning.

Three aspects are key for brand positioning: category, target-consumer group, and brand advantages (Dutta, 2012; Franzen & Moriarty, 2009; Keller, 2013; Kotler & Keller, 2016). *Category* refers to the market in which a brand will be competing. *Target-consumer group* indicates who the potential customers could be. *Brand advantages* suggest the reasons a consumer would want a product /service. A formula has been developed to clarify what roles positioning should play in a branding strategy (Kapferer, 2012, p. 155):

For [...] (definition of targeted consumers, e.g. the people who have dandruff issues; the people who are concerned about banking risks)

Brand [X] (the product, the service or the organisation, e.g. Head & Shoulder; Lloyds Bank)

Is [...] (definition of competitive set and subjective category, e.g. the shampoo; the bank)

Which gives the most [...] (promise or consumer benefit, e.g. clean hair; safe banking services)

Because of [...] (reason to believe, e.g. the anti-dandruff formula; rich banking experience)

For instance, the positioning for *Head & Shoulders* shampoo may be “for the people who have dandruff issues, Head & Shoulders is the shampoo which gives the cleanest hair to its consumers, because of its unique anti-dandruff formula”. The positioning for *Lloyds Bank* may be “for the people who are concerned about financial risks, Lloyds Bank is the bank that gives the safest banking services because of its rich banking experience”. However, brand positioning may be approached in other way. So far, no research has been conducted on whether positioning is appropriate in corporate branding for arts organisations. As artworks are highly symbol-related products, an arts organisation cannot be compared to a shampoo or a financial institution, both of which are necessary to everyday living. Therefore, exploring how far commercial positioning theory may be applicable for an arts organisation is likely to pose challenges (Fillis, 2006; Kompatsiaris, 2020; Qian, 2020).

Brand positioning also varies from period to period for an organisation. Comparing brand positioning with brand identity, current studies indicate that, brand positioning is competition-oriented, and may change through time, while brand identity is more stable and long-lasting (Catie, 2020; Kapferer, 2012). However, in the cultural sector, studies focusing on artworks and arts organisations express concerns regarding competition-oriented brand positioning in the arts. For example, some artworks are created under a product-oriented process. The artworks are made for “art’s sake”, not for “business’ sake” (Fillis, 2006, p. 33). This implies that competition-oriented marketing may not have a role in the arts. At the same time, product-oriented strategy and sales-oriented strategy are considered to give only a short-term increase for a brand in the art market (Byrnes, 2014). In fact, the lack of research on brand identity in relation to artworks as well as the positioning for small-sized arts organisations was underscored almost 18 years ago: “there is little, if any, discussion about image, reputation and identity issues in the smaller firm context, and even less in arts and crafts organisations” (Fillis, 2003, p. 239).

Identity building is required and is found to be beneficial for arts organisations in the long term, whilst branding research in arts organisations may integrate a creative process into current marketing theory and practice (Fillis, 2002). It is suggested that branding in the arts may

introduce an innovative method for future marketing practice. After studying how the famous surrealist artists built their reputation in the art market, Brown (2010) recommends artists' personal branding as an effective method, the general process of branding in the art is believed to be inspirational for marketing research as well. Schroeder (2010), working on how famous artists construct their personal reputation, agrees with Brown (2010) and indicates that, since art is a serious business, brand identity can help to locate an artist as a brand in the art market. Moreover, he finds that visual elements such as logos and images are helpful for positioning a brand in the arts.

### **3.4 Micro level of corporate brand identity: the construction**

#### **Identity and brand identity**

Identity is defined through two major criteria: similarity and difference. Firstly, identity “refers to the sameness of objects” (similarity). Secondly, it involves “the consistency or continuity over time that is basis of establishing and grasping the definiteness and distinctiveness of something” (difference) (Jenkins, 2014, p. 18). Further, identity provides a source of meaning that enhances people’s ability to cope with society (Rabinovich & Morton, 2015). For a person, identity is to be established, as it is a way of classifying him/herself to his/her group; it is a tool through which somebody can attach him/herself to others (Jenkins, 2008). Accordingly, identity and “self-concept” provide “answers [to] the question ‘who am I?’” (Oyserman, 2004, p. 5). Similarly, for an organisation, its identity defines and describes who the organisation is (Schultz et al., 2005). As far as a brand is concerned, the brand’s stakeholders “value the brand’s stories largely for their identity value. Acting as vessels of self-expression, brands are imbued with stories that stakeholders find valuable in constructing their identities” (Holt, 2004, p. 3). The terms and concepts used in corporate branding research are summarised by Schultz et al. (2005, p. 24):

Alignments between the origin and everyday practices of the organisation [organisational culture], where the organisation aspires to go [strategic vision], how the organisation is perceived by external stakeholders [images] all nested in perceptions of who the organisation is [identity].

For a corporate brand, brand identity can be expressed by a set of visual elements, such as colours, signs and images, yet its sphere is greater than visual elements, brand identity can be expressed through texts, music or behaviours as well (Balmer & Greyser, 2006b; Meng, 2021). Corporate brand identity should not be restricted to visual elements, although visual elements make a huge impact on branding, they are only one component among all the elements of brand

identity (De Chernatony, 2010; Nusa & Maja Konecnik, 2013; Robson & Farquhar, 2021). Stakeholders can distinguish a brand better if its brand identity is formed by multiple elements (Olins, 1989). Brand identity is set by a branding strategy, it is considered as “a set of brand associations that the brand strategist aspires to create or maintain” (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2009, p. 43). Kapferer (2012) suggests that brand identity is a key message that conveys a permanent value, through which one brand can differentiate itself from its competitors. Moreover, stakeholders’ personal identity is considered relating to brand identity. Parker (2000) finds that the culture of an organisation significantly assists its employees to shape their identities. From a management perspective, brand identity is conceived of as merging with management in branding research (Melewar et al., 2013). The identity of a corporate brand reflects, in some degree, the managerial style of the organisation.

### **3.4.1 Corporate brand identity**

A *corporate* brand differs from a *product* brand, in that a corporate brand focuses on an entity, such as a company, organisation, or institution, whereas a product brand focuses on a product or a service provided by the entity (Fetscherin & Usunier, 2012). Corporate brand identity stems from the set of beliefs, values, and the heritage that the members of the organisation hold in common, and it targets all stakeholders, including managers, employees and consumers (Balmer & Greyser, 2003; Robson & Farquhar, 2021). Corporate brand identity draws a picture of how an organisation seeks to identify itself by clarifying what an organisation stands for (Hatch & Schultz, 2003; Schultz et al., 2005). Furthermore, once developed, a corporate brand lasts throughout the life of the organisation, and multiple stakeholders are responsible for the development of the corporate brand, for instance, the executive team, the communication team, the strategic design team and so forth (Hatch & Schultz, 2008; Liu et al., 2021). Therefore, in this thesis, different stakeholders are to be observed and studied to examine whether and how corporate brand identity may affect the branding of an arts organisation.

#### **Corporate identity and organisational identity**

Two aspects underpin corporate brand identity: corporate identity and organisational identity. *Corporate identity* is the idea that generates the uniqueness of an organisation, and the way by which the idea is communicated to its stakeholders. In short, corporate identity is about how an organisation expresses itself to its stakeholders (Balmer, 2008; Hatch & Schultz, 2009; Melewar et al., 2005). As indicated by Olins (1989), who illustrates how visual elements contribute to corporate identity, corporate identity should be designed and aligned through a visual identification system. Corporate identity should clearly depict what the organisation’s

business is about, how it wants to be operated, and how it wants itself to be perceived. Therefore, corporate identity contributes to corporate brand identity in two ways: strategic management (namely vision, mission and strategic plans) and visual representation (namely logo, symbols, signs, fonts and other visual elements).

On the contrary, *organisational identity* involves cognitive and behavioural aspects. It is about whether the stakeholders of an organisation understand what the organisation is and what the organisation stands for (Hatch & Schultz, 2004; Maon et al., 2021; Parker, 2000). Organisational identity involves the study of cognitive and emotional function; it examines how ideology and behaviour contribute to the construction of corporate brand identity. Organisational identity affects corporate branding in its brand image and its reputation building, hence, it significantly influences stakeholders' cognitive evaluation of the identity of a corporate brand (Heding et al., 2009; Maon et al., 2021). However, corporate identity and organisational identity each evaluate a corporate brand from only one aspect, while corporate brand identity is formed by both aspects (Balmer & Greyser, 2006a; Balmer & Mukherjee, 2006).

To overcome this limitation, researchers suggest a number of solutions. Margulies (1977) suggests corporate identity research to start with an interview with the CEO of the organisation. Olins (1995) indicates that behaviours are as important as appearance for corporate identity research. Schultz et al. (2000, p. 19) suggest looking at corporate branding from all aspects offered by brand management research for researchers to have a comprehensive understanding of the brand, although, in order to accomplish this, the perspectives and practices derived from "marketing, strategy, communication and organisational studies" are all required. In order to understand the construction of corporate brand identity, Holt (2005) suggests that investigation should be conducted on organisational culture and corporate image, as these two factors are as important as strategic management and visual representation. This is because the image represents the impression and perception formed by external stakeholders (e.g. audiences), while the culture refers to the experience and perceptions that internal stakeholders have (e.g. managers); in addition, cultural factors could affect the direction in which the organisation develops (Hatch & Schultz, 2003; Schultz et al., 2005). Therefore, this thesis will explore perceptions and impressions of stakeholders of an arts organisation, including internal and external stakeholders, to explore whether a corporate brand's identity can be affected by both, and how the stakeholders may affect the brand identity.

### **Communication for corporate brand identity**

To build and deliver a corporate identity and organisational identity, communication is key. Identity communication assists a corporate brand in differentiating itself from its competitors, providing a variety of benefits for a corporate brand, including economic and reputational benefits (Melewar & Karaosmanoglu, 2008; Nyagadza et al., 2020a). Identity communication may enhance a corporate brand by providing stakeholders with personal and social identity construction. However, identity communication can sometimes be ineffective, due to a misunderstanding between stakeholders. This misunderstanding can cause a brand's stakeholders to fail to recognise the brand identity of the corporate brand, creating barriers (Nyagadza et al., 2020b; Schultz et al., 2005). To address this issue, it is suggested that identity communication with internal and external stakeholders should be aligned (Abimbola & Balmer, 2012; Balmer, 2008; Burghausen & Balmer, 2015; Podnar & Balmer, 2013; Schultz et al., 2000). This suggestion was tested in Anisimova and Mavondo's (2008) empirical study on the deviation of communication of corporate profiles and its impact on consumers' satisfaction and loyalty. Their research proves that the alignment of communication is an effective way of enhancing stakeholders' recognition for a brand, although little has been done to explore identity communication in arts organisations. A lack of communication strategy was found in Fillis's study (2003, p. 246), testing the effectiveness of using the Marketing Mix regarding audiences' perceptions of art in Northern Ireland and Dublin, and reporting "a severe lack of academic management research in this area". Research regarding arts management puts more emphasis on forming public relationships and the procedures of using the Marketing Mix, less on identity communication (Diggle, 1994; French & Runyard, 2011; Kotler & Armstrong, 2001). This is why identity should be explored in the fieldwork for this thesis.

Brand communication for contemporary visual arts organisations may differ due to the unique way of producing artworks. In addition, if artworks are seen as communication carriers, they may create a different channel of communication for the organisation. These will be analysed later in the thesis. Further exploration is needed to determine whether the alignment of identity communication is necessary and effective, and to examine whether there are new possibilities of theorising brand identity communication for contemporary visual arts organisations.

### **3.4.2 Corporate branding framework**

First of all, the identity approach sees corporate branding as a strategic tool for establishing or maintaining corporate brand identity through communication and managerial processes (Balmer, 2008). Brand identity represents the outstanding features of the organisation and they

can be uncovered internally and externally. The internal features are corporate identity and organisational identity, which relate to visual expression, strategic vision, top management, organisational culture and behavioural aspects (Hatch & Schultz, 2008; Ind, 2007, 1998). The external features refer to the corporate brand's image and its reputation (Abratt & Kleyn, 2012; Davies, 2003).

Two normative frameworks are developed for corporate brand identity research. The first is *AC<sup>4</sup>D* framework, introduced by Balmer (2010, p. 188), categorises the dimensions underpinning the creation of brand identity into seven identity types: “actual identity”, “communicated identity”, “conceived identity”, “covenanted identity”, “cultural identity”, “ideal identity, and “desired identity”. These seven identity types depict the overall strategy, images, and culture that an organisation may have, or tends to have, internally and externally. The framework implies a possibility that a difference may exist between conceived corporate-brand-identity and communicated corporate-brand-identity. Furthermore, Abimbola and Balmer (2012) conclude that the framework may reveal the value that a corporate brand has, and that it may discover the symbiosis between corporate brand identity and corporate identity. Current research considers that the framework may support research into the management of multiple identities, guiding organisations through identity changes and realignment processes (Balmer & Mukherjee, 2006; Heding et al., 2016). However, as it is complex to examine all seven identity types, few empirical studies have been able to put all the seven identity types in test, including the person who established the theory. Furthermore, when brand building is in an initial stage, brand identity is often challenged by many factors, which are difficult to evaluate (Lam et al., 2013). Therefore, this framework is not adopted in this thesis.

The second framework is the *Brand Toolkit* developed by Hatch and Schultz (2001). In this toolkit, three major dimensions are recognised for corporate brand identity: vision, image, and culture. *Vision* refers to strategic vision, a central idea behind what the organisation does and what its aspiration is for the future (Argenti, 2013; Hatch & Schultz, 2004). *Image* refers to an overall impression of a corporate brand perceived by its internal and external stakeholders (Baldwin & Roberts, 2006; Hatch & Schultz, 1997). *Culture* refers to organisational culture, involving stakeholders' ideology, values, and beliefs (Bonaparte, 2020; Hatch & Schultz, 2008; Parker, 2000; Thomas, 2005). The Brand Toolkit simplifies the seven dimensions proposed by *AC<sup>4</sup>D* into three dimensions. The purpose of this toolkit is to balance the aspirations and multiple identities of an organisation during communication in a straightforward way. However, this toolkit requires highly synchronised communication between the aspects

relating to strategy and the aspects relating to action. During the branding process, misalignment may occur due to a changing situation. For example, Kolb (2016), Nusa and Maja Konecnik (2013) find that social media has changed the rules of communication in creative industries, where the communication is more user-generated. An organisation's communication with its stakeholders may be misaligned if the communication is dominated by audiences. Hence, further exploration may be required to see whether an arts organisation's brand identity may be affected by online communication in terms of its vision, image and culture. In addition, since the image and culture are to be influenced by the external environment, they reveal a broader sphere for branding in the arts. Accordingly, a macro level of corporate brand identity is to be discussed.

### **Mission-and-vision statement**

Vision is one of the major factors that affect corporate brand identity building (Ingenhoff & Fuhrer, 2010a). Vision, also known as strategic vision, refers to the aspirations of an organisation (Kantabutra & Avery, 2010). Mission-and-vision statement is commonly chosen for clarifying the vision of an organisation: its purposes, ambitions, and strategies (Dumanig & Symaco, 2020; Salem Khalifa, 2012).

Elements involved in a mission-and-vision statement, include but are not limited to, a statement of strategic vision for a firm, a description of a perceived value, or a definition of a company's business scope (Dumanig & Symaco, 2020; Kantabutra & Avery, 2010; Salem Khalifa, 2012). The development of three models reflects the evolution of the study of mission-and-vision statement. Firstly, Collins and Porras (Collins & Porras, 1996, 1991) introduce the *Vision Framework*, which suggests two dimensions to be conceived in an organisation's vision: a core ideology and an envisioned future. The *core ideology* refers to the core values, purposes and fundamental reasons for the organisation to exist. The *envisioned future* refers to the development of objectives that the organisation tries to achieve. Secondly, Campbell and Yeung (1991) develop the *Ashridge Mission Model*, which divides the two dimensions mentioned above into four categories: purpose, strategy, value, and standards of behaviour. *Purpose* refers to for whose benefit the organisation is in business; *Strategy* defines how an organisation plans to make competitive advantages; *Value* refers to the ideological thinking; The *behaviour standards* indicate employees' actions, which guides an organisation's policy drafting. These four elements are then extended by David and David (2003) into a mission statement check-list, which contains nine components that an effective mission statement should include. In the checklist, the *4Ps* of *Marketing Mix* are considered as factors that would

affect a mission statement. The third model is Lipton's *Model of Organisational Vision* (Lipton, 1996, 2004). In Lipton's model, the nine components in the checklist are simplified into three dimensions: mission, strategy, and culture. Lipton believes that organisational culture, the ideology of an organisation, must be included in a mission statement, yet in practice, organisational culture is often missing from the mission statement (Salem Khalifa, 2012). While the models developed overlap, a gradually simplified tendency can be seen from mission-statement studies. Among the three models, Lipton's model is the most relevant to the study in this thesis, which involves organisational culture. Hence, Lipton's model is a reference for the investigation of the mission-and-vision statement of an arts organisation.

Culture and strategy are significant for all models proposed. The Vision Framework reflects the managers' and employees' ideologies and aspirations for an organisation. The Model of Organisational Vision describes how an organisation can achieve its aspiration. For an organisation, expressing its brand identity as a personality benefits the brand identity construction, especially when it is delivered in a mission-and-vision statement (Ingenhoff & Fuhrer, 2010b). This needs to be explored in the fieldwork to determine its applicability for an arts organisation.

A clear mission-and-vision statement can be well supported by online communication on the organisation's website, which the stakeholders can easily access (Chun, 2004; Dumanig & Symaco, 2020; Forest, 2020). Surprisingly, even in large companies, such as British Airways or Marks and Spencer's, explicit mission-and-vision statements are rarely found, despite the fact that, when the statement is clearly defined, the mission of the company can be managed better (Campbell & Yeung, 1991). Few studies have explored, for an arts organisation, whether a mission-and-vision statement is effective for brand-identity construction online. Hence, this will be explored in the fieldwork.

### **3.5 Macro level of corporate brand identity: the cultural meaning**

As previously discussed, corporate branding is affected by factors at both micro and macro levels. Even factors at a micro level, such as corporate identity and organisational identity, may still be influenced by factors originating in a macro environment, such as, ideology, social class, and culture. An organisation's image is negotiated with the perceptions of its internal and external stakeholders, while the perceptions are based on the stakeholders' interpretation of the organisational culture, which, in fact, also relates to the stakeholders' ideology (Balmer & Greyser, 2003; Kristal et al., 2020). In cultural consumption theory, culture is even

considered as a major influence that influences a consumer's attitude and consumption behaviour (Bourdieu, 2010; McCracken, 2005). Therefore, the image of a corporate brand closely relates to its culture and, in a broader sphere, even relates to the culture that comes from society, and enables people to process self-recognition. This process of self-recognition is related to both personal and social recognition. To gain a clear vision of how a corporate brand identity is constructed and interpreted through cultural factors, the cultural meaning of a brand is next explored.

### **3.5.1 Identity construction and mindshare group**

Introduced by Holt (2002), *the cultural approach* addresses the issue of how corporate brand identity could be affected by cultural factors. As a further exploration, Holt and Cameron (2010) point out that cultural expression is an essential factor; it influences consumers' perceptions of brand identity of an corporate brand, forming the cultural group of consumers into a mindshare group. Culture expression is determined being a combination of ideology, myth and cultural code. *The cultural approach* sees a brand as a "cultural artefact" that tells stories to express the cultural meanings of a brand and to enable its consumers to form their collective identities; as a result, the culture group of consumers will be formed into a mindshare group (Holt, 2004, p. 215). A mindshare group is considered key for strengthening a brand (Holt, 2006).

The cultural approach is based on studies of cultural consumption, which theorise that the act of consumption made by a consumer is not just based on the function of the product, but also on its symbolic meaning (Baudrillard, 1996; Bourdieu, 2010; McCracken, 2005, 1990). For a brand, the function of symbolic meanings operates in two directions: outward and inward. The outward direction is called *social-symbolism*, in which it constructs a community; the inward direction is called *self-symbolism*, in which it identifies consumers' personal identity (Rosenbaum-Elliott et al., 2011). During branding communication, a brand's self-symbolism reveals who the consumers are and what they want to be, whereas a brand's social-symbolism indicates which social group the consumers are from or wish to enter (Bourdieu, 2010; McCracken, 2005). In cultural consumption studies, consumers maintain their identities in the personal and social world by consuming items that convey symbolic meanings (Faiers & Bell-Price, 2014; Monaco & Guimelli, 2011). Normally, these items are communicated by brand-related advertisements. Through communication, symbolic meanings are transferred into the brand for consumers to choose. As a result, the symbolic meaning of the brand is enhanced. Advertising plays an essential role in this process, concentrating and depicting a brand's

symbolism (Macklin & Carlson, 1999; Neville-Shepard & Kelly, 2020). However, for corporate branding in the arts, few studies have examined whether brand-related advertisements affect the construction of corporate brand identity. Therefore, an investigation will be conducted in Chapter 6.

The consumption of brand's symbolic meaning is also believed to be able to stabilise consumers' status in a certain group (Douglas & Isherwood, 1996; Wang & Qiao, 2020). Cumulative consumption reflects and recreates group identity, which distinguishes the difference between this group and other groups, and enables an individual to distinguish his/her own identity (Bourdieu, 2010). In other words, through consumption, brand's symbolic meaning is constantly grounded in social context (Wang & Qiao, 2020). In brand-related communication, messages representing this cultural group are delivered to the members of the group. Brand's symbolic meaning enables group members to locate themselves in society (Lane, 2020). In this way, a mindshare group is born. Cultural consumption is a tool for constructing or maintaining consumers' identities within social context (Arnould & Thompson, 2015; Bourdieu, 2010).

#### **Cultural consumption and identity construction**

As previously discussed, the word identity refers to the similarities and differences of one person over others. For a person, "identity" and "self-concept" provide "answers [to] the question 'who am I'" (Oyserman, 2004, p. 5). Hence, when the question is directed inwards (referring to who I am as an individual), it tries to address personal identity; whereas when the question is directed outwards (referring to who I am as a part of the social group), it tends to locate social identity. During identity construction, symbolic meaning plays an important role.

In 1934, in the article *Possible Selves*, George Mead developed an anthropological theory to explain how human beings recognise their identities. He argued that identities are dynamic and result from a constant negotiation between individuals and the people with whom these individuals form relationships (Mead & Morris, 1934). In postmodern consumer culture, the self is not conceptualised as a ready-to-use product of a social system, nor a fixed item that could be simply adopted. Rather, it is described as a thing that is actively created by human beings (McCracken, 2005, 1990). Consumption assists in achieving this process (Rosenbaum-Elliott et al., 2011; Tomlinson, 1990). Thompson (1995, p. 210) underlines that self is a "symbolic project" constructed by individuals out of the available symbolic materials. Then, the symbolic meanings are woven "into a coherent account of who he or she is, a narrative self-

identity [personal identity]”. Individuals’ possible selves derive from the socio-cultural or historical contexts and from the symbols that are communicated through media (Furukawa, 2021; Markus & Nurius, 1986). Therefore, it is to be explored whether and how the negotiation and construction of stakeholders’ personal and social identity may affect a corporate brand’s brand identity in the arts.

Personal identity is also negotiated through cultural consumption. Consumption carries consumer’s consciousness, sub-consciousness, and unconsciousness of symbolic meaning (Belk, 1988). Cultural activities enable an individual to develop, maintain, and express their identities. The symbolic meanings of the activities are artefacts that facilitate an individual’s personal and social identity construction (Beng-Huat, 2000; Clarke et al., 2003; Lane, 2020). Narrative identity theory suggests that, for personal identity development, in order to develop *selves*, individuals are required to tell stories that relate to their life purposes to make sense of their lives (Escalas, 2004). In other words, in personal identity development, self-expression is a significant step (Chernev et al., 2011). As part of social activities, cultural interactions, such as visiting galleries, involve social networking (French & Runyard, 2011; Lane, 2020). The interaction with visual arts, such as paintings and installations, may help individuals to form stories that can be used to make sense of their lives (DeAndrea et al., 2010; Jin et al., 2012; Nixon et al., 2014). Therefore, cultural activities may carry functions of social-recognition and self-expression at the same time, which may prove beneficial for personal identity development. In short, cultural consumption and cultural activities may facilitate stakeholders’ identity development, constructing their personal identity (Mayr, 2020; Zorloni, 2013).

At the same time, personal identity is uncovered through the recognition of social identity. Narrative identity development goes hand in hand with collective social-identity development (Brewer & Hewstone, 2004). In short, personal identities are embedded in social identities. Jenkins (2014) points out that the constructed “self” must be validated through social interaction, although tensions are always found in the negotiations between the symbolic meaning that individuals construct for themselves and the symbolic meaning that is exposed to society (Chaney, 1996; Rosenbaum-Elliott et al., 2011). An individual’s position in the negotiation may be enhanced through consuming a brand that refers to a specific symbolic meaning (Clarke et al., 2003; Kim, 2021). Hence, consuming a brand may be an activity that assists to achieve a successful negotiation between the tensions. By the same token, a brand in the cultural sector, for example, a contemporary visual arts organisation, may be a symbol that

facilitates the construction of its stakeholders' personal identities in a social environment. This is to be explored in Chapter 6.

### **Identity and cultural group**

Negotiating personal identity is one of the major reasons why individuals belong to certain cultural groups. *Consumer Culture Theory (CCT)*, the foundation of the cultural approach, explains the dynamic relationships between consumption, marketplace, and cultural meaning. CCT points out that national culture is not considered as a criterion for dividing cultural groups, instead, perceptions are. Cultural groups may overlap in one nation because of the differences in individuals' perceptions (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Arnould & Thompson, 2015). Hence, to determine a cultural group, personal identity may be key (Holt, 2005; Leonard & Prevel Katsanis, 2013). Brand is a highly symbolic composed artefact, a product that represents certain symbolic meanings connecting with its stakeholders (Grønhaug & Trapp, 1989; Morgan Parmett, 2014). The idea of group identity offers significant potential for branding research. By consuming a brand, cultural similarities may be recognised by the members of a cultural group. When this consumption occurs, the identity negotiation may also occur between the group members and their social context. This negotiation may assist individuals to form their personal identity embedded within their social identity. Individuals may clarify their social positions by confirming their identities in their cultural group (Berger, 2011; McCracken, 1990; Schroeder et al., 2006; Solomon, 2015). Therefore, the group identity of a stakeholders' group should be explored to see if corporate branding may be affected by the cultural activities of the group.

### **3.5.2 Symbolic meaning and cultural group**

#### **Brand and symbolic meaning**

In the cultural approach, symbols such as texts, images, logos, and signs that represent certain symbolic meanings of a brand are examined to reveal how cultural symbols affect stakeholders' perspectives of a brand (Holt, 2005, 2006). The analysis aligns the "symbolic meanings of a brand with its consumers' [stakeholders'] personal, social and cultural needs" (Oswald, 2012, p. 50). It identifies the symbolic meanings of a brand by analysing a range of narratives, images, and ideologies of the stakeholders' group (Oswald, 2015; Rambocas & Mahabir, 2021). The analysis of narratives and images helps to determine how the symbolic meaning may be associated with a brand and, how this association helps to increase the brand's public visibility, maintaining its relationships with its stakeholders in long term (Berger, 2011, 2010; Kim, 2021; Oswald, 2012).

Research shows links between the symbolic meanings of advertisement and the unconscious of stakeholders' group. Roland Barthes (1973) examined the symbolic meanings of advertisements relating to consumer cultures, analysing images, texts, and signs in print advertisements. He found that images, texts, and signs used in advertisements are a collective representation of a certain cultural group (Barthes, 1977, 1986, 1964). According to psychological studies, this collective representation may be based on the stakeholders' personal unconsciousness and the group's collective unconsciousness. Psychological theories show that human beings' personal unconsciousness and collective unconsciousness may derive from certain repressed psychological needs. These needs may be revealed in particular incidents (e.g. dreams), where the symbolic meanings of the incidents are interpreted by the subconscious part of a human being's brain (Freud, 2015; Freud & Freud, 1986; Jung et al., 2014). Similarly, through cultural consumption, stakeholders' psychological needs may be uncovered when they read certain brand's advertisements in which the images, texts and signs stand for particular symbolic meanings.

The construction of personal and social identities can be enhanced by texts, images, signs, and rhetoric in advertising attached to certain brands (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009; Levy & Rook, 1999; Solomon, 2015). Stern (1989, 1994, 1991) extends Barthes's findings by analysing narrative structures and deconstructing the cultural myth used in advertisements. Mick (1986) expands the study into rhetoric literature on brands' advertisements relating to symbolic consumption, underlining that the rhetoric of the discourses in advertisements may have more impact on a consumer's cultural perceptions than the actual meaning of the literature in the advertisement. Levy (1981) found that symbols in advertising represent consumer's social status and the social class to which they belong. These studies show that the identities of stakeholders' groups are constantly negotiated, recognised, and formed through reading certain advertisements or other objects with the same function. Therefore, in this thesis, it is necessary to analyse the advertisements of an organisation functioning as a corporate brand, to see how the identity of its stakeholders and its stakeholders' cultural group may be constructed through texts, images, and rhetoric.

In cultural consumption, a brand's symbolic meanings may closely relate to the construction and reconstruction of the identity of the cultural groups. Three tiers of psychological needs are classified by Maslow (1954) (see Chapter 2: basic needs, social needs, and self-fulfilment needs). These needs are listed from bottom to top in a pyramid to depict the psychological structure of human beings. Cultural consumptions involve activities that represent a human's

psychological needs in the higher hierarchical tiers in Maslow's pyramid. For example, artworks normally involve the ideological perceptions and aesthetic perceptions of the artists. Hence, researchers assume that consumers who visit galleries or interact with visual arts organisations may do so to satisfy their social or self-fulfilment needs (Bourdieu, 2010; Clarke et al., 2003). Similarly, cultural brands are consumed for the same purposes (Morgan, 1999; Rambocas & Mahabir, 2021; Tomlinson, 1990). The social function and self-fulfilment function of cultural activities are discussed in cultural consumption research. Results show that, social identities are built through various forms of cultural consumption in different social classes (Baudrillard, 1998, 1996). In social hierarchies, cultural consumptions help people to move from a lower level to a higher level of social class. When people seek to move up from their social class, they feel obliged to pay more visits to museums or to consume more brands imbued with symbolic meanings representing the ideologies of higher classes. For example, some middle class people from start to buy artworks in auctions when they want to move up to the upper class, although, cultural consumption preferences are different when classes are compared. (Bourdieu, 2010). The visitors to galleries and museums include fewer people with lower levels of education. Working class people tend to consume more accessible artwork, such as furniture or historical objects (Bourdieu et al., 1991). Overall, art-related activities are perceived to be instruments facilitating reconstruction of a new social identity for people to achieve social mobility. However, whether these findings remain applicable in the new millennium requires examining.

Texts, images, signs, and rhetoric are used as *cultural expressions* in communication to construct consumers' personal and social identities. Cultural expression is broken down into three aspects: "ideologies, myths and cultural codes". An *ideologies* is a "point of view on one of these important cultural constructs that has become widely shared and taken for granted, naturalised by a segment of society as a truth"; *Myths* are those "instructive stories that impart ideology"; *cultural codes* rise "the most appropriate and compelling cultural content" used to resonate with consumers (Holt & Cameron, 2010, p. 174). Among these three aspects, ideology is the foundation of cultural branding. It is the instrument that differentiates a brand from its competitors in the cultural consumption market (Holt, 2004). As sharing mind is the purpose of communication, sharing ideology profoundly shapes stakeholders' everyday evaluation and actions into a mindshare group (Berger, 2001; Rodner & Kerrigan, 2014). "Strong brands will sustain ideology – a particular point of view on a cultural construct that is central to the product" (Holt & Cameron, 2010, p. 174).

However, a brand's ideology should be conveyed into cultural myth and cultural codes in communication before it can facilitate branding. In communication, myths are the carriers of a brand that impart ideologies to its stakeholders. Studies based on brands that advocate a certain ideology (e.g. Jack Daniel's whisky) show that only when the ideology is embedded in myths and cultural code, the concept can become comprehensible to its stakeholders. In other words, by using myths/cultural codes in communication, the brand's ideology may resonate with its stakeholders at a visceral level (Holt, 2002; Holt & Cameron, 2010; Oswald, 2015). These findings demonstrate a consistency with the narrative identity theory explained previously. It also suggests that if the ideology of a brand is expressed in narratives, it may satisfy stakeholders in their need for narrative identity construction. A narrative makes it easier for stakeholders to understand the brand's ideology (Nyagadza et al., 2020a, 2020b). However, whether this is applicable for an arts organisation is to be explored in fieldwork.

In addition, the symbolic meanings hidden behind cultural codes may be uncovered through three kinds of basic codes: social codes (including language, consumed products and behaviours), textual codes (including aesthetics, genres and media) and interpretive codes (including aesthetic perceptions and ideologies) (Chandler, 2007; Mas et al., 2021; Palmieri et al., 2020). *Social codes* refer to the world; *textual codes* indicate media and genres; *interpretive codes* represent the relationship between social and textual codes. In this thesis, cultural codes will be examined in a brand's advertisements and other materials, in order to gain a deeper understanding of how the brand identity of an arts organisation is negotiated within its cultural group.

### **Brand and cultural group**

*Cultural group* refers to the difference in people's activities, interests and opinions (Vyncke, 2002). Unlike consumer typology, which discusses consumer/audience groups from a marketing communication point of view, cultural group theory discusses people from a social culture point of view: a consumer culture perspective (Baudrillard, 1996; Berger, 2011, 2010). Karl Marx notes that people's opinions are significantly influenced by their cultural groups: "it is not the consciousness of human beings that determines their being but their society determines their consciousness" (Marx et al., 1963, p. 51). Consumption is linked to the pursuit of contentment and wellbeing by cultural theorists; this personal contentment is seen as the driver on which consumption behaviours are based (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 80):

Modern man spends less and less of his life in production within work and more and more of it in the production and continual innovation of his own needs and well-being.

He must constantly see to it that all his potentialities, all his consumer capacities are mobilised. If he forgets to do so, he will be gently and insistently reminded that he has no right not to be happy. It is not, then, true that he is passive. He is engaged in – has to engage in – continual activity. If not, he would run the risk of being content with what he has and becoming asocial.

Approaching consumption behaviour from significantly different perspectives, Marx and Baudrillard both find that social activity has a certain degree of power over an individual's behaviour and identity construction. It is argued that an individual needs to form a tight relationship with his/her group in order to be recognised by society (Baudrillard, 1996). Based on similarity of ideology or social class, cultural groups are therefore formed (Fung, 2002; Morgan Parmett, 2014; Närvänen et al., 2013). Cultural consumption reveals particular symbolic meanings of being members of certain cultural group (Lane, 2020; Wang & Qiao, 2020). The insiders of a cultural group protect their ideology from being taken over by other cultural groups through certain consumption behaviour, so that the group would be able to keep a unique symbolic meanings of its own, thereby bolstering the members' social identities (Bourdieu et al., 1991). This type of protection is called *symbolic violence*, which means the insiders who are from a certain cultural group use cultural activity as a weapon to prevent outsiders from joining. These outsiders are normally from other cultural groups or from a lower social class (Bourdieu, 2010). Therefore, in people's daily life, cultural activities represent symbolic meanings related to certain lifestyles the members have, which suggests from which cultural group the person comes.

By clarifying to which cultural group a person belongs, a brand can see whether a person belongs to its core market (Cahill, 2006; Solomon, 2015). People may decide which brand they would like to interact with by looking at what kind of cultural group the brand is introducing to them (Nepomuceno & Laroche, 2015). It may be easier for people to choose a particular brand if the brand is representing the ideology with which they agree (Chaney, 1996; Saviolo & Marazza, 2013). This is particularly significant for a culture-related brand, as cultural activity closely relates to people's identities and ideologies (Bourdieu et al., 1991; Chernev et al., 2011; Wheaton, 2013; Yang, 2004). Therefore, in contemporary visual arts, a corporate brand may better engage with its cultural group if the ideology it introduces is agreed by the group members.

### **3.6 Branding through online communication**

As discussed, communication is key for branding. In terms of online communication, the information delivered on different online platforms ought to be aligned, which is a challenge

for managers (Fetscherin & Usunier, 2012; Saxton et al., 2020). Hence, a strategic plan should be developed to integrate market positioning, vision, total image and culture of the organisation (Podnar & Balmer, 2013; Podnar & Balmer, 2010). Alignment may be required from three dimensions: *strategic vision* perspective – positioning and vision-and-mission statement (Salem Khalifa, 2012), *Visual identity* – logos, pictures and images (Wheeler, 2012), and the *culture* of the organisation (Holt, 2004; Schultz et al., 2000). During online communication, the culture of the organisation is constantly interpreted by and negotiated with its stakeholders (Fournier et al., 2012; Melewar et al., 2013; Pizzi et al., 2020). My fieldwork will explore these three dimensions of brandings in an arts organisation.

The online communication mode has changed the way that information is exchanged (see Chapter 2). It may also significantly affect the branding process for a contemporary visual arts organisation (Berger, 2001; Harlan & Marc, 2010). As has been investigated in Chapter 2, online communication has turned branding communication into user-generated communication. Stakeholders are increasingly involved in a corporate branding process. They can visit a website and exchange opinions on social media about an organisation either negatively or positively (Gummerus et al., 2012; Lai & Fu, 2020; Wang et al., 2020). In some cultural organisations, stakeholders are even co-producing products or services (Kolb, 2016). Using online media brings challenges as well as benefit to branding in cultural organisations. Studies have categorised these benefits into four aspects: affiliation, expression, collaborative problem-solving and circulation (Jenkins et al., 2009). The *affiliation* is formed online, yet it is not generated by an organisation, but by the stakeholders' group (cultural group) of the organisation; the affiliation is generated through their communication on social media, hence it cannot be controlled by the organisation (Chen et al., 2020; Kolb, 2016). Online *expression* benefits both the organisation and its stakeholders. As previously discussed, self-expression is a significant step for people in forming their own narrative identities. Online media, especially social media, provides available platforms for creative self-expression for everybody (DeAndrea et al., 2010; Elsayed, 2021). Cultural products, such artworks in contemporary visual arts, are the items that assist people to actively express themselves (Escalas, 2004). On social media, people leave comments on artworks or adapt old artworks into new ones through their own unique perspectives. By taking part in stakeholders' online expression, the ideology introduced by an organisation may be known and accepted by its stakeholders (Kolb, 2013, 2016; Nyagadza et al., 2020a). Furthermore, using online communication may help the contemporary visual arts organisations to *solve problems*. According to recent studies, cultural

organisations, including contemporary visual arts organisations, normally face issues regarding the acquisition of public funding and fundraising, and used to be on the agenda discussed in meetings behind closed doors. With online communication, this process can be and ought to be changed by stepping forward and asking questions directly to the public about what would motivate them to donate (Kolb, 2013, 2016). Moreover, in a funding application process, contemporary visual arts organisations, especially artist-led ones, may gain more evidence on how useful and significant their projects are through online discussions which may be crucial a factor for authorities to decide whether the organisation can get funding or not. Finally, *circulation* is the last, but not the least, of the benefits. Online communication gives opportunities for people to share, comment, like, or email information to other people (Lai & Fu, 2020). Through circulation, the public may gain better awareness of an organisation's overall image, which is considered a basic step in the corporate branding (Maon et al., 2021; Nusa & Maja Konecnik, 2013).

Several media platforms are highlighted for cultural organisations to interact with stakeholders on web 2.0: websites, social media, online advertising, virtual markets and blogs (Pitsaki, 2015; Potter, 2021). These platforms can be effective media for branding practice. However, few research has shown evidence that this is applicable to an arts organisation. At the same time, smaller-sized organisations have limited budget, compared to national-run, state-run or corporate-owned galleries. Therefore, in this thesis, social media and websites were chosen, to explore the effectiveness of corporate branding and, to establish whether or not online communication can facilitate branding in the arts, and whether or not an organisation can form a stronger relationship with its stakeholder group (cultural group) through online discussions.

In summary, this chapter discussed two approaches – the *identity approach* and the *cultural approach* – adopted in this thesis for the study of corporate branding. Reacting to the micro level of branding research, the *identity approach* was employed; reacting to the macro level of branding studies, the *cultural approach* was adopted. These two approaches may help to further understand the branding issues caused by communication and cultural factors. Furthermore, this chapter identified the research gap and the key factors that affect corporate branding, which are to be explored in the fieldwork. Two significant aspects of branding – brand positioning and brand identity – are discussed. These two aspects will be explored in the fieldwork, to see how branding may be applied in an arts organisation. Moreover, the symbolic meaning of brand

is discussed in this chapter; it is found that the symbolic meaning of a brand may associate the personal-and-social-identity construction of its stakeholders. In addition, cultural consumption study assists to address the motivations of stakeholders when they interact with a brand, clarifying why stakeholders may engage with their cultural group through communication. Their actions need to be explored in the fieldwork as well. Finally, this chapter explored the relationship between online communication and branding. It discussed the effectiveness of branding through online communication, although more evidence needs to be shown in this thesis through fieldwork.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter outlines the methods adopted by this study. It demonstrates why the methods are appropriate, from philosophical stance to research strategy. The chapter focuses on demonstrating why an ethnographic case study is the most appropriate. The chapter starts from defining case study, clarifying what the research purposes and functions of a case study are, and why a single-case study suits this study. Then the chapter clarifies the strengths and weaknesses of this method. Previous studies are listed as examples of valid theory development through this method. The validity and reliability of this study are discussed as well. For the data collection, the chapter introduces the design and the data collection methods before moving on to demonstrating why and how the case is chosen. Finally, after explaining the interview design and the analysis design, the chapter demonstrates how the participant observation is conducted, and how I, as the researcher, immerse myself in the case, and why it is key for this study.

## **4.1 Research philosophy**

### **Epistemology**

Epistemology concerns itself with what “constitutes acceptable knowledge in a field of study” (Saunders, 2016, p. 132). It concerns the question of what knowledge is, and reflects the position of a researcher, that is to say, whether the researcher considers reality from an objective or subjective point of view. There are two major philosophical groups in epistemology: positivism and interpretivism (Bryman & Bell, 2015). For positivist researchers, reality is represented by objective data, such as stones, machines, actual employees. These objects exist separately from the researcher. For this reason, positivist researchers argue that the data collected is less biased and more transparent, and therefore more objective, because the data is collected without reference to feelings and attitudes (Hammersley, 2013). On the contrary, for interpretivist researchers, reality cannot exist without people’s feelings and attitudes. For instance, an interpretivist researcher considers society as formed by people as well as by their attitudes, opinions and conventions (Saunders, 2016). Therefore, for interpretivist researchers, reality must take into account words, feelings and attitudes. Reality is about how people think and feel and, how objects are interpreted in people’s minds (Hammersley, 2013).

Although positivist epistemology is commonly used in management research, it does not seem to be the most appropriate philosophical stance in this context. As this study explores how people’s feelings and thoughts, which relate to the identity derived from their social circumstances (Johnson, 2000); these may or may not affect how an organisation is recognised. Moreover, how an organisation communicates with people may affect people’s feelings and thoughts about it as well. Hence, a corporate brand’s brand awareness does not exist if it does not interact with people. On the contrary, such recognition, within particular social and cultural context, is caused by communication and interaction between the organisation and its stakeholders. Therefore, for this study, to investigate how an organisation may be recognised by people, interpretivism is the most appropriate philosophical stance.

### **Ontology**

Research philosophy is the stance that research takes as its foundation. Ontology concerns the nature of reality, “the question of social ontology is concerned with the nature of social entities”, and “whether reality is external to social actors” (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 20). This “raises the assumptions researchers have about the way the world operates and the commitment to particular views” (Saunders, 2012, p. 130). Two approaches are applied to ontology:

objectivism and subjectivism. Objectivism “represents the position that the social entities exist in reality external to and independent of social actors”, while subjectivism “asserts that social phenomena are created from the perceptions and consequent actions of social actors” (Saunders, 2016, pp. 131-132). In other words, objectivism holds that an entity, such as an arts organisation, can be studied without account of stakeholders’ ideas, concerns, or motivations, whilst subjectivism asserts that it is people’s perspectives and feelings that create the entity’s culture, and that their concerns are significant for the reality of the organisation. As the research topic here is to study whether or not and how people’s identity may influence brand identity of an arts organisation, subjectivism is selected as the most appropriate ontology.

#### **4.2 Research strategy**

This study seeks to explore corporate branding both on micro and macro level. On a micro level, the impact of communication on branding is to be studied; on a macro level, the influence of cultural factors, such as identity, is to be investigated. To study the impact of communication on branding, an analysis will be conducted to find out how a corporate brand is represented and how texts and visual elements may be used to communicate with the brand’s stakeholders. As for the influence of cultural factors, appropriate theories will be adopted to investigate how the brand identity and brand positioning may be interpreted or influenced by the predominant culture or cultures. Moreover, in the analysis, the data will be placed into a wider context of cultural environment. The analysis will then examine how a corporate brand is perceived, understood and accepted by its stakeholders.

The analysis requires intimate knowledge about multi-stakeholders – the people who relate to the corporate brand – in various ways. The stakeholders include the managerial teams, the artists/arts managers, the collaborators, the managers of similar organisations, and the audiences (Gyrd-Jones & Kornum, 2013; Preece & Kerrigan, 2015). It is essential to know how they perceive a corporate brand through communication and interactions. It helps my study in tracking connections between the identity of a corporate brand and the identity of its stakeholders.

On a micro level, a corporate brand’s brand identity is formed by a series of elements: logos, pictures, texts, and other elements. These elements interact with the brand’s stakeholders and influence their perspectives. At the same time, organisational culture helps stakeholders to understand what they see and hear about the organisation (Abimbola et al., 2012). The stakeholders may perceive their own identity through direct or indirect communication and

interactions with the corporate brand (Holt & Cameron, 2010). This process is described as a dialogue that provides a foundation for building the corporate brand (Hatch & Schultz, 2008). Therefore, to study how the communication and interaction between the identity of the brand and the identity of its stakeholders, the elements that form a corporate brand will have to be collected. Similarly, on a macro level, to discover stakeholders' identity, and to find out how cultural factors may influence the stakeholders and the brand's cultural group, stakeholders' opinions and stories have to be listened to, their behaviours have to be observed and contextualised, their subconscious needs to be explored.

*Case-study research* will assist to achieve these objectives. Firstly, case-study research helps to obtain multiple types of data, which enables the researcher to explain "the presumed casual links in the real-world interventions, which is too complex to study through survey or experimental methods" (Yin, 2014, p. 19; 2018). Secondly, case-study research helps illustrate a clear set of outcome that may enlighten those real-world interventions (Yin, 2009, 2018). In my study, the new challenges for corporate branding are examined. In addition, an approach modelled on ethnography will help this project in placing people's perspectives within certain organisations' cultures. This is because ethnography requires the researcher to immerse him/herself to the case that is to be studied. The immersion enables the researcher to interpret the cultural context in which the intervention occurred (O'Reilly, 2012; Stufflebeam, 2014). Moreover, it supports further development of corporate branding theories in the arts, especially for artist-led organisations.

Case-study research involves two major variations: single-case study and multiple-case study (Yin, 2009, 2018). Multiple-case study enables a set of cross-case conclusions drawn through the data collected across different cases; however, many multiple-case studies employ a quantitative data collection method, which is based on a positivist philosophical stance (Dul, 2012). Even though some multiple-case studies employ mixed-method or qualitative methods, the breadth and the depth of the data collected on each case cannot be compared with the ones collected in a single-case study (Creswell, 2014; Swanborn, 2010). In order to explore stakeholders' identity and an organisation's cultural context, my study requires substantial data about ideology, identity and other cultural factors that may influence stakeholders. At the same time, the identity of a corporate brand and the ideology of its managerial team may also need to be studied. Substantial data can only be obtained when the researcher closely observes the organisation and its stakeholders. Employing ethnographic case study enables in-depth investigation about the connections between brand identity and stakeholders. Furthermore,

focusing on one case may help the researcher develop a close relationship with each stakeholder, increasing the opportunity for exclusive conversations with certain stakeholders, thereby collecting data that may not be obtained by other researchers.

According to previous studies, triangulation and long-term observation are identified as valid methods to enhance the validity and accuracy of the findings for case-study research (Elman et al., 2016; O'Reilly, 2009). Triangulation helps create convergence of evidence, which limits subjectivity (Yin, 2014, 2018). Long-term observation enables the researcher to gain in-depth understanding and a broader sense of what is occurring in corporate branding in contemporary visual arts in the North East. Therefore, my study employs both.

### **4.3 Ethnographic case study**

#### **Definition**

No simple definition of *case study* can be given, due to its complexity as a research method. However, in the past, researchers provided too narrow a definition of it, based on the emphasis of “decision”, such as the following one.

The essence of a case study, the central tendency among all types of case study, is that it tries to illuminate *a decision* or set of decisions: why they were taken, how they were implemented, and with what result. (Schramm, 1971 cited in Yin, 2014, p.15)

Among other narrow definitions, the emphasis was put on “individuals”, “organisations”, “processes”, “programs”, “institutions” or “events”, which defines case study “by interest in an individual case, not by the methods of inquiry used” (Stake, 2005, p. 443). Some scholars even confused case study with fieldwork such as participant observation, for example Kidder (1986) and Frankfort-Nachmias (1996). These misunderstandings have led to a weakening of the definition for case study as a research method.

To provide a complete definition for case study, Platt (1992) traced historical practice on case studies. She then indicated that case study as a research method “has its own logic of design”, and it is “a strategy to be preferred when circumstances and research problems are appropriate rather than an ideological commitment to be followed whatever the circumstances” (Platt, 1992, p. 46). Yin (2014, p. 16) takes into account current research trends up to 2008, and points out that the definition of case study falls into two areas: its scope and the inquiry.

A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the “case”) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident. A case study inquiry

cope with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result. As a method itself, it relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result, benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis. (Yin, 2014, pp. 16-17)

As a consequence, employing case study as the research method for my study is due to the fact that the target for investigation is a real-world case – an organisation. The research question, how corporate branding may be applied in contemporary visual arts, takes the North East as the cultural context. It assumes that the investigations and findings, such as understanding about branding in contemporary visual arts, are very likely to involve cultural conditions. Therefore, cultural factors, key for the study, need to be examined in the case study.

#### **Strengths and weaknesses of single-case study**

The essence of case study research is particularisation (Simons, 2009). Employing a single-case study helps achieve greater depth of understanding in a particular context and situation. Like any method, a single-case study has its strengths and weaknesses. In terms of its strengths, a single-case study assists the researcher in understanding the complexity of a project and in engaging on a deep level with the situations or phenomena in question. Substantial data can be collected, which provide the basis for in-depth investigation and possibilities of precise interpretation to prepare theory development (Elman et al., 2016). For my study, employing a single-case enables in-depth investigation about cross-correlated multiple stakeholders' perspectives under one research proposition. It provides opportunities to show the dynamics of stakeholders' cultural groups, so that the identity influence on a corporate brand can be revealed. Furthermore, single-case study provides opportunities to engage with stakeholders, key for ethnographic case study (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

The weakness of single-case study lies in the difficulties of interpreting the large amount of data collected in the fieldwork. The data may be too detailed for researchers to analyse (Farquhar, 2012; Swanborn, 2010). Scholars do not find personal involvement (how it may affect the validity of the findings of the study) and/or subjectivity of the researcher (the way that a single-case study operates) a limitation (Simons, 2009; Yin, 2014, 2018). This is due to the uniqueness of the case-study method, later to be discussed. Derived from subjectivist ontology, subjectivity is inherent in qualitative research. However, subjectivity can be monitored and disciplined by triangulation (Bryman & Bell, 2015). In addition, a clear explanation of the particular context and time-frame for the case study may help readers gain understanding and make judgements themselves (Simons, 2009).

### **Employing ethnographic case study**

As a method, *ethnographic case study* originates from anthropology. It focuses on exploring people's communities and their culture, analysing a specific culture from the viewpoints of its members (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Accordingly, ethnographic case study encourages researchers to immerse themselves in the environment they investigate. At the same time, to gain close-up descriptions of the context, it embraces different data collection methods, such as interviews, long-term observations, and participant observations (Elman et al., 2016). During the fieldwork, the researcher is considered an instrument, a tool for data collection, through which to understand how and why the intervention of the real world occurs (Negis-Isik & Gürsel, 2013; O'Reilly, 2012). In other words, in my study, I am considered a tool for collecting and interpreting what occurs in the organisation, immersing myself as a member of the organisation's cultural group.

In an ethnographic case study, studying culture does not mean investigating an unusual culture, which normally is the case for ethnographic research (Harcup, 2014). Instead, it focuses on a particular project which is "aspiring to understand the case – the organisation – in its social-cultural context and within the concepts of culture in mind" (Simons, 2009, p. 23). Topics that aim to explore the practice of social life, that are not easily spoken about, that involve ambiguity or ambivalence of the members in the case are considered particularly suitable for ethnographic case study (O'Reilly, 2012). In my study, how a brand's stakeholders perceive the brand may be ambiguous or ambivalent, circumstances may change according to time. Therefore, ethnographic case study is deemed the best method to use.

In terms of findings, ethnographic case study differs significantly from other methods, such as surveys (Elman et al., 2016; Gerring, 2007). Whether a single or a multiple case study, the case in a case study is not equivalent to the respondents in a survey. "Case study, like the experiment, does not represent a sample, in doing case study research, your goal will be expand and generalise theories (analytical generalisation) and not to extrapolate probabilities (statistical generalisation)" (Yin, 2014, p. 21). The term case in case study should not be confused with the terms "the sample of cases" or "the small samples size of cases" (Yin, 2009, p. 23), "because case studies, like experiment, are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes" (Yin, 2014, p. 21). This is because the case in case studies does not refer to the sphere of like cases (Gerring, 2007; Woodside, 2010). In this sense, case-study research should be considered parallel to experimental research. The aim of analytic generalisation of ethnographic case study can be used to either "contribute to an abstract theory

building or to define new research focusing on a new concrete real-world situation in real-world. The lessons learned from a case study may potentially apply to a variety of situations, far beyond any strict definition of the hypothetical population of ‘like-cases’ represented by the original case” (Yin, 2014, p. 41). In terms of the size of a case study, no matter whether it relates to a single- or multiple-case study, it will be too small in number to serve the function of representing a larger population as a sample. Hence, some scholars even indicate that it is a fatal flaw to think that statistical generalisation is the way to apply the findings of case-study research (Woodside, 2010; Yin, 2014, 2018). In case-study research, especially where an ethnographic case study is employed, the case or the cases should not be considered as sampling units. Instead, they should be regarded in an empirical light to inspire development of theoretical concepts and principles (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; O'Reilly, 2009; Yin, 2009).

Overall, a single-case based ethnographic case study helps to observe cultural context (e.g. cultural group, identity), to examine how identity may affect a corporate branding process, to explore how corporate branding is applied in the arts, how stakeholders might be under-or-over represented by a corporate brand, and how the branding practice might change over time. In order to understand how identity and ideology may affect corporate branding, my study will utilise a single-case based ethnographic case study.

#### **Examples of theoretical development**

In sociology, a significant number of examples can be found in theories generated from single-case studies. Vaughan (1997) conducted a single-case study on the space shuttle *Challenger* tragedy in 1986. This detailed study revealed how the social structure of an organisation had transformed deviance into acceptable and routine behaviour. This single-case study demonstrated how deviance may be transformed into acceptable behaviour through the institutionalisation of production pressure. She applied this finding to a diverse array of other situations in her final discussion of the study. Warner (1941) undertook a classic sociological case study which made an essential contribution to social satisfaction theory. It was based on a single-case study of *Yankee City*, a small American city. The research contributed towards the understanding of the social differences among ‘upper’, ‘upper-middle’, ‘middle-middle’, ‘middle-lower’ and ‘lower’ classes. Over time, the insight given by Warner’s research has been applied broadly in various social situations. Another example is an extension of Erving Goffman’s well-known sociological theory (Buchanan, 2010). A Croatia-based single-case

study presented a successful example of reputation management applied in tourism (Rivera, 2008).

### **Validity and reliability**

Validity and reliability are concepts related to research measurement. *Validity* “is about whether the research is measuring what it intended to measure” (O'Reilly, 2012, p. 226). It also relates to whether the research is credible, plausible and whether enough evidence is given to form the argument (Gill et al., 2010; Hammersley, 2013). *Reliability* “concerns the question of whether the results of a study are repeatable” (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 41).

For qualitative research, validity mainly concerns the perspectives of the participants in the study (Saunders, 2016). Four dimensions of validity are used to assess research: construct validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability (Gibbert et al., 2008). *Construct validity* is used to identify correct operational measures for the concepts that are investigated (Yin, 2014, 2018). For my study, it entails that the chosen case has to be able to address the research proposition and research questions. Internal validity deals with the overall problems of making inferences. It seeks a logical and trustworthy relationship between the conditions and the inferences, emphasising the importance of distinguishing spurious relationships between the data and the conclusion. However, internal validity is not applicable to this research project. Yin's perspective (2014), which stipulates that internal validity does not apply to descriptive and exploratory studies, is followed. As my study explores whether and how corporate branding may be influenced by cultural factors, it is an exploratory study. *External validity* defines the domain where the research findings are to be developed (Yin, 2018). For my study, external validity defines the domain where the findings develop regarding to the research proposition. O'Reilly (2012, p. 226) emphasises that “ethnographic research is particularly good at dealing with problems of validity because, essentially, it focuses on the *emic* view – that is, on the insider's or 'native's' perspective”.

Reliability demonstrates the operations of a study, determining whether same results can be generated if another researcher follows the same procedure (Saunders, 2016). Yin (2018) suggests that documentation of the procedure is useful to demonstrate how a case study is conducted, which provides opportunity for the research to be repeated. However, for ethnographic case study, as the researcher immerses him/herself in the case, it will be difficult for another researcher to follow exactly the same procedure (Harcup, 2014). In comparison,

applying the same theory may enable later researchers to study the same case or topics, which is advised (Yin, 2014).

The connections between validity and reliability are very different in qualitative research compared to quantitative research. For quantitative research, validity presumes reliability, because if the collected data were not reliable, they would not be valid. Yet in qualitative research, “as the measurement is not a major preoccupation, validity would seem to have little bearing” (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 394). Validity can be seen, in qualitative research, as a fact whether the researcher is observing, identifying or measuring according the research proposition (Mason, 2002). As my study employs a single case based ethnographic case study, it may involve a large number of variables and data. Therefore, different data-collection methods are to be adopted to enhance validity. The following sections will illustrate the data collection methods, the researcher’s preparation and practice.

#### **4.4 Data collection design**

##### **4.4.1 Participant observation and research inquiry**

Although this research project employs multiple data-collection methods, the major method is *participant observation* (O'Reilly, 2009). As discussed, ethnographic case study is a special method that suggests the researcher study issues from an insider’s perspective, from the view of a person’s own lived experience. This means that the researcher should not only talk to the people involved in the case, asking them to answer questions, but should also observe and participate in their life (O'Reilly, 2012). Therefore, participant observation is the major method employed in this ethnographic case study. Participant observation consists of two parts: participation and observation. Bronislaw Malinowski (1926), the founder of contemporary ethnographic method, indicates that the purpose of participation is to understand the data from an insider point of view before it is blended into an analysis setting, and to make sense of the world involved in everyday social practice. The purpose of observation is to observe, notice, record and try to make sense of actions and events (Brewer, 2000). During participant observation, a researcher acts as both a participant and an observer. Hence, practically, being both the participant and the observer can be difficult to manage; theoretically, it needs careful consideration. Ethnographer O'Reilly (2009, p. 151) summarises how a researcher involved in a participant observation is an instrument:

A participant is a member of a group joining in activities, sharing experience and emotions, contributing to debate and taking part in the very interactions on which social life is built. An observer is an outsider, watching and listening, not always fully taking

part, and rarely being a fully-fledged member of the community. An observer intentionally joined the group and will leave at some time; her participation is instrumental.

Participant observation “enables the strange to become familiar and the familiar strange” (O'Reilly, 2012, p. 92). Observation is significant for addressing the research questions, as it tries to make sense of what happened in participation. As a researcher, it is essential to stand back intellectually, to reflect on what happened, to write down and objectify the issues, to ask people questions and, to address research questions; it is also essential to seek opportunities to access the issues so that in-depth understanding can be obtained to facilitate the objectification and reflection (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

Similar to O'Reilly (2009), Maykut and Morehouse (1994, p. 24) indicate that, in a participant observation, the researcher should be considered a “*human-as-instrument*”. Scholars insist that “a person, that is, a human-as-instrument, is the only instrument which is flexible enough to capture the complexity, subtlety, and constantly changing situation which is the human experience” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 193). On the one hand, this is due to the nature of qualitative research, which aims to capture and interpret social reality, namely people’s mind. On the other hand, the constantly changing social reality may be too complex to capture (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). If the data collection tool is a static instrument, it is “not multifaceted enough and complex enough to capture the important elements of a human person or activity” (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 25). Therefore, only a human being can be the appropriate tool. In other words, in participant observation, the researcher, as a person, is the best data collection tool, because he/she is as complex as the subject matter that is to be studied. This principle also applies to other qualitative data-collection methods, such as interviews.

Human-as-instrument could be challenged as subjective. However, triangulation is the way to enhance the validity of a study. Subjectivity is inevitable, as the deeper level of meaning is constructed by a human being. Ethics are essential for qualitative research; any investigation should be conducted recognising bias may exist. Therefore, subjectivity needs to be explicitly explained, and the researcher’s role needs to be acknowledged and clarified (Moules, 2002). At the same time, the researcher should allow the respondents to retain their roles of being individual, unique members of the community, and actively use the new space under enquiry (Moules, 2002). In my study, respondents are notified of intention at the beginning of the study. It enhances construct validity – the meaning of the case (Merriam, 1988).

For the inquiry on the relationship between the researcher as human-as-instrument and the group in which he/she immersed, *human plurality theory* supports the idea that a researcher can think and act independently during the study. Although, in participant observation, the researcher immerses him/herself in the subject matter, interacting or relating to the people in the subject matter, the researcher is able to retain his/her distinct thoughts and feelings. Human plurality is considered as a basic human condition, which enables a researcher to observe social reality from his/her own view, communicating to the participants his/her own ideas (Arendt, 1998). “You must become part of that world while at the same time remaining separate, a part of and apart from”(Patton, 1980, p. 121). Human plurality theory finds that twofold-characteristics, equality and distinction, exist in each human being, they influence every human being’s actions and communications: “If we were not equal, we could not understand each other or those who came before us. If we were not distinct we would not need to understand each other” (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 25). Maintaining his/her own distinct thoughts to fulfil research objectives during a study is a researcher’s basic human condition. Hence, there is no problem for a researcher to act on his/her own purposes even when he/her is immersed in others (Arendt, 1998). Moreover, in terms of relationship, some data analysis methods, such as hermeneutical/dialectical methods, find that relationships even help establish valid conclusions and reliable findings. For example, the hermeneutical method encourages researchers “to have close interaction” with other participants during the case study (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 115). Relationships in hermeneutical method are considered a merit. Some research cases also prove relationship can be a merit for study. Love (1994, p. 1) successfully uses subjective understanding to study medical couples’ lives. In her study, the position being one of “the medical wives” becomes a merit, helping her to analyse the voices and the experiences of others.

In terms of my study, establishing a close relationship with the organisation and becoming an insider provides exclusive opportunities for data collection. For example, opportunities to have conversation with all founders and stakeholders when necessary, and opportunities for accessing other organisations and collect first-hand data. Moreover, a close relationship with the organisation may enable me to obtain exclusive information regarding managerial operations. An established relationship may also facilitate my network with other stakeholders (e.g. artists, studio holders), who may release information that enables valid findings.

In summary, being the major data collection method, participant observation is significant for this ethnographic case study. As a human-as-instrument and data collection tool, establishing

a close relationship with the organisation is key for the researcher. This relationship may provide more opportunities for accessing exclusive sources of data, which enhances the validity of this study.

#### **4.4.2 Interview**

*Interview* is considered a cross-disciplinary data collection method. It generates a wide variety of ideas, concepts and insights into qualitative research (Cisneros-Puebla et al., 2004). For qualitative research, interview is not only utilised to gather facts, but also to construct meaning and interpretation through the context of conversation (Kvale, 1996). Formalisation of the roles of interviewer and interviewee is a precondition of research interviews (Benney & Hughes, 1956). However, the roles of interviewer and interviewee have become more flexible in contemporary interviews. Some researchers practise an interview style “wondering together with interviewees” (Cisneros-Puebla et al., 2004, p. 39). Contemporary interviews also include forms such as dialogues, meaningful discussions and conversations on research topics (Cisneros-Puebla et al., 2004).

Contemporary society is an “interview society”, where narratives become significant for individuals. This change reflects the development of the relationships between individuals – “the evolution of a self as an object of narration” (Silverman, 1997, p. 248). Interviewees “are seen as significant commentators on their own experience” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002, p. 5). As individuals, they respond more to the meaningful knowledge. This has caused change in forms of interview and the way of interpreting interviews (Silverman, 2004). Gubrium and Holstein (2002, p. 9) consider interview a “significant means” for a person to realise the connections between personal identity and social contexts, because as a part of the society, individuals regularly produce meaningful questions and answers.

In ethnographic case study, a researcher can be seen as an interviewer who is traveling and accompanying the interviewees, exploring and trying to discover “the stories of the lived world” (Kvale, 1996, p. 4). Kvale (1996, p. 4) emphasises that if a researcher wants to find a genuine story, to truly understand an individual, he/she has to use a method that can motivate the individual to speak in a “genuine voice”. Hence, to discover an individuals’ life, and thereby to discover their identity, two types of interviews are employed here.

#### **Narrative interview**

*Narrative interview* is based on human stories, aiming to uncover the repressed identity of individuals through storytelling. Narrative interview (life-story depth interview) is one of the

commonly used methods for collecting data in cultural study. Other interview forms include phenomenological interviews and memory elicitation interviews (Heding et al., 2016). The similarity of these three methods is that they all try to motivate interviewees to release their *genuine voice*. However, phenomenological interview tends to focus on interviewing people under certain themes predesigned by the interviewer (Bevan, 2014). Similarly, memory elicitation interview emphasises tracing the interviewees' earliest memory on certain themes, e.g. childhood memory (Braun-LaTour et al., 2007). Narrative interview is a method to reveal people's identity. Through storytelling, narrative interview allows people to reveal their feelings and experience repressed in their subconscious; as a result, their identities can be revealed (Holt, 2002), and narrative interview is, therefore, a method to reveal people's identity.

Narrative interview is particularly good for collecting discursive data in cultural studies. In branding research, Holt (2002) established his ground-breaking theory – cultural branding theory – adopting narrative interview as his data collection method. His paper takes branding, for the first time, into a macro-level of recognition, a cultural sphere. He considers that “narrative interviews provide a particularly good fit” with cultural branding study. In his ground-breaking paper, he uses “micro level data — people's stories about their consumption – to investigate macro level constructs” (Holt, 2002, p. 73). The narrative interview particularly fits my study, as it is an identity-based project, which should yield a significant amount of discursive material. Moreover, people's individual and shared identity are usually hidden in their subconscious, which can only be discovered through storytelling.

The narrative interview used by Holt is derived from the *Extended Case Method* (ECM), a method for social research originated in the Manchester School of Social Anthropology (Burawoy, 1998). ECM is favoured by researchers who study macroscopic and cultural topics. The narrative interview they use focuses on reflexive storytelling, highlighting the narratives that empower the interviewees. Moreover, this method emphasises hermeneutic analysis, paying attention to the interpretation of the reflexive stories told by the interviewees (Holt, 2002). However, Holt's (2002) study aims to find out how the people's resistance to brand is caused. Hence, he designs interview questions for his interviewees to let them talk about different categories of commodity. In comparison, my research proposition is to find relationships between the identity of a brand and the identity of its stakeholders. Therefore, the design of my narrative interview in this context should focus on listening to stakeholders' stories, getting to know their life experiences, and discovering their identities. Edward Bruner

(1988, p. 7) thus summarised the links between each individual's story and their self-construction:

A life lived is what actually happens. A life experienced consists of the images, feelings, sentiments, desires, thoughts and meanings known to the person whose life it is...a life as told, a life history, is a narrative, influenced by the cultural conventions of telling, by the audience and by the social contexts.

Arts-involved activities have long sought to work in creative and challenging ways with stories that people tell, and through which they understand, their lives (Smedt & Cruz, 2011). The telling and sharing of these stories has also seemed an important part of a process to affirm and challenge received ideas about individual and collective identities (Crow, 2010). My study seeks to uncover and read aspects of identity; the narrative interview is therefore selected as one means of realising this aim. It may "illustrate rather more general principles of semi-structured interview", particularly supportive conditions are offered (Wengraf, 2001, p. 5).

The narrative interview is based on the theory of memory. Human beings do not remember everything that happens to them. Instead, the unique memories that human beings accumulate, the way they string them together, and the way they are expressed are based on one foundation: who the people are (Cohen & Conway, 2008). Denzin (1989) indicates how to identify the episodes that leave marks on people's lives: through the 'before and after' moments, times of transition that change lives, deaths, departures, successes, failures, accidents or near misses. These types of memories tend to be recalled most frequently, or repressed completely. When human beings recall their memories, stories are built around these episodes in a narrative form. The stories told are revealed as the narrative performance of a human being's identity. For instance, Dennett (1992) analogises a human-being's *self* to a centre of narrative gravity, in which the information received by a human-being's brain is translated into streams of consciousness. This translation process is experienced as internal conversations that human beings have with themselves. Through these conversations, people's identities are constructed and performed in constant interaction with social environment and cultural context.

The key idea of narrative interview is that interviewees tell their stories and their lives (Fossati, 2013). To reveal the identity of the storyteller, a narrative interview is constituted of two parts. The first part is the narrative construction of the individual's identity; the second part is more akin to a conventional semi-structured interview, except that the questions would be generated from the storytelling part. In the first part interviewees are encouraged to tell their own stories in a comfortable environment. Storytelling helps in exploring the interviewees' personal and

collective identity as it releases their subconscious and unconscious. Subconscious and unconscious are categorised into broad functions: directive, social, self-representative and adaptive (Cohen & Conway, 2008).

The second part of a narrative interview is similar to a semi-structured interview, which is a question-and-answer conversation. This conversation is led by the interviewer who asks the questions uncovered in the storytelling. The aim of this conversation is to set the agenda and cue in responses to research questions. The questions should be perceived by the interviewer as relevant to the research project (Cisneros-Puebla et al., 2004). When significant memories or issues are spotted by the storyteller in the first part, the interviewer needs to mark them down, then revisit them in the semi-structured interview. This step is to develop an in-depth understanding of the significant moment/issues in relation to the research project.

A narrative interview may take a very long time. As a result, substantial discursive material will be obtained (Holt, 1997). As an ethnographic method, the narrative interview may involve a detailed analysis of discourse, language, and the idea of narrative flow, which, will be conducted through data analysis (Garfield et al., 2010).

### **Semi-structured interview**

As discussed, interview enables the researcher to explore the answers that relate to a particular research topic. *Semi-structured interview* is hence designed to help the researcher to discover more information through pre-designed questions (Saunders, 2016). Malhotra (2010, p. 207) describes how rich and relevant data may be obtained through semi-structured interviews: “an understanding, direct, personal interview, in which a single participant is probed by an experienced interviewer to uncover underlying motivations, beliefs, attitudes and feeling on a topic”. In a narrative interview, the semi-structured interview stage helps to verify the stories told, and relates them to the research proposition; it helps cover the aspects not mentioned by the storyteller, yet significant for the researcher. Moreover, semi-structured interviews may assist to further explore hidden issues revealed through storytelling (Wengraf, 2001). Pure semi-structured interview enables researchers to obtain relevant and accurate data, useful for the investigation of strategic aspects in branding (Bryman & Bell, 2015). However, in a semi-structured interview, the questions have to be well designed to ensure that the interview can be sufficiently open and allow the interviewer to improvise subsequent questions. Studies find that 50% to 80% of response and subsequent questions will have to be improvised, deviating from the initial prepared questions (Wengraf, 2001).

Narrative interview and semi-structured interview compensate each other's strengths and weaknesses. As discussed, a narrative interview is appropriate to obtain discursive information released by a person's subconscious, although it may take a long time to reach relevant topics or issues related to the research proposition. The interviewer does not control what the interviewee talks about. On the contrary, a semi-structured interview compensates for this weakness, as the procedure of a semi-structured interview is controlled by the interviewer. The questions are designed to address the research questions and propositions, which can also be modified according to the real interview situation. However, a semi-structured interview is strategically designed, which is not appropriate for obtaining subconscious data, which are important for identity studies.

#### **4.5 Analysis design**

##### **Iterative analysis**

*Iterative analysis* is commonly adopted by ethnographic study due to the fact that, in ethnographic study, "important parts of the analysis [are] being made while the researcher is still gathering his data" (Becker, 1970, p. 27). "In ethnographic research you can go back, ask people more questions, find the person you missed, or look for more information and collect more data, because you do not gather blindly" (O'Reilly, 2012, p. 183). As explained previously, in ethnographic research, the researcher is a "human-as-instrument": collecting data according to what arises out of the interviewee's thinking. At the same time, the collected data are rarely systematic, they "come out of the interplay between a receptive and curious mind and a world explored over time and with diligence" (Atkinson, 2001, p. 35). Peacock (2001) explains ethnographic research using the analogy of the camera. He says ethnography uses harsh light and a soft focus: using a harsh light to see behind things, in corners and in shadows, and things that might be missed, the researcher has to be open minded to surprises and things that try to stay hidden. At the same time, a soft focus is required so that the focus of the study can be changed to bring in aspects that are not thought relevant. In this case, participatory research allows for participants' engagement at all stages, from design through data collection to analysis and writing (Ezzy, 2002).

Iterative analysis requires sorting data into different categories to suit the purposes of the study. These categories can be thematic or descriptive, or both (O'Reilly, 2012). However, the data should not be sorted according to the frequency it appears, but should be sorted according to note and to code with the categories (O'Reilly, 2009). In this study, the data collected are to be sorted according to the themes that are relevant to the main topic, corporate branding, and the

different branding aspects of corporate branding, namely, brand positioning, the cultural group, the brand advantage, and the branding barrier. For the participant observation, data are collected through my field notes and are organised in chronological order. At the same time, the data are categorised into themes as the observation continues. For the interview, data are categorised according to relevant themes during the analysis, and quotations will be used as examples or evidence when discussing the findings in the analysis.

Iterative analysis is based on the patterns of thoughts of the researcher. “The patterns of thoughts, speech or action, repeated in various ways and with various individuals and groups, are means of ensuring reliability” (O’Reilly, 2012, p. 195). In order to achieve the reliability of the analysis, multiple sources of data are collected in this study, and these sources of data will be involved into the discussion of each topic. For iterative analysis, the data analysis should be organised in order to explain the findings and the new concepts developed relevant to the research topics (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). In the present study, data will be first sorted into categories. Within each category, data will then be organised and compared in order to bring ideas together to address the development of new concepts/theories. In this process, open coding is involved to sort the data into categories and focus coding is adopted to compare data and bring ideas together. Iterative analysis is a constructing process. During the construction, theories are used to support and to explain the data analysis, so that the new concepts/ theories can be developed and constructed (O’Reilly, 2012). In this study, theories will be involved to support the new concept developed in the analysis.

Mixing different data analysis methods is also allowed, as long as it is useful for constructing new concepts (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this study, apart from using multiple sources to validate the reliability of the analysis, other analysis methods, such as discourse analysis and visual analysis, will also be applied to validate the construction of new concepts.

### **Discourse analysis**

“Discourse studies is the discipline devoted to investigation of the relationship between form and function in verbal communication” (Rekema, 2004, p. 1). It provides opportunity for interdisciplinary research to interact from different dimensions and multiple perspectives (Wodak & Krzyżanowski, 2008). *Discourse analysis* contributes to producing knowledge in terms of how meaning is expressed and interpreted in a variety of situations. These situations include social, organisational, and cultural settings. Adopting discourse analysis as an analytical technique for this research enables discussions to be associated with other

perspectives, enhancing the reliability of this interdisciplinary research project. Further, without being restricted by any particular method, it allows discourse interpretation and comprehension to be more flexible (Lucarelli & Giovanardi, 2016). Discourse analysis is employed to reveal the founders' identities through the meanings expressed by the verbal expressions during the interviews and observations. In this study, discourse analysis takes precedence.

### **Visual analysis**

*Visual analysis* is another method adopted by this study to clarify the identity expressed through a visual sign of an organisation – the logo. Narratives expressed by visual signs and images may reveal the group identity of a certain cultural group (Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2001). Employing visual analysis enables this study to clarify how identities may be embedded in a visual sign. The visual analysis undertaken will closely examine how the signs and images are selected by the founders and whether or not it may relate to the founders' identity and the branding process of the corporate brand.

Employing multiple analysis methods ensures that the data are analysed within their context – the meaning of the behaviour of the participants in the arts. This reflects what is required by hermeneutics in sociology, which is “the interpretation and understanding of social events through analysis of their meanings for the human participants in the events” (Willis, 2007, p. 10).

### **Triangulation**

*Triangulation* is to “give a more detailed and balanced picture of the situation” (Altrichter, 2008, p. 233). For this ethnographic case study, triangulation provides the rationale for using multiple data sources, and evaluates whether the findings can appropriately answer the research questions. Patton (2002) discussed four types of triangulation: triangulation of data sources (*data triangulation*), triangulation among different evaluators (*investigator triangulation*), triangulation of perspectives to the same data set (*theory triangulation*) and triangulation with different methods (*methodological triangulation*). Here, data triangulation, theory triangulation, and methodological triangulation are employed. This is due to four reasons. Firstly, data triangulation is the most significant triangulation for case-study research, using multiple data sources is considered as a major strength (Yin, 2014, 2018). Secondly, managing a 30-month data collection is a complex process, and multiple sources can provide convergence of evidence for the findings and conclusions, which can assist to enhance the accuracy of the results. Thirdly, theory triangulation can help to strengthen the construct validity of this

research project (Yin, 2014). For example, Aftab (2013) adopts theory triangulation in which she compares her single-case study to previous studies and theories. Fourthly, different methods are employed by my study, for the reasons explained previously.

The data sources involved in this ethnographic case study include: the summary of the two-and-half year participant observation, narrative interview, semi-structured interview, company files, emails, artists' proposals, newspapers, third-party documents, industry reviews, social media sources and company website sources. These sources of evidence provide multiple measurements for one research proposition. Hence, the data obtained can be interpreted accurately, and the overall picture of the case can be illustrated clearly.

## **4.6 Fieldwork**

This section outlines the fieldwork conducted for this research based on the theories of methodology reviewed previously. The section explains the reason why the case is chosen, how this ethnographic case study is conducted, and what happened in the field.

### **4.6.1 The case**

Yin (2014) indicates that two aspects are to be considered for a chosen case. First, the case has to be able to answer the research questions and fit the research proposition, in essence, fitting in the research field (i.e. a contemporary visual arts, artist-led organisation), matching its geographical criteria (i.e. North East England), and having the desired characteristics required in research question (e.g. practice positioning, using communication tools, has a variety of stakeholder groups). Second, to lead to the findings, the case has to demonstrate a logic that links data to its research proposition and the interpreting criteria. These two aspects also address the validity of the case, which was discussed previously. Moreover, as this study employs participant observation, the case needs to allow researcher to be present on a regular basis.

Several organisations located in the North East were considered: BALTIC<sup>1</sup>, the Centre for Contemporary Arts (CCA), The New Bridge Project, Vane Gallery, Locus+, and Breeze Creatives. As CCA is located in Glasgow, it would not be possible to be present regularly and BALTIC is not an artist-led organisation (although it has artists play various roles in it), these two are not appropriate. Vane Gallery, Locus+, The New Bridge Project and Breeze Creatives

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<sup>1</sup> BALTIC was founded with funding from The National Lottery through Arts Council England, Gateshead Council, Northern Rock Foundation, the European Regional Development Fund and One North East. BALTIC receives continued support from Arts Council England and Gateshead Council and is a registered charity. Details see <https://baltic.art/about/what-is-baltic>.

are all located in Newcastle upon Tyne, which allow daily access. However, considering Vane has only two people working full-time, only operating a gallery, it has too narrow a group of stakeholders to investigate for this study. Locus+ operates multiple projects and has a variety of stakeholder groups.<sup>2</sup> Yet, it does not use social media platforms as its major communication tool.<sup>3</sup> Because social media communication is significant in my study, Locus+ would not be a good fit. As The New Bridge Project and Breeze Creatives are both artist-led, operating with multiple functions and projects, they would hence be potentially good fit. In comparison, The New Bridge Project, has had a five-year branding history since it was established, Breeze Creatives, however, is a newly established organisation. As this study aims to determine what or how many factors may affect the organisation's positioning, choosing a newly established organisation may offer more opportunities to closely examine what or how the factors may affect the organisation when the corporate brand has not been positioned.

Breeze Creatives meets all the criteria. First of all, to answer the research proposition and the research questions, this organisation operates in contemporary visual arts sector, located in the North East. The fact that all three founders are artists qualifies it as an artist-led organisation. Second, as explained, Breeze Creatives is in its early stage of development. For corporate branding, it provides a rare opportunity to explore how cultural factors may or may not affect this brand's positioning, for example, how cultural factors (e.g. cultural group, stakeholders' identity) may influence corporate brand's positioning. As a new organisation, Breeze Creatives' managerial team is small (only three founders are in charge) and the scale of its cultural group (stakeholders' group) has not yet been expanded extensively. These merits allow the study to distinguish the relationships between stakeholders and provides opportunities to concentrate on the investigation of the founders, making the study more focused.

Breeze Creatives operates multiple projects and functions under one brand.<sup>4</sup> It may help to demonstrate how a corporate brand can be managed under multiple functional purposes. As Breeze Creatives is a Community Interest Company (CIC), the influence of cultural factors might prove stronger in the brand's positioning, which makes it easier to observe. In terms of

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<sup>2</sup> According to the company's CV, Locus+ was founded in 1983. It was registered as a company in 1994 and has organised a large number of international artist activities which involves artists. Details can be found on their website: <http://www.locusplus.org.uk/home>

<sup>3</sup> Selected transcriptions/summaries are included in the Appendix. In the interview with the director of Locus+, he admits that Locus+ is the company that rarely uses social media as a communication tool for working purposes. Record provided upon requirement.

<sup>4</sup> Breeze Creatives is private company limited by guarantee without share capital, a Community Interest Company (CIC). Its company number is 09040279, which can be checked online.

brand establishment, although Breeze Creatives was only formed in 2014, through its way of engaging with its stakeholders, it has increasingly gained public visibility and brand reputation in the North East (which will be discussed in Chapter 6). This fact provides an opportunity to observe what factors may affect a brand's public visibility and brand image. In terms of the investigation of collaborative factors in branding, Breeze Creatives provides opportunities as it has been constantly collaborating with different organisations, inside and outside the North East. In 2015, a London-based charity organisation *Arts Emergency* held its launching event with Breeze Creatives in BAL TIC, taking Breeze Creatives as its response centre in the North East.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, Breeze Creatives may be considered as a major mover in the creative and cultural sector in the region. It initiated the cultural event *Block Party* in Newcastle, which has become a major cultural cooperation event (Naylor, 2017). Since its foundation, Breeze Creatives has been playing an essential role in bonding arts organisations together (Naylor, 2017; Wheeler, 2016).

As a case, Breeze Creatives has its strengths and weaknesses. The strengths have been identified above: its suitability to the research proposition, the small managerial team, the focused stakeholders' group, the merit of being a newly established corporate brand, and its increasing reputation. Furthermore, the characteristics of being a community interest company (CIC) enables the company to connect to people from communities. The weaknesses, on the other hand, may centre on *reliability*, as the researcher developed a close relationship with the founders of the organisation. However, research has shown little evidence on how relationships may affect the findings and conclusions of ethnographic studies. On the contrary, as previously discussed, a close relationship benefits this ethnographic case study as it enhances accessibility of the data.

Moreover, using multiple data sources, long-term observation, and triangulation ensures the validity and the trustworthiness of the study. The fact that Breeze Creatives is a community interest company (CIC) may also be a double-edged sword for this study. On the one hand, as a CIC, cultural influence may appear prominent so that valuable factors may be easier to discover; on the other hand, it may be necessary to be cautious about data analysis, making sure that the findings answer the research questions, rather than solving issues for CIC.

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<sup>5</sup> Event details are available on Breeze Creatives' official website: <https://breezcreatives.com/events/the-arts-emergency-response-centre>

Breeze Creatives is located in Bamburgh House, Market Street East, in the city centre of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, England. In 2014, as a non-profit organisation, Breeze Creatives converted a nine-floor building, Bamburgh House, into a multi-function contemporary arts space, providing services and facilities to artists. The services and facilities include two galleries, artist studios, foundation courses, community spaces, bar areas and conference spaces. From the third to seventh floor, studios are provided at a lower price for artists and organisations. The second floor and the eighth floor are converted into two galleries, Abject Gallery and Abject 2 Gallery. The first floor is converted into a large conference space for the arts, communities, and businesses. The ground floor is converted into community social space, holding charity events, arts events, and community activities. It was previously named *¡VAMOS!*, yet the name was later changed into *Kommunity*. On the fourth floor, a foundation course, F.A.D (Foundation Art and Design) is managed by Breeze Creatives in collaboration with Northumberland College. In addition, on the eighth floor, a bar area is designed beside the gallery space, serving during preview nights or arts events in Abject Gallery. Breeze Creatives' managerial team consists of three founders, Alex Breeze, Daniel Gibson, and Zoe Anderson, each of whom has a different family background. Breeze is from an upper-class family; he and his siblings were educated in boarding schools, and, although his family is no longer wealthy, it still owns a large amount of land. Gibson considers himself as of typical middle-class family background, as his father is a university lecturer and his mother an art teacher. Anderson self-styles herself as a member of the working-class, due to her parents having worked as miners, although she herself is a PhD candidate and has a university-lecturer background, she should be classified a member of the middle-class. The backgrounds of the three founders make Breeze Creatives' managerial team a good example of how different social backgrounds may or may not form a shared identity, and how this shared identity may affect a brand's positioning and identity.

#### **4.6.2 The interview**

##### **Preparation**

Before the formal interviews, a pilot interview was conducted aiming to determine which types of interview are more suitable for addressing the research questions and fulfil the research proposition. Anna Campbell, a contemporary visual artist, was chosen for the pilot interview. The topics include the interviewee's identity, ideology, and perspectives on branding in the arts. The pilot interview was set in a semi-structured interview form and I played the role of the interviewer. In the pilot interview, I found it difficult to motivate the interviewee to talk

about her identity and ideology in a semi-structured interview. During the interview, the interviewee was not able to let her subconscious lead the talk. When asked about her identity and ideology, she started to seek the purpose of this interview, trying to use logic to answer the questions instead of letting her subconscious take the lead. As a result, the interview topics needed to change, attempting to let her talk about ideas of branding and her knowledge about arts organisations. Only when there were no more questions asked that directly relate to identity, the interviewee was able to talk more casually. This way, discursive data can be given, which proves useful to the study.

Overall, the pilot interview achieved its aim. It proved that solely using a semi-structured interview does not help obtain discursive data. To obtain data on people's identity and ideology, their subconscious needs to be revealed. Therefore, both narrative interviews and semi-structured interviews should be employed. In addition, information obtained through this pilot interview proved useful for the analysis.

To conduct a narrative interview, appropriate interview techniques need to be learned. Therefore, I attended three training classes for narrative interview, studying the basic principles and skills. Furthermore, face-to-face training was given by an experienced narrative researcher, to overcome possible challenges in a real interview situation. During this training, a number of tips and advice were given, such as how to set up a comfortable environment for interviewees, how to induce the interviewees to release their subconscious, how to understand and react to silences, how to detect the key issues revealed in storytelling and how to ask specific questions in following-up. In addition, pilot narrative interviews with several acquaintances were conducted to ensure the narrative interviews would be conducted in an appropriate manner. Semi-structured interviews were less of a challenge, as I had frequently conducted them in my profession as a creative director in advertising companies and during my master's degree study. Hence, training courses were not followed, although pilot interviews were conducted with acquaintances as further practice.

#### **Interview sample selection**

As my study seeks answers to whether and how the stakeholders' identity may affect corporate brand identity, the interviewees were to be selected from Breeze Creatives' stakeholders. They must have close relationships with Breeze Creatives, have worked with the organisation, or have attended the organisation's events. They must be interested in up-to-date information

about Breeze Creatives. To make the size of each sample group clear, all numbers listed in this section are in Arabic numbers.

33 samples are selected for the interviews in this ethnographic case study. The samples can be categorised into 4 sample-groups: the managerial team, the key collaborators, the audience/consumers, and the industry. 3 samples, the founders of Breeze Creatives, are selected for the group of managerial team; 7 samples are selected for the group of key collaborators; 16 samples are selected for the group of audience/consumers; 7 samples are selected for the group of the industry.

The 7 samples selected for the group of key collaborators including two artists-in-residence at Breeze Creatives, the director of *Kommunity*, the programme leader of F.A.D, a journalist, an event photographer, and an event organiser. Some of them are Breeze Creatives' business partners (for instance, the programme leader, the director in *Kommunity* and the artists-in-residence), while some of them have undertaken various collaborations with Breeze Creatives. For instance, the event organiser organises events while the journalist writes features for the events. At the same time, the photos taken for the features are done by the events photographer. At an interpersonal level, these 7 collaborators have very close relationships with Breeze Creatives' managerial team.

In my study, interviews last about one-and-half hours each in average, although some narrative interviews lasted over 3 hours. Within the total of 33 samples, 26 samples are chosen to take both narrative interview and semi-structured interview, including 16 audience/consumer samples, 7 key-collaborator samples and 3 founders of Breeze Creatives. 7 samples are chosen to take semi-structured interview only, they are 7 arts managers from the industry (who either work in other arts organisations as directors/managers or are independent curators). This is because interviewing the directors/managers and independent curators mainly aims to explore the business category in the arts, the attitude of artists, and whether branding strategy may influence a corporate brand in the arts. These objectives do not relate to subconscious; hence, semi-structured interview is more efficient to obtain data.

The 16 samples, selected for the group of audience/consumers, and the 7 samples selected for the group of the industry are chosen from Breeze Creatives' subscriber mailing list. The subscribers include individuals and organisations. As for the individuals, they should have attended Breeze Creatives' events, or have close relationships with Breeze Creatives, or they are keen on obtaining information about this organisation. As for the organisations, they should

either collaborated with Breeze Creatives before, or have formed a close relationship with it. Using the mailing list, approximately 600 subscribers received invitations to join this research project, and 51 respondents replied. Each respondent was contacted individually, and it was eventually decided to recruit 23 samples in total: 16 for the audience/consumer group, and 7 for the industry group. As this is a stakeholder selection process, the criteria are based on the way these samples are connected to Breeze Creatives. The audience/consumers group are formed by 5 studio holders, 5 audience members from visual arts exhibitions, and 6 from other art events. The industry group are formed by 5 directors/managers from arts/cultural organisations, a manager specialised in cultural sector at Newcastle City Council, and an independent curator.

All interviewees' names are replaced apart from the people who have given consent allowing their names to be shown in this thesis. They are the 3 founders of Breeze Creatives (Alex Breeze, Daniel Gibson, Zoe Anderson), the director of Locus+ (Jon Bewley), and 4 Artists (Jaisen Yates, Mao Kai, Fang Qi, and Stu Herring).

#### **4.6.3 The participant observation**

##### ***Immersion***

In this ethnographic case study, as the researcher, I conducted a participant observation, which lasted for two-and-a-half years, from the November 2014 to April 2017. Before starting the participant observation process, an email was sent to the managerial team to clarify my role and the research purposes. As this ethnographic observation is undertaken alongside other PhD duties, it is not possible to be present at Breeze Creatives and work with its founders on a daily basis. I accordingly decide to focus on the most important occasions, observing each strategic meeting, casual meeting, crisis meeting and observing the events and the preview nights of exhibitions.

During the observation, I immerse myself with the stakeholders of Breeze Creatives, attending organisational events and personal events whenever possible. In order to access exclusive information that may only be released to the insiders, I interact with the stakeholders' life as much as possible: dining with stakeholders in their houses or in my house (not only with the founders but with other stakeholders as well), attending their birthday parties and weddings, walking dogs with the founders to listen to their new strategies about the organisation, closely observing their strategic meetings. Moreover, I joined them on a three-day business trip to Glasgow and participated in curating exhibitions for Breeze Creatives. I co-curated exhibitions

in Abject Gallery and in China, assisting them to organise events. A close personal relationship is developed with the founders due to this study.

From the very beginning, the information is found out to be released more easily if the conversation is conducted in a casual manner. Significant strategic plans and operational ideas are normally discussed during casual conversations, such as social interactions in events, working breaks, parties, meals, and after-work drinks. Sometimes discussions are conducted during dog walking. Even if a formal meeting is conducted in a meeting room, the business discussion is normally conducted very briefly in between conversations about the founders' and other stakeholders' personal lives.

After realising that for the stakeholders in Breeze Creatives, their professional life is inseparable from personal life, I try to maintain casual interactions with them, having conversation in various locations: in the gallery, during events, in the office, on the roof, at home, at a barbecue party, in a restaurant, and on the street. I talk with the stakeholders as much as possible about the details of each exhibition and event, also, trying to understand their hobbies, ideologies and life experiences. All the observations have given me the opportunity to explore the stakeholders' ways of thinking and action, which is essential for this study.

The data collected during the observation are kept in notebooks. Reflective summaries are written down as soon as each observation finished on the day. In the end of this two-and-half year participant observation, a 57-page overall summary is completed in chronological order and sorted according to the relevant themes. This way, some of the issues happened across the whole period can be linked together.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, as part of this ethnographic study, narrative interviews and semi-structured interviews with the stakeholders are conducted at Breeze Creatives. The data is retained in an electronic recording device and stored according to ethics requirements. The profile of each interviewee who is involved in this thesis is listed in the appendix. To keep the interviewee anonymous, the names of the interviewees are replaced.

In addition to the data sources mentioned above, I am granted permission to check the organisation's diaries and be copied into emails, application proposals, documents, strategic reports drafted either by the founders themselves or by a third party – a business-consulting

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<sup>6</sup> Observation summary.

agency and a financial adviser.<sup>7</sup> Through these substantial materials, a deep understanding of which challenges Breeze Creatives is facing is obtained. In terms of how this organisation operates, these sources uncover the strategic thinking of the founders, while the sources' cross-correlation with the interview results enables a more reliable analysis for this research.

### **Time spent**

Participant observation is a unique and significant part of ethnographic studies. It allows a researcher to see and to feel the atmosphere in which the organisation operates. Hence, it provides access to stakeholders' partially expressed thoughts.

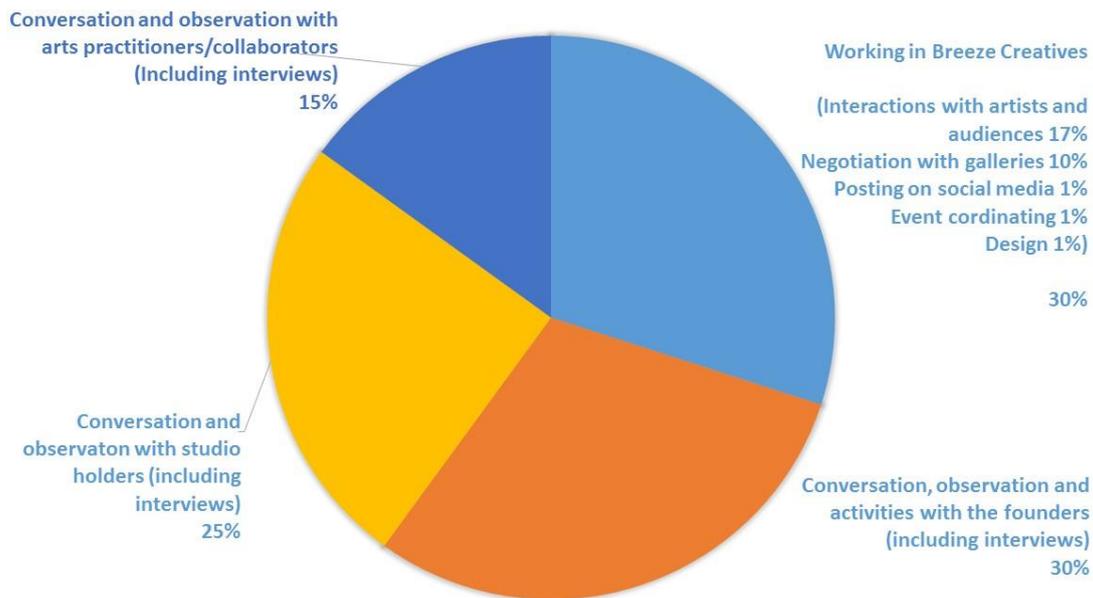
During the participant observation, self-awareness is key for the researcher who operates on occasion as a consultant for Breeze Creatives; as the researcher, I have to carefully manage myself to follow the working process and fulfil the tasks, yet, at the same time, retaining my position as a reflective observer and avoiding "going native" (O'Reilly, 2009, p. 87). I was offered work on two exhibitions for Abject Gallery. On the first exhibition, I worked for a month as a curating assistant, coordinating the creation of the artworks and being the interpreter at the preview night. On the second exhibition, I worked alongside another curator on different tasks, and worked on the whole curating project for about seven months.<sup>8</sup> In addition, I worked on negotiating and coordinating with Chinese galleries, aiming to introduce contemporary British artists to China in order to expand the Breeze Creatives' market abroad, establishing its international reputation. These activities continued after my fieldwork is finished in April 2017. Other participations include posting information on Facebook, coordinating exhibitions and events. The diagram below depicts my time spent, distributed according to the different groups of stakeholders during this case study.

### **Figure 5 Time spent on the case**

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<sup>7</sup> Financial reports, the business reports, the emails, and the diaries will be provided upon requirement.

<sup>8</sup> Observation summary.



**The art-related work**

According to the founders of Breeze Creatives, a huge number of hours are spent on building construction and administration, which is also supported by observations. The majority of these activities include ordering equipment, installing lamps and lights, managing the cash flow, repairing locks, cleaning toilets, and ensuring that the building entrance password remain secure. The majority is safety-and-security related. For example, dealing with security issues for the studio holders, making the ceiling wiring safe, and maintaining the cleanliness of floors and toilets. One of the founders said, “95% of the work is building and administration work, 5% is about art; no, actually, even less, 2%”. “Picking artwork is like a two-minute thing”, he said, snapping his fingers, before adding, “but we try to create a good environment, so that good things may happen in here.” “Probably because we are small, yeah, I guess, the curators at BALTIC would have more time to focus on arts. We don’t have their resources. An artist-led organisation doesn’t mean that the work is more about art, unfortunately.”<sup>9</sup>

According to the research observations, much of the work at Breeze Creatives is unevenly distributed among the stakeholders in different periods. For example, in 2015, there was about a six-months’ workload with no relation to the arts, between April 2015 and December 2015, three founders were busy on reinventing Bamburgh House, a nine-floor building. Although the organisation was founded on 14 May 2014, the three founders had to work in a studio located at Commercial Union House (CU House) in the beginning of its establishment, a building under the management of another organisation. After rate relief was offered by Newcastle City

<sup>9</sup> Noted in 2016 and summarised in 2017 in the observation summary.

Council, Breeze Creatives was allowed to use Bamburgh House in April 2015. All the floors and the studio spaces in Bamburgh House were to be refurbished during 2015. Therefore, in this period, the founders' focus was building reinvention.<sup>10</sup> In comparison, in 2016, when the building reinvention was complete, Breeze Creatives started to refocus on arts, although the administration work still took most of the founders' time. Even though all three founders are artists, they must do everything else in addition to art-related work. The table below estimated the distribution of the workload in arts and other types.

**Table 4 The workload distribution of Breeze Creatives over 30 months (2014 to 2017)**

|                     | Art-related work | Other work |
|---------------------|------------------|------------|
| NOV 2014 - APR 2015 | 60%              | 40%        |
| APR 2015 - NOV 2015 | 1%               | 99%        |
| NOV 2015 - APR 2016 | 10%              | 90%        |
| APR 2016 - NOV 2016 | 15%              | 85%        |
| NOV 2016 - APR 2017 | 20%              | 80%        |

In general, the art-related work includes writing applications for the council, drafting articles for the media, communicating with artists, planning the annual exhibition schedule, curating exhibitions, organizing events, checking applications for the artist-residency position, posting information on social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter) and communicating with collaborators from other companies or fields.

Having a small managerial team is a characteristic of Breeze Creatives, which is not uncommon in arts organisations in the North East. The three founders are key of strategic planning, decision making, and the key of the cultural group established by this organisation.<sup>11</sup> According to my observations, about 90% of decisions are made during casual conversation, about 80% of operational ideas are brought out in spontaneous conversations. However, the founders realise the importance of corporate branding; business advice appears significant for Breeze

<sup>10</sup> From April to December 2015, Breeze Creatives did not hold strategic meetings. The reinvention of Bamburgh House included the organising the installation of the walls for the blocks, taking timber from the ground floor to the top floor, painting the walls, putting up wall papers, hiring people to build a bar area, removing carpets, installing sockets for the studios, and so forth. To reinvent a nine-floor building such as Bamburgh House under a low budget, three directors of Breeze Creatives sometimes had to do manual construction works themselves.

<sup>11</sup> Observation summary and the interviews with the founders.

Creatives. At the end of 2016, they hired a business consultant as a part-time employee, in order to get advice on business management and speed up this corporate brand's growth.

In summary, this chapter illustrated the methodology employed by this study. With an interpretive philosophical stance, it embraced qualitative research methods. For the reasons previously explained, the ethnographic case study is the most appropriate method according to the research proposition. Multiple data collection methods are employed due to the requirement of research reliability for this study, which also prompts the use of multiple analysis methods adopted by this study. As a researcher and a data collecting tool, immersion in the case is key for obtaining exclusive data, which proves beneficial to the findings and the theory development in the next chapters.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Branding in the Arts**

#### **Introduction**

The analysis in this chapter will be based on the data collected in the fieldwork. Chapter 5 examines evidence related to the two major factors which cause the existing branding theory to be extended: the ambiguity of the definition and business category of arts organisations, and the resistance in the art world in the North East.

Previous chapters have reviewed current branding theories which assert that brand positioning is competition-oriented and functions as a tool for organisations to meet the market demand and identify a brand's consumer group. As discussed, commercial positioning theory involves three major factors: category, target consumer group and brand advantages. Scholars even introduced formulas indicating that the function of positioning is to clarify the market competition for a brand. However, is the commercial positioning theory applicable for the arts? To what extent is positioning competition oriented in the art world? Does positioning principally aim at meeting the criteria of the art market, of the audiences, or of the artists themselves? For an artist-led organisation, in particular, is positioning used to answer the same needs as it is in the commercial world? Are there other factors influencing brand positioning for the arts? To answer these questions, the investigation has to start from the issue of how contemporary visual arts is defined, how the organisations are classified, why they are

established, for what purpose the artists would collaborate with an organisation, and what kind of opinions they hold regarding commercial branding.

To examine whether or not commercial branding theories are applicable in contemporary visual arts sector, this chapter will, through ethnographic research, study how contemporary visual arts organisations are defined and categorised. The study here may provide a reference to scholars on how a contemporary visual arts organisation should be defined and positioned, and whether or not commercial branding theory requires adaptation to suit the current business situation in this sector.

This chapter aims firstly to identify the differences between the academic definitions of contemporary visual arts organisations, arguing that the current category for arts organisations is too broad to give a clear definition for each type of organisation that runs under a range of business models for different purposes. This helps to draw a conclusion regarding whether or not commercial brand positioning theory is applicable in the arts. Secondly, this chapter will reveal the attitudes that artists and managers hold towards branding in the arts. This study found that there is a strong resistance against corporate branding within the arts and cultural sectors. This chapter argues that this resistance partly derives from a lack of understanding or miscommunication between the commercial world and the art world. Neither artists nor commercial tools are understood properly. Hence, commercial tools may not be accepted, unless they are adjusted or adapted to fit the art world. Due to a misunderstanding of branding on the part of the art world and the lack of understanding of artists and arts organisations on the part of the commercial world, currently, branding in contemporary visual arts organisations may be undertaken without a strategy. This issue is particularly true for artist-led organisations, where it may appear more prominently.

This chapter will provide a new definition for the contemporary visual arts, based on the current definition and preliminary research evidence. Comparisons will be drawn to further clarify the current situation of brand positioning in the arts. Therefore, this chapter will involve data taken from interviews with directors of different arts organisations, council managers, curators, and marketing managers, in order to analyse how managers perceive their organisations, what kind of definition they would give to these types of organisation, and whether or not the current definitions are clear enough to explain and identify the uniqueness of arts organisations. From the first-hand data collected from the art world, it appears that there are differences between each type of organisation and such differences needs to be clarified before commercial theories

can be adopted in the art world. Furthermore, this chapter identifies the current issues and the gap that exists between academic discourses and practitioners' thinking. A set of categories is given to clarify the position in which each contemporary visual arts organisation lies, which helps to draw conclusions on brand positioning in the arts.

### **5.1 Definition and its ambiguity**

First of all, in order to establish whether corporate branding is applicable in the sphere of contemporary visual arts, to evaluate whether or not, and where appropriate, branding strategies can be applied or adapted to suit organisations in contemporary visual arts, challenges and issues must be studied, and terminologies must be clearly defined.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the arts are not clearly defined. In terms of the definition of the arts and art, The Arts Council England (2013) believes that a variety of culture-related activities can be called the arts, which involve (but are not limited to) 30 fields, including music, dance, drama, film, creative writing, fashion, architectural design and visual artworks. Fillis (2011, p. 12) indicates that the arts “are shaped by intellectual achievement and reflect the belief systems of a society”. Other scholars believe that the arts are part of the modern culture that deals with industrial, political, economic and global settings (Horkheimer, 1973). Sometimes, the products of art are viewed as the signifier of certain cultures because, in the majority of cases, the way the arts are expressed is determined by how cultural messages are produced and delivered through certain forms of products and services (Baudrillard, 1998). Hence, the arts consist of elements containing rich and complex symbolic meanings, such as images, texts, and performances. Although there is no commonly agreed definition for art (Penrose, 1990), it is seen as being reflection of a human being's senses, mind and ideologies. It enables people to understand the activities and ideologies of their fellow human beings. Moreover, it visualises the relationships between a person and a society on a number of levels, from personal interactions to a relationship between an individual and an organisation (Levinson, 1979).

Defining art is a fundamental issue and the debate about how to define art is ongoing (Fillis, 2011). For example, Berleant (1969, p. 163) gives the following definition of art: “Art is an attempt to represent through the use of a sensuous medium the actual or ideal, the things we perceive or the underlying nature of reality, by imitating their appearance or their formal structure”. Chartrand (1990) considers art to be a manifestation of pleasure or emotion and direct intuitive vision. Clancy (1994) classifies the arts into *Hiarts* involving plays, opera

musicals and concerts, *Pop* such as film, rock, pop and jazz music, *Exper* including art exhibitions, contemporary dance, literature and poetry, and *Trad* like traditional music and folk dance. Some researchers distinguish between *the arts* and *art*, indicating that the products of the arts do not need to be consumed for aesthetic purposes, while the products of art do (Panofsky, 1940). However, it is difficult to determine when an object becomes art. This is because the products of the arts and the products of art are both communication carriers and are interconnected.

Contemporary visual arts and visual artists are not clearly defined as well (see Chapter 1). Walter (2015, p. 47) defines contemporary art as “sculpture, painting and other cultural works that are from the current time, or since World War II”. Kolb (2005) defines visual arts as products based on painting, sculpture, crafts, or other visual-related artworks; she considers visual artists are those who produce artworks with creativity. Fillis (2004) points out that contemporary visual artworks may not be original and that it can be problematic to consider artworks original, as research shows that artworks can be a combination of several original works from other artists. Accordingly, contemporary visual arts are perceived as a wide area that relates to any visual-related artworks created in a period within a current lifespan. However, marketers who currently work in the contemporary visual arts sector may have different opinions contributing to this definition. Heather Purser, a marketing manager working for Tyne and Wear Archive Museums (TWAM) for online marketing, proposes three points to be added into the definition of the arts. She believes that the arts should be critically engaged, made by living artists and reflecting on contemporary issues:

Contemporary means that it should be current, and the artwork potentially made by living artists, whether they are emerging or established, they are creating works that response to contemporary modern-day issues, happening right now, and also they are critically engaged with their practice. That’s a really important point, a lot of people say they are artists, but if it is just a photo that looks nice, it isn’t critically engaged, they are not contemporary visual artists.<sup>12</sup>

The term “critically engaged” is debatable: Firstly, this term is used more in criticism of Fine Art, which serves aesthetic purposes, although artworks may not be created for aesthetic purposes (Fillis, 2011). Secondly, as previously explained, “the arts” relates to a wide range of cultural activities that may or may not serve aesthetic purposes. Therefore, to respond to the marketer’s input within an appropriate boundary, the contemporary visual arts may be defined

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with Heather Purser, July 2016.

as: the visual-related artworks that are likely to be made by living artists, that stand for culture, and reflect contemporary issues that postdate World War II. It is noticeable here that the concept “visual-related artworks” refers to a broad range of artworks, which may cause issues for classifying organisations active in the world of contemporary visual arts.

## **5.2 Ambiguity of the business category**

After having defined contemporary visual arts, it is now necessary to clarify the definition of contemporary visual arts organisations. Despite the definitions found in related fields, such as arts management, cultural research, and cultural economics research, the definitions given in current research do not clearly delimit the boundaries of contemporary arts organisations, and are therefore ambiguous.

Some definitions only give a general concept of arts organisations rather than being specific to contemporary visual arts. Attempting to give strategic management guidance to arts organisations, Varbanova (2013) defines them in relation to arts management, describing them as a cluster, or a group of entities that work in the arts. Kolb (2016), exploring how to apply marketing strategies into the cultural sector, indicates that art organisations stand for culture and creativity, they form a branch of cultural organisations and they belong to the creative industry. Although these definitions show some major characteristics of arts organisations, they do not specify the organisations’ uniqueness. According to these definitions, many types of entities can be involved. For instance, Varbanova’s definition only states that the organisations work in the arts, which is too wide a field. As stated, around 30 activities are involved in the arts, including fashion and design. Consequently, a large number of entities could be included when the definition merely combines the word “arts” with the word “organisation”. By the same token, Kolb’s definition only indicates that arts organisations relate to culture and derive from the creative industry. Yet, organisations, such as advertising companies, are also from creative industry and are culture-related, but they do not fall within most definitions of arts organisation. Therefore, the current academic definitions need further development.

Other researchers attempt to give specific definitions of contemporary visual arts organisations, the given characteristics, however, are incomplete. For example, in a culture-related economic study, Porter (1998) proposes that, as contemporary visual arts organisations are of varying size and complexity, they can be defined as a cluster of operators of various value and importance. Porter’s definition tends to highlight three managerial and cultural characteristics of contemporary visual arts organisations: the complexity, varying sizes, differing value (see

Chapter 3) and importance. In essence, the complexity stems from the differences between each organisation. Every organisation has its own nature, with differing ideologies and values inbuilt. It is challenging for academics to capture them all in a single statement. Resultantly, Porter's definition has some ambiguity in terms of clarifying what kind of characteristics this cluster of operators has. In addition, this definition does not show which types of business these organisations engage with and what kinds of services they offer. The relationship between the organisations and contemporary visual arts is not provided, nor is the uniqueness of these types of organisations highlighted, which are significant deficiencies.

During this study, the managers interviewed think that the term, contemporary visual arts organisation, is only an umbrella, describing what type of artworks the organisation represents. Some managers, who have had over fifteen years of working experience in contemporary visual arts, consider contemporary visual arts organisations as a very broad umbrella, covering all types of organisations working in different disciplines. For example, Alex Breeze, one of the founders of Breeze Creatives, states: "contemporary visual arts organisations to me means any organisation either exhibiting or producing work in the current visual art world. It is to me a very broad umbrella of describing an organisation."<sup>13</sup>

As an umbrella, the term, contemporary visual arts organisation, may not show many of each organisation's characteristics. Consequently, the question here arises: is there a definition that can clearly encompass all of the characteristics, and the uniqueness, of contemporary visual arts organisations? Managers argue that contemporary visual arts organisations are too complex, with a variety of business types and operational styles. Therefore, it is difficult to provide one single definition that can clearly define the boundaries of every type of organisation, apart from the fact that they all relate to contemporary visual arts. Samantha Ewen, director of The Newbridge Project (a contemporary visual arts organisation) expresses her concerns about setting forth one single definition to cover all organisations:<sup>14</sup>

I think it is very difficult, because I think they are all quite different, aren't they? The aspect of contemporary visual arts organisations is very different... you even get kind of dance, performance, sound that is now classified within visual arts, depending on how it is presented and is dispersed... I am not sure whether I can define a contemporary visual arts organisation, look at the organisations around the city, there are lots of

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<sup>13</sup> Email with Alex Breeze, 18 Aug 2016.

<sup>14</sup> Name is replaced.

organisations do that, but they do it very differently. I think it is just too expansive, really, to put one description on.<sup>15</sup>

It is believed that the definition will be too “expansive” if it tries to comprise all of the characteristics of contemporary visual arts organisations. The statement further implies that art forms are expanding because of advances in the presentation and distribution of the contemporary visual arts. This becomes another reason why it may not be appropriate to set one single definition for all contemporary visual arts organisations.

However, it is fundamental to have a clear understanding of contemporary visual arts organisations, of who they are and what they do. Managers recognise this and, accordingly, try to give boundaries to contemporary visual arts organisations. A manager suggests that, in order to develop a clear definition, setting some clearly defined boundaries is the first step.

The organisations don't have to be just one particular type ... these boundaries really need to be defined... If it is an art organisation... If it is critically engaged with visual arts, and then they work with the artists that prove that they are contemporary and they are critically engaged then they are contemporary visual arts organisations.<sup>16</sup>

The manager believes that it is necessary for contemporary visual arts organisations to be formed with different business types, and setting boundaries is the key for the managers to distinguish their organisations. In the above statement, some boundaries have been suggested: critical engagement, visual arts and contemporary. This statement suggests that setting clear boundaries may help managers to understand and clarify the area to which a given contemporary visual arts organisation may belong. From a branding point of view, boundaries may also help managers to realise in what position an organisation lies, which is fundamental for brand positioning.

In academic research, scholars have been trying to give boundaries to contemporary visual arts organisations at a managerial level according to the products they provide. Throsby (1994) suggests that intellectual property involvement is a characteristic of contemporary visual arts organisations. Pommerehne and Granica (1995) indicate that the aims to satisfy the aesthetic and create cultural distinctiveness should also be considered as a boundary of contemporary visual arts organisations. Zorloni (2013) finds that human factors play key roles in visual art production. She also believes that, in contemporary visual arts organisations, the delivery of

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<sup>15</sup> Interview with Samantha Ewen, July 2016.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Heather Purser, July 2016.

symbolic meanings should be a major concern. Moreover, some managers see arts organisations as data collection tools that explain and validate the society. Jon Bewley, the founder and director of Locus+ points out:

The organisation is the delivery mechanism, and there's an orthodoxy about delivery mechanisms that fits systems of managing data: audiences, visitor numbers, etc. Organisations are designed by systems to deliver an explanation and validation for the expenditure or investment of the money, and each organisation has its difference.<sup>17</sup>

Here, data refers to financial investment and/or the people who interact with the organisations. From this statement, it can be seen that, to some degree, the contemporary visual arts organisation can be the connection linking the government, the economy and the people together. This linkage is strengthened through the cultural activities generated by the organisations. Zorloni (2013) further suggests that a contemporary visual arts organisation can contribute to the cultural sector economically.

Although this study is an ethnographic study based on a single case, the data collection involves opinions of different types, voiced by managers who work in a variety of aspects in contemporary visual arts, and collected through emails, conversations, interviews and observations. Hence, after collecting the researchers' results and the managers' opinions, eight boundaries are exemplified to help defining contemporary visual arts organisations, recognising more boundaries may come over academic and practice-related ideas:

1. Social-economic contribution;<sup>18</sup>
2. Cultural influence;<sup>19</sup>
3. A production function in which human factors play an essential role (Throsby, 1994);
4. A relationship with some forms of intellectual property (Throsby, 1994);
5. An output with highly symbolic content (Zorloni, 2013);
6. Aesthetic and cultural distinctiveness purposes (Pommerehne & Granica, 1995);
7. Various sizes and business forms (Porter, 1998);<sup>20</sup>
8. Critical engagement.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Interview with Jon Bewley, July 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Jon Bewley, July 2016.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Jaisen Yates, May 2016.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Samantha Ewen, July 2016, and the interview with curator William Peterson, June 2016.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Heather Purser, July 2016.

These eight boundaries cover aspects from business type to managerial style, from product category to cultural significance, from economic value to social value. It appears that a final definition may be formulated by linking all of these boundaries together. However, not every organisation can fit into all of these criteria. Studies with managers from various contemporary visual arts organisations show that there are few organisations that meet all of the above-stated criteria (O'Reilly, 2011; Zorloni & Ardizzone, 2016). For instance, regarding intellectual property, some organisations are heavily involved such as auction houses (Thorsby and Christie's, for example), while other organisations have no involvement, such as artists' studio providers. In fact, many of the organisations that are considered contemporary visual arts organisations by practitioners are those who provide spaces for artists to create works. There are some types of contemporary visual arts organisations that mainly focus on providing promotional services for the artists, and that may therefore be considered media platforms. Artists naturally have their own opinions of what contemporary visual arts organisations are. For example, Anna Campbell, a visual artist and a researcher in the arts, states:

When you said a contemporary visual arts organisation, I thought about the things like Access or the Artists' Newsletter, which is kind of memberships to artists... they are virtual, online... they offer support and promotions for artists...<sup>22</sup>

From this statement, the important position that media platforms hold is discernible. Media platform providers are information distributors and communication generators for the artists or the artworks, and may therefore become the first organisation that an artist considers among all forms of organisations. However, other organisations play a valuable role in contributing to the cultural sector as well. Alexander Porter, a culture and tourism manager at Newcastle City Council, gives his insights into how other types of arts organisations contribute to the cultural sector:

There are artist studio complexes, they are more about artists' work space than exhibition, such as The Newbridge Project, they are more about artist work place and studios...their principal value is providing cheap working space to emerging artists, providing a focus point to the development to the community of artists in the city.<sup>23</sup>

The studio providers, by supplying space, make it possible for artists to work. It is necessary for the emerging artists to have an affordable working space, and likewise for established artists to have an appropriate working environment, so that emerging artists can bring fresh ideas and

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<sup>22</sup> Interview with Anna Campbell, April 2016.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Alexander Porter, June 2016.

creativity to the production of artworks. The consistency of the production in art enhances the community of artists, and subsequently the community enhances the culture of the city.

Overall, contemporary visual arts organisations feature different business types that may not fit into the same criteria. Even when setting boundaries for these organisations, the boundaries may not be applicable to them all. All types of contemporary visual arts organisations make a cultural and economic contribution. The organisations may engage with artists and audiences, and use financial investment in different ways. This means that the term “contemporary visual arts organisation” can only indicate the types of arts with which the organisations engage, yet no organisation type should be neglected by any academic definition.

In branding research, a given definition is based on the business similarities of the organisations. The more similarities there are, the clearer the definition can be, and vice versa. Under the umbrella of contemporary visual arts organisations, there may be only one shared feature that all the organisations are engaged with contemporary visual arts, although there are around 30 further areas of potential relation, and these areas keep expanding. Therefore, as it would need to cover such a diverse range of business forms and sizes, any definition can but remain ambiguous.

### **5.3 Branding issues caused by the ambiguity**

Using a necessarily ambiguous definition of contemporary visual arts organisations, this chapter argues that, although competition-oriented positioning is widely used in the commercial world, this positioning theory may not be applicable, if each contemporary visual arts organisation does not have a clearly defined category.

Firstly, contemporary visual arts organisations cannot be defined with one simple definition. As explained above, these organisations form a complex group, which comprises markedly different business forms. Under these circumstances, it may not be realistic to offer one single, definitive term to describe them, and, for the reasons mentioned earlier, it may not be appropriate to give a set of boundaries to attempt to distinguish their characteristics. Therefore, there is a certain degree of ambiguity in this sector.

In Chapter 3, three key factors for positioning were identified: category, target consumer group, and brand advantages. As indicated by the competitive-oriented positioning formula, category is a principal factor. It affects how managers and other stakeholders perceive a brand, and it determines what competitive advantages the organisation may need to exploit.

Considering contemporary visual arts organisations as corporate brands, their brand positioning is a significant precondition of brand management (see Chapter 3). Due to the ambiguity of this sector, how to clarify each organisation's position within the sector becomes key. However, if commercial branding theory – the idea that brand positioning should be competition-oriented – is to be followed, a clearly defined category is essential. Scholars in commercial branding research believe that an organisation understands itself and its position by comparing it with that of its competitors. Here, the term “business competitors” refers to the other organisations that provide similar products or services (Fournier et al., 2012). Scholars also believe that brand positioning helps organisations clarify their uniqueness through this comparison (Kotler & Keller, 2016). As discussed, in brand-identity communication, staying within the frame of a competitors' group may also help a corporate brand's stakeholders to understand what products or services the organisation provides (Franzen & Moriarty, 2009). Under this condition, without a clearly defined category, it may not be possible to form a comparison. At the same time, giving a strict, precisely defined category to a group of similar organisations may help them to clarify their positions. Therefore, if the commercial positioning theory is applicable, a clearly defined business category is essential.

Appropriate positioning is believed to assist an organisation not only in clarifying its competitors, but also in identifying its own stakeholders' group (Ingenhoff & Fuhrer, 2010a). Without appropriate positioning, organisations may not have a clear awareness of who they are, what they do and what they aim to achieve. Consequently, they may not be able to determine who constitute valuable stakeholders (e.g. audiences, collaborators), and who do not. Under these circumstances, if an arts organisation decides to employ a branding strategy, the strategy may not work systematically. For example, in branding communication, the information may not be designed and delivered in the way that its audiences prefer. Appropriate positioning may facilitate the stakeholders and the cultural group of an organisation to understand the brand identity it tries to show. The stakeholders may end up being attracted by the information given and, in turn, may be attracted by the organisation itself as a corporate brand. However, if the organisation does not know what information to deliver or with whom they should communicate, inappropriate messages may be delivered to audiences, resulting in a failure of brand-identity communication. If the brand-identity communication fails, the brand identity of the organisation may lose its opportunity to fully negotiate with its stakeholders, resulting in a branding failure.

Brand identity issues may also be caused by the fact that contemporary visual arts organisations being in an undefined category. If arts organisations are considered corporate brands, the brand identity of these organisations is significant to their stakeholders and cultural groups. However, if the theory of commercial branding is followed and an arts organisation has to recognise its brand identity by relying on the comparison between its competitors, the unclearness of who the competitors are may cause brand identity crisis.

As previously discussed, for a corporate brand, brand identity consists of two parts: one is corporate identity, the other organisational identity. As noted in Chapter 3, corporate identity is responsible for communicating with audiences; it concerns how unique the organisation is in comparison with its competitors. Organisational identity relates to the culture of the organisation at a behavioural level, it concerns how the stakeholders understand and react to the organisation based on its culture.

Corporate identity relates to brand strategy, visual representation, and marketing communication. Brand strategy may be explained in a mission-and-vision statement. Visual representation may relate to logos and images. Marketing communication may help an organisation to communicate with target stakeholders strategically. Overall, corporate identity is about offering a general image to all its stakeholders in the outside world. However, if an organisation is not clear about which position it holds, it may not be sure about what kind of images it should show to its audiences. The manager may hesitate about what kind of vision the organisation should present; they may hesitate over whether or not to show certain characteristics, as they are not sure that these will be acceptable to the stakeholders and their cultural group.

As discussed in Chapter 3, organisational identity relates to the culture of the organisation. It pays high regard to the stakeholders' emotional and behavioural reactions to the strategies or decisions that the organisation makes (Balmer & Greyser, 2003; Schultz et al., 2005). Hence, organisational identity closely relates to the sense of identity that the stakeholders of the organisation possess. Therefore, if the stakeholders have very little understanding of the organisation, they may not know how to react to certain strategic actions, as they may not fully understand the work with which the organisation is engaged. Moreover, the stakeholders may not realise that they have the same ideology as the organisation and the rest of the members from the cultural group; they may not gain a sense of group identity through interacting with the organisation. Hence, the stakeholders' reactions may not be synchronised to achieve the

goal of the organisation. In some extreme cases, organisational identity issues may even cause an organisational crisis (Hatch & Schultz, 2008).

Overall, for contemporary visual arts organisations, effective branding is based on appropriate brand identity communication and appropriate positioning, while these two factors both require a clearly defined category.

#### **5.4 Defining the business category**

How many types of business operate under the umbrella of contemporary visual arts? How many categories can contemporary visual arts organisations have? Experienced marketers offer their thoughts on the diversity and complexity of what types of businesses in which contemporary visual arts organisations may engage. William Peterson is an independent curator who has had over twenty-year experience on curating exhibitions collaborating with different contemporary visual arts organisations. The other manager, Heather Purser, has had over ten-years' experience working in visual arts and has been working as marketing managers in contemporary visual arts organisations (e.g. TWAM, NEPN) on a daily basis. Here are the brief overviews of their observations:

A contemporary visual arts organisation? It could be a gallery which collects works, the collection of contemporary work. It could be a gallery which particularly concerns itself with selling the work. Or maybe an organisation whose principal objective, for instance, The Newbridge Project, is providing studios for artists, but also has exhibition space, and shows works, not just the work by the studio members, but also other artists. It could be an organisation, who doesn't show work, but it creates works, like Locus+, their principal objectives are not to show works but to create works... Or it could be the organisations who support artists... something like A·N... they provide newsletters... that is information and ideas and pieces about artists, by artists and for artists. Also, it could be the organisations whose principal objectives is part of a broader area of activities, specifically, the encouragement to the public to get them involved in the arts themselves physically, and perhaps, specialise in young people, children or the general population or, older people, or, the people who are with disabilities... they can be anybody whose principal function is to involve the creation, funding, and programming of arts organisations from a brick-and-mortar point of view, so, local authorities are arts organisations, because they tend to have galleries and they have education programmes, they have museums and art galleries... running art galleries and museums itself, the local authority is the organisation that wants to ensure that there is an exhibition there, or choose not to, so that makes it an arts organisation as well, as well as funding organisations, and the funding organisations can be public funds, or charitable funds, and there are funding charities their principal is to fund visual arts, and there are organisations, which are voluntarily run rather than professional, it might do all of those

things, but they are not in the way as professionally run and staffed organisations are. There are some others there, and also arts media in this sector, by the digital or printed arts publications, such as magazines, books publications, they are arts organisations as well.<sup>24</sup>

...It could be a collective, set up by artists entirely, with no one in charge. It could be a charity, that only works with critically engaged artists and puts on a tour and exhibition and doesn't have a space. It could be an arts festival organisation, they might not have a public face and base all the time, but do when there is a festival; it could be a contemporary art gallery, that does have a space to open to the public, they might charge for coming in and they might not, but that doesn't matter, if they have critically engaged contemporary artwork to show.<sup>25</sup>

In these two statements, managers have proposed seven types of organisation that fall under the umbrella of contemporary visual arts. The first proposed type is contemporary visual arts galleries, although these galleries can be separated into two sub-categories: for-profit and non-profit. The *for-profit* galleries aim to sell artworks, while the *non-profit* galleries aim to collect or exhibit artworks. In short, the non-profit galleries are concerned more with how to attract audiences to view artworks than how to make profit from the sale of artworks. Accordingly, the galleries can be categorised into *sale-driven* galleries and *exhibition-driven* galleries. The latter type are studio providers, who can be either for-profit or non-profit, although, as will be seen later in this study, non-profit studio providers are more popular in the North East England. The third type of organisation is artwork producers. They employ artists to produce artworks or create new art forms. This type of organisation may not have a space to display the artworks, yet may help the artists to find such space. The fourth type of organisation proposed is the media platform. This refers to organisations that create media platforms or publications for artists and arts organisations to gain information from the art world, from the government, or from the commercial world. The platforms may also assist the artists, or the arts organisations promote themselves.

The fifth type of organisation is arts-service providers, who provide services for the public to access the artworks for special reasons. They normally service vulnerable people, for example the elderly, children, and the disabled. According to the responses gathered in the fieldwork, this type of organisation tends to help people resolve different issues through art forms. They may provide services helping disabled people to gain confidence or to learn new skills or may provide education to children. This type of organisation is often non-profit and may also assist

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<sup>24</sup> Interview with William Peterson, June 2016.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Heather Purser, July 2016.

non-vulnerable people to access arts exhibitions or festivals. The sixth type is local authorities, including government departments, funding bodies, and charities. They either direct the development of the contemporary visual arts or control funding budgets. They can be led on either a volunteer or a professional basis and are normally non-profit entities. Although some large chains of arts organisations are managed under the hierarchy of local authorities (e.g. the Hatten Gallery, and the Discovery Museum are parts of Tyne and Wear Archive Museum (TWAM) which a large organisation under the management of the local government), they are still perceived as individual entities here, as this study evaluates the organisations from a branding perspective. Since the local authority has a very different business-management style, its branding strategy on organisations should be considered in a different way as well. The seventh type mentioned is public relation (PR) companies. This type of organisation runs festivals or art fairs. The art fairs provide opportunities for the artists or for arts organisations to interact and communicate on a professional basis. Festivals, such as *The Late Shows*, creates more opportunities for the public to access and enjoy contemporary visual arts.<sup>26</sup>

All seven types of organisation mentioned above operate under the umbrella of contemporary visual arts organisations. They function for different business purposes and may have very different managerial styles. They may be artist-led. Thus, they should be studied individually and according to their functionalities.

However, these seven organisation types do not cover all categories of contemporary visual arts organisations. According to Zorloni's (2013) study, auction houses should also be accounted for. Therefore, in order to gain a precise understanding of branding in the contemporary visual arts, it is necessary to clarify how many categories there are under the umbrella of contemporary visual arts organisations. The Australian Government's Department of Communications and the Arts released a document in which the Minister for the Arts and Sport, Senator Hon. Rod Kemp, presented the findings of the *Contemporary Visual Arts and Craft Inquiry*. He considers that contemporary visual arts organisations aim to "facilitate the creation, exhibition and interpretation of artistic works created by living artists"; at the same time, he also indicates that the organisations "produce publications, arrange conferences and touring exhibitions, conduct education programs, and act as centres for local artist communities by providing residency and studio management" (Kemp, 2002, p. 34). In this report, eleven

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<sup>26</sup> "The Late Shows – supported by Port of Tyne – is a free late-night culture crawl which takes place in Newcastle Gateshead over the weekend of Friday 18 - Saturday 19 May 2018." – The Late Shows (2018). The Late Show. Retrieved 13 July 2018, from <https://thelateshows.org.uk/about-us>

categories are provided as the infrastructure of the contemporary visual arts in Australia. They are major art museums, craft and design organisations, contemporary arts organisations, regional galleries, university galleries, art and craft centres, artist-run initiatives, artist service organisations and associations, national exhibitions touring support, major contemporary visual art and craft events, and studios and workshops. However, in these categories, there are no set criteria. Some of them are categorised by the owner of the organisation, some of them by the organisation’s functions, while others by geographical region. Hence, there are many areas of crossover.

Through in-depth interviews, observations and content analysis, a primary study is conducted in order to build examples of business categories for contemporary visual arts organisations in England. As this study explores these categories within contemporary visual arts organisations, in order to gain accurate knowledge of this area, senior managers are interviewed. Among the interviewees, seven are directors from different contemporary visual arts organisations; one is a British Council manager, who manages the funding budget for arts organisations in the North East; one is a senior marketing manager who has spent ten years working in visual arts; one is an independent curator who has been working with contemporary visual arts organisations for over twenty years. The results are also based on information given online, such as companies websites, newsletters, and Facebook accounts. The following table displays the general categories of contemporary visual arts organisations discerned by interviewees.

**Table 5 Examples of business category of contemporary visual arts organisations**

| Category           | Sub-category      | For- profit | Non-profit |
|--------------------|-------------------|-------------|------------|
| Gallery            |                   | √           | √          |
| Public services    |                   | √           | √          |
| Artist association | Studio space      | √           | √          |
|                    | Art services      | √           | √          |
| Media platform     | Publication       | √           | √          |
|                    | Online media      | √           | √          |
|                    | Traditional media | √           | √          |
| Artwork producer   |                   | √           | √          |

|                                   |                       |   |   |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|---|---|
| <b>Local authority</b>            | Government department |   | √ |
| <b>Charitable funding project</b> | Funding bodies        |   | √ |
|                                   | Charity               |   | √ |
| <b>PR company</b>                 | Event                 | √ | √ |
|                                   | Arts fair             | √ | √ |
| <b>Auction house</b>              |                       | √ | √ |

This table suggests the division of contemporary visual arts organisations into two major sectors: for-profit and non-profit. Under each sector, the organisations are divided into eight categories. Each category may have several sub-categories, according to business function and purpose. It can be seen that, apart from funding bodies, both the non-profit organisations and for-profit organisations operate in all categories.

In the *gallery* category, no sub-category is given, as galleries can be categorised according to different criteria, from geographic location to the type of owners, while all galleries are intended to show artworks. Hence, the general category can be assigned here. The *public service* category includes the organisations that provide different services to the public. The *artist association* category includes artists' studios and other art services (for example, Northern Print provides printing services for artists). *Media platform* refers to online or offline media, such as artists' newsletters, magazines, and publishers. *Artwork producer* relates to the organisations that help or commission artists to produce artworks. *Local authorities* are the extensions such as government bodies, institutions, and charities, which normally provide funding and suggest directions for the development of contemporary visual arts. *PR companies* organise festivals, conferences, arts fairs, and other events. *Auction houses* are the locations where artworks are sold and are normally known as for-profit organisations, but some of their auctions have begun for non-profit purposes, hence, they are also listed under the non-profit heading.

Although this table covers a range of business functions in contemporary visual arts (from producing to selling, from providing services to organizing activities, from funding to media support), there may still be some business categories which are not included. Some organisations such as Breeze Creatives, have more than one business in operation. Therefore,

it is difficult to put these organisations into one category, and it may be even more difficult to find their business competitors.

Moreover, do organisations, such as Breeze Creatives, have to position themselves according to their competitors? If their competitors are not obvious, should their positioning still be referenced to their competitors? In other words, are competitive-oriented positioning and commercial brand-identity theory applicable to these types of organisations?

Branding strategy and brand-identity communication is believed to vary according to the corporate brand's positioning. If organisations are positioning themselves according to other criteria, do the branding strategy and brand-identity communication need to be altered? Whatever the case, one thing is certain, as so many different business are in operation in contemporary visual arts, there is no single branding strategy applicable for all organisations across business categories. For the organisations that run different businesses under one umbrella, branding researchers may need to closely examine, evaluate and assess the operation of each organisation to find a suitable way of branding for them.

### 5.5 Artist-led organisations

There is a special managerial style mentioned by the managers in contemporary visual arts organisations, artist-led, which refers to the organisations that are operated by artists themselves. This type of business is termed *artist-run initiatives* in the Australian report, but in the North East, managers refer to them as artist-led organisations. It can be seen in table 6 that artist-led organisations encompass all of the categories, except for government bodies. The managers even think that artist-led organisations may operate outside the art world and may be any type of organisation. To make clear whether competitive-oriented positioning and commercial brand-identity theory is applicable to the businesses in contemporary visual arts, it is necessary to look closely at how contemporary visual arts organisations operate. In addition, in case commercial branding theories are not applicable in the arts, as an artist-led organisation is directly operated by artists, it may be relevant to closely examine this type of organisation, to investigate whether appropriate branding theory extension can be developed.

**Table 6 Examples of business run by artist-led organisations**

| Category        | Sub-category | Artist-led |
|-----------------|--------------|------------|
| Gallery         |              | √          |
| Public services |              | √          |

|                           |                       |   |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|---|
| <b>Artist association</b> | Studio space          | √ |
|                           | Art services          | √ |
| <b>Media platform</b>     | Publication           | √ |
|                           | Online media          | √ |
|                           | Traditional media     | √ |
| <b>Artwork producer</b>   |                       | √ |
| <b>Local authority</b>    | Government department |   |
|                           | Funding bodies        | √ |
|                           | Charity               | √ |
| <b>PR company</b>         | Event                 | √ |
|                           | Arts fair             | √ |
| <b>Auction house</b>      |                       | √ |

Firstly, the managers understand the ‘artist-led organisation’ as a general name, which simply describes organisations led by artists. Alex Breeze, one of the founders of Breeze Creatives considers that the organisation may not be restricted by “working in the arts”.<sup>27</sup> Here, much emphasis is put on the word “led” in managers’ understanding. Samantha Ewen, director of The Newbridge Project, believes that the output “is not necessarily delivered by artists, not necessarily run by artists”, but “as long as it is led by artists, it is an artist-led organisation”; here, the word “led” refers to “the direction, not the leader, the front or the delivery”.<sup>28</sup> In the words of Alexander Porter, culture and tourism manager at the Newcastle City Council:

In my mind, they are organisations whose mission and *modus operandi* are determined by the people who make the work. In other words, it is not a board of directors who determine what will happen and then provide a framework within which the artists then make the work, it is the artists (or their chosen representatives) who decide what they want to do and then make a resolution about when it can be done and how. Effectively, in traditional economic terms, the workers (i.e. the artists) are empowered to decide how they will deploy their skills and then to work out how to do it and how to make it economically viable.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Email with Alex Breeze, 18 Aug 2016.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Samantha Ewen, July 2016, the name is replaced.

<sup>29</sup> Email interview with Alexander Porter, June 2016.

This explanation shows that, in artist-led organisations, the artists as stakeholders may have total control over the major direction of projects. It shows that the artists involved in artist-led organisations have more say in decision-making than they would in other organisation types, they may control the direction of an organisation, and may plan how the organisation can achieve its goals. Considering an arts organisation a corporate brand, Chapter 3 has revealed that, for a brand, its stakeholders' personal identity and social identity may influence the brand's organisational identity. In brand-identity communication, when a brand's stakeholders are both the message sender and receiver, their opinions may influence the brand identity of a corporate brand. Eventually, brand identity may be significantly affected by artists' personal identity and social identity. How much control does an artist have in an artist-led organisation? Jon Bewley, director of Locus+, an artist-led organisation, gives an example that explains how the procedure in his organisation allows the artists to stay in control:

We try to allow the decisions been made by the artists who is in the production of new works to have final say. We don't usually say that "oh we would like to do a project with you but only want to show that bag". We say that "would you like to do a project, that you would say that yeah I would like to make a bag, that is green, it's small etc. etc. So, for us, artists have as much control as possible is reasonable. They don't manage projects on a financial basis, on the day-to-day basis but they have a lot of say on how it develops with the emphasis.<sup>30</sup>

This view reveals that, in some artist-led organisations, the artists are given more freedom and control over the work they produce, although the overall scope of a project may be decided by others. In fact, the director of the organisation may have given direction to the artists. Therefore, an investigation is required to establish how much creative freedom the artists may possess, particularly concerning the influence during brand positioning and brand identity communication for the organisation.

### **5.5.1 The role artists play**

To discover how much influence artists may have over the positioning and brand identity communication of a corporate brand in artist-led organisations, it is necessary to first examine the role that artists play in these organisations. This ethnographic study reveals that, as stakeholders, the role of artists in an artist-led organisation may be very different compared to a commercial company. Especially for an artist-led organisation, in terms of ideology, the founders tend to believe that an organisation should stand for the artists' cultural group it

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<sup>30</sup> Interview with Jon Bewley, July 2016.

represents. Establishing an organisation is not often considered as an opportunity for financial gain.<sup>31</sup> As emphasised by the director of Locus+, “funding takes years to find, if it isn't worthy I have wasted my life. It is worthy because the role of artists in society is absolutely crucial for understanding who we are.”<sup>32</sup> Some artist-led organisations believe they ought to decide what they stand for from the very beginning:

It should stand for allowing artists to control the means of production, and its dissemination. (Interviewer: How to achieve that?) You decide from the very beginning, that is what we do when we started, that is what we said we would do. Obviously, you can't do it all the time. The circumstances and situations may require compromise, negotiation, give-and-take. In essence, we are trying to give artists the main say over what and how they represented.<sup>33</sup>

For some artist-led organisations, the business purpose is set at the very beginning, and is believed not to be for financial gain but for other purposes. The word “led” here is deemed essential for understanding the business purposes. According to Samantha Ewen, director of The Newbridge Project, the organisation aims to be shaped and formed for the purposes of letting the artists to be involved with their own ideas and skills:

Artist-led is the organisation that is a shape that led by artists, so what happens in the organisation is shaped by an artist community. What is interesting is “led”, so it is not necessarily being delivered by artists, but as long as it is led by artists. (Interviewer: How do you define “led”?) I mean the direction, not necessarily being the leader, the front or the delivery, but which way do we want to go. (Interviewer: Is there something else?) Artist-led is interesting. We look at lots of artist-led organisations. Everyone is slightly different, different models to the way they function.<sup>34</sup>

Although some leaders of artist-led organisations believe that the goals and purposes of an organisation should be set at the beginning, they point out that the goal of each organisation can vary significantly, the purpose of the organisation or the operational process should be led by artists. In artist-led organisations, decision-making and directions are strongly influenced by artists themselves. The artist group is seen a key among the whole stakeholder group. For instance, Ewen defines an artist-led organisation as an entity that is shaped and led by artists themselves. Hence, what happens in the organisation is also to be shaped by the “artist community”, namely, the artist group is believed to be the stakeholders who are shaping the

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<sup>31</sup> Interview with the directors of Locus+, The Newbridge Project, Breeze Creatives, and Dance City.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Jon Bewley, June 2016.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Jon Bewley, June 2016.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Samantha Ewen, July 2016.

brand identity of an artist-led organisation. In addition, the word “led” is said to be a significant term: in an artist-led organisation, not necessarily every project and operational plan is delivered by artists, yet as long as the projects and plans are “led” by artists, this organisation is believed addressing what an artist-led organisation’s purposes. In Newbridge’s case, finances and other specialists are hired for specific functions, while the projects about the arts such as exhibitions, residencies, and other arts activities are either brought up by artists themselves or are discussed by artists with the organisation.

So in my opinion, you can remain artist-led, as long as you are responsible to the artists that are within the community, and you can still have paid members of staff, most of our staff are professional artists anyway. The staff have studios here, some of them are professional artists, photographers etc. So, even the people who get paid to deliver the managerial or administrative roles, they tend to be artists, but I don’t think that is a constituted case. To remain artist-led, you don’t have to have an artist coming to do your accounts that is not the best way of using them.<sup>35</sup>

Here, artists are leading the direction where the organisation is going. In some of the artist-led organisations, the artist-group acts as a leader, a group of stakeholders speaking for both the artist community in general as well as for the organisation in which they are involved. In terms of the operational styles in artist-led organisations, each of them operates in slightly different styles and uses different management models. As summarised by Ewen, “Artist-led is interesting. We look at lots of artist-led organisations. Everyone [every organisation] is slightly different, different models, the way they function.”<sup>36</sup>

### **5.5.2 The impetus of artists and arts organisations**

It is alleged in Chapter 2 that human beings have three hierarchies of needs: basic needs, psychological needs, and self-fulfilment needs (Maslow, 1954). Basic needs refer to security, safety, food, and warmth. Psychological needs refer to prestige and feeling of accomplishment. In comparison, self-fulfilment needs refer to one’s full potential, relating to creative activities. My research should show that, by creating artworks or operating an arts organisation, the artists/managers studied in this research are more likely trying to reach the self-fulfilment needs, which are more related to their identities than security and social status.

#### **Attitude of artists**

During this ethnographic case study, various casual conversations are initiated during participant observations, some of which proved to be revealing. Zoe Anderson, one of the

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<sup>35</sup> Interview with Samantha Ewen, July 2016.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Samantha Ewen, July 2016.

directors of Breeze Creatives, expressed her opinions during a conversation, revealing how artists and arts managers see brands and branding operations from the art world point of view:

I wish there was a different word for brand, because if you said just a different word, it still means the same as “brand”, it would be better. It is the word “brand” [which causes problems], because artists will go “oh, that is related to advertising! I am not a product, so you don’t have to advertise me as a product”. Even if you call us [artists] “consumer”, it is awful.<sup>37</sup>

Strong resistance is shown towards the concept of branding in this conversation. As an experienced artist as well as an arts manager, she even suggested replacing the words “brand” and “consumers” with other expressions to avoid sounding offensive to the art world. From the narrative interviews and conversations held with a variety of artists, it is noticeable that many of them refuse to accept the idea that they are part of a commercial world, and refuse to accept that the operations applied in the commercial world may affect their views and behaviours. Artists, or even some arts managers, would prefer to see themselves as individuals, who are living according their own free will, and who are not forced to be a part of a social system.

In some cases, the idea of being secure and having a decent income is not an artist’s priority. For example, artist Jaisen Yates believes that being an artist is his “call”. This call has guided him in the past twenty years of his life. In his narrative interview, he reveals how he spent his whole life trying to get away from a normal life routine, such as receiving qualifications, starting a family, having kids and getting an office job. He expresses how much he hates to be thought a part of the social system. Hence, he used to spend years living in a subcultural community on a remote island, outside of society. Through the years, individualism and scepticism have become significant for Yates, guiding his perspective on how he should react to social responsibility and social relationships. This belief has become Yates’s identity, which since his younger age, has been inspiring him to create artworks and been constantly reflected in his paintings and sculptures.<sup>38</sup>

### **Identity of artists**

For these artists, at least, art is a personal choice, voice, and expression. Creating artworks is often not a means to bring a decent income. Creative work is central to the lives of artists and has the potential to engage all their emotions. Artists sometimes make great efforts and

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<sup>37</sup> Interview with Zoe Anderson, May 2016.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Jaisen Yates, June 2016; the curatorial proposal of Jaisen Yates’s solo exhibition -- Monochrome Coloured Autophobia 2017, and the observation summary.

compromise on many other aspects in life in order to keep creating artworks. In some artists' cases, earning certain income is to support the creation of artworks, not the other way around.<sup>39</sup> In fact, some artists realise from the very beginning that being an artist means facing financial insecurity. Some examples show that, if artists had opportunities to earn a better income, yet the work involved might disturb the production of their artworks or might create conflicts with their belief in the arts, they would rather reject the opportunities than change direction. Chris Stones, a Fine Art photographer, states:

I work in a shop and they tried to promote me and I rejected the offer. I have my priorities, I have to work to manage money, but it is not my purpose of life, so if I sank into this side too much I wouldn't be able to come out of it. I would rather remain on a lower level. Well, my parents think that I am absolutely crazy. They are like "take the money, take the money", I am like "no I am not doing it" [laugh]. It is the way I am. I am very set in my own ways. I don't like to think that I have missed the opportunity. I have the potential, I am very self-conscious about the work I created, for my work and practice, I am very confident about the way I work, about what I can achieve, what I want to achieve, just because I have that kind of mind-set, I won't give up.<sup>40</sup>

During the conversation with Stones, he keeps showing his artworks to me to demonstrate how much he enjoys the creative process and how much he feels connected to the work he created spiritually. He expresses that being an artist is his ultimate goal and believes that he has the potential to achieve it. Hence, he chooses to work in a shop to earn an income to support the creation of his artworks. When the financial gain might start to divert him from his potential achievement in art, he has to resist the temptation of fully entering the commercial world, so that he can maintain his pursuit of being an artist. In other words, this artist says "no" to the commercial world. Being an artist, he sacrificed his financial benefit for a possibility of artistic achievement with no guarantee being granted.

Here, being an artist has become Stones's identity, a force that supports him and keeps him going on with his life. Being an artist is the way he values himself. At the same time, the process of artistic pursuit means that the artist has to negotiate with the social system, the commercial world. In Stones's story, his parents think that he is "absolutely crazy" and want him to "take the money". The commercial world has been putting pressures on an artist's practice but the artist is trying to find a way to prove his own identity against the commercial world. Similar stories are told by Stu Herring, a performance artist at Breeze Creatives. In order to support his

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<sup>39</sup> Interview with Jaisen Yates, Brian Adams, Stu Herring, and John Smith, June -July 2016.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Chris Stones, June 2016.

art practice, he has to rely on the income brought by working in social service sector. However, when asked what he would prefer to be designated as in the occupation section at the end of the interview, he answered that he would prefer to be seen as an artist, despite the fact that social work is what he does for a living.<sup>41</sup> Cases here reveal that artists use art as a form for their identity recognition.<sup>42</sup> In this study, 14 out of 14 artists interviewed perceive creating artworks as a personal journey, a unique experience and a personal manifesto.<sup>43</sup>

## 5.6 Commercial branding issues in contemporary visual art

### **Conflict between the art world and the commercial world**

The motivations of artists and those from commercial world may differ greatly. Financial gain is thought essential for most business practices including branding. Current branding theories, such as *positioning theory* and *marketing communication theory*, label people as consumers and people's purchase behaviour as consuming. Commercial branding tools segment people into groups and name them as target consumer groups. If the commercial branding point of view is adopted, marketing tools and actions will be preferably used to gain financial benefit. As a result, a brand's positioning strategy should occupy a profitable segment in the market against competitors.

Consequently, when a brand manager from a commercial branding company tries to collaborate with a group of artists, the differences in motivation and the conflict in word-use may very likely be highlighted during communication. The motivation of gaining profit might not be hidden or be altered during communication. The words used by a commercial branding company may offend artists, or may be looked down on by artists. Sarah Wilkinson, an artist who has experienced working with a commercial branding organisation, explains the conflicts in her way:

For the arts to understand branding is down to the language as well, the language of the commercial world has implicit meaning that creates difficulties for the arts. Sometimes it is exploitative, such as cultural goods, consuming, and consumer. There is still a bit of resistance to that although I feel it is changing, but I also think that within branding, certainly in the digital world. There are lots of examples of advertising agencies found on commercial sites, the branding sites, who have just behaved quite badly in relation

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<sup>41</sup> Interview with Stu Herring, June 2016.

<sup>42</sup> However, as every human being, artists' motivations may differ from person to person, from group to group. More varieties of artists can be seen here: <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/>

<sup>43</sup> Artists interviewed are (some named are replaced): Jaisen Yates, Stu Herring, Peter Tennant, John Smith, Brian Adams, Amy Carr, Rebecca Gardiner, Anna Campbell, Paul Trent, Carol Smith, Chris Stones, Sarah Wilkinson, Paul Rijnvos and James Snijeders.

to the arts, by appropriating artistic works, using things to appropriate attribution. I think that come from the ignorance of working and practising in the arts. There is an educational issue.<sup>44</sup>

Wilkinson explains what conflicts and issues currently occur in collaborations between the art world and the commercial world. Barriers exist between the drive of artists for commercialisation in the art world and the actions taken by commercial branding entities. Existing branding tools may not fit within the art world the same way as they fit within the commercial world. It suggests that commercial branding tools and applications may not be working efficiently for the art sector because of miscommunication and misunderstandings on both sides.

As discussed in Chapter 2, *cultural tendency* is essential during marketing communication. Therefore, being part of marketing communication, positioning and brand-identity communication involves an intensive message encode-and-decode process, with word-use becoming significant during the message delivery. In these circumstances, what is signified by commercial branding terminologies may not be decoded by artists in the same way. Misinterpretation and misunderstanding may occur. Hence, copying commercial terminology without alteration does not appear to be an appropriate way to communicate with artists and arts managers during branding practice. Moreover, as discussed in Chapter 3, commercial branding theory is motivated by financial gain, while this motivation appears not to fit with the impetus of artists and arts organisations. As a result, commercial branding theory may have a margin for adaptation if marketers want to apply it into the art world.

Again, founder and director of Locus+, Jon Bewley stresses that artworks are considered as part of the artists' life, which should be carefully protected by the artists. Creating art is a personal expression for the artists, which reflects their personal thinking, feelings and experiences; it becomes an expression of artists' personal identity. Therefore, these artists will be offended if they feel their "lives" are consumed by capital.<sup>45</sup>

### **The uniqueness of the art world**

Another barrier for commercial branding to be applied in arts organisation is the unique characteristics of artists as a cultural group. Bewley recalls his experiences as a team leader in collaboration with artists in the past decades. Bewley believes that being creative and expressing oneself is a priority, a supreme task for some artists. Some artists are considered

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<sup>44</sup> Interview with Sarah Wilkinson, May 2016.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Jon Bewley, July 2016.

“narcissists” and “egomaniacs”.<sup>46</sup> This self-focused mind-set may enable artists to express themselves; at the same time, it makes them not wish to be designed by a procedure for certain purposes, such as a branding purpose. Resultantly, when an artist becomes a manager of an arts organisation, this self-centred nature of artists endures, especially for an artist-led organisation.

This unique characteristic of the art world may cause the purpose of each organisation to differ. The reasons may derive from personal experiences, inspired by artists’ personal identities. When an artist becomes a manager of an organisation, these characteristics may help him/her to communicate or collaborate with other artists, may help him/her to understand and to persuade other artists under certain circumstances. Therefore, an artist-turned manager has his/her motivation to maintain the artistic mind-set and not to accept being “consumed” by a commercial branding procedure. However, the responsibility of being a manager of an organisation normally forces him/her to think about a better way to operate the organisation when the art world is under a commercial invasion. Here, some managers are experiencing a paradoxical situation: on the one hand, the artists refuse to be consumed by the commercial procedure; on the other hand, the organisation they manage needs commercial branding tools to grow. Therefore, arts managers must carefully operate branding actions under the observation of artists as a cultural group, even though they want to use current corporate branding tools.

#### **The responsibility for an organisation**

According to Bewley’s experiences, gaining artists’ trust is essential when it comes to collaborating with artists, and one of the essential actions for gaining trust is to understand the impetus and purpose of artists’ artworks. The organisation must stand behind the artists and support the values and the principles that the artists believe in. It appears that the artists would not commit to an organisation unless they believe that the organisation shares an ideological similarity with them and can understand their emotions. In other words, the identity of the artist group needs to be understood and recognised, as for an arts organisation, artists are significant members of the cultural group. In some cases, recognising the artists’ identity becomes a precondition for an arts organisation.

The organisation has to be involved, to understand, and to represent the value that the artists stand for. Above all, trust is the key for long-term collaboration. Taking an artist-led organisation as an example, apart from other practice and collaboration in the arts, Locus+ has

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<sup>46</sup> Interview with Jon Bewley, July 2016.

been publishing books for artists for decades. With the experience of collaborating with a variety of artists, its director reveals how an organisation might build trust with its artists, and how the trust between the organisation and its artists may affect their collaboration. This example demonstrates how the relationship between artist's identity and an artist, and between an artist and an organisation works. The example also reveals that the precondition of any relationship is creating mutual benefit for both the artists and the organisation.

They are very emotional. They have to trust you. You are making a book about their life, the meaning for them being an artist. You will have to market it; you will have to stand behind them. Then, they could really believe in you and trust you and they could be committed to what you do, because they think you are fantastic.<sup>47</sup>

This example is about a book-publishing project. It reveals that there is a belief that an artist would not trust or collaborate with an organisation unless the organisation understands and stands behind the meaning of being an artist. This sometimes is an artist's life principle, belief, and idea; in short, his/her identity. Hence, for an organisation, understanding artists' multiple identities becomes a precondition for gaining their trust.

Arts organisations are expected to stand not only behind artists' artworks but also their identities. Moreover, organisations are expected to represent and to promote their artists' identity in a way the artists agree on, so that the artists' artworks may be marketed appropriately. Marketing support is another reason why artists need to be involved with arts organisations. An organisation is considered to be more knowledgeable about the art market than the artists themselves are. Therefore, although artists want to be understood and to maintain their original identity, many of them are also keen on being marketed under professional guidance or through appropriate collaborations with organisations. As in the example given above, the book-publishing project creates mutual benefit for Locus+. It shows that if an organisation can demonstrate understanding and knowledge, the artists' full trust can be gained. The trust may also lead to a mutual benefit for both artists and organisations. As long as an artist's identity is understood by the arts manager of an organisation, he/she is likely to consider the organisation "fantastic".

### **Artists as stakeholders**

In this case, Bewley also discloses that artists closely connect themselves to the project they are working on. During each stage of the publishing process, the artists involved expect the

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<sup>47</sup> Interview with Jon Bewley, July 2016.

organisation to fully deliver their intention and their ideas, as the intention and the ideas are significantly related to their life purposes and the impetus of their artworks. The ideas express who the artists are and where they are from. Talking with other artists (e.g. Jaisen Yates, Stu Herring, and Chris Stones) about the artworks they create, it also reveals that an art project sometimes becomes a subject through which the artists question their own identities.<sup>48</sup> In a collaborating project between an artist and an organisation, an artist may often question the value of his/her own work. For example, in the book-publishing project, the artist may question him/herself in this way:

If I give this book to a complete stranger, would they understand what I do and do they understand why it is important? Why what I do as an artist is important enough for other people to spend money and a part of their lives to commit to me?<sup>49</sup>

As discussed in Chapter 3, the thoughts that provide answers to the question “who am I?” form a person’s *personal-concept* and this personal concept is to construct his/her identity. The examples above suggest that, for artists, artworks tend to answer the question “who am I?”, and by expressing their impetus through artworks, artists are finding their personal identities. What is also discussed in Chapter 3 is that corporate brand identity stems from a set of beliefs, values and the heritage that the stakeholders of the organisation hold in common. Under these circumstances, when an artist collaborates with an arts organisation, he/she becomes a member of the stakeholders’ cultural group of that organisation. For the organisation, the artist’s personal identity may act as a stakeholders’ identity, and may influence the identity of the organisation, namely, the corporate brand identity.

At the same time, organisations may be under the observation of artists with whom they are in collaboration. When an arts organisation collaborates with an artist, the organisation becomes representative of the artist’s thoughts, feelings, and impetus; these thoughts, feelings, and impetus form the artist’s personal identity. Generally, although a collaboration is expected to speak for both the identity of the artist and the identity of the organisation, artists are more likely to stand for the value of the art world. As such, if the organisation was absorbed with its own purposes, the artist may not give a positive review to the organisation in the art world.<sup>50</sup> As a consequence, the organisation may have difficulties in building up a reputation in the art

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<sup>48</sup> Interview with Jaisen Yates, Chris Stones, May-June 2016.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Jon Bewley, July 2016.

<sup>50</sup> Observation summary.

world. Overall, for an arts organisation, “the process through which to build up trust with the artists helps us to build up trust with the art world.”<sup>51</sup>

However, for an arts organisation, a strong and consistent image of a corporate brand is believed beneficial on gaining trust from more artists in future collaboration. Therefore, arts organisations seek a way of balancing the recognition of the artists’ identity and the recognition of the corporate brand’s identity. Here, applying branding appropriately will benefit the organisation.

As discussed in Chapter 3, corporate brand identity is formed by visuals, text and behaviour. As exemplified in the book-publishing project, if a published art book is printed with both the artist’ name/profile and the organisation’s logo/profile, the visual elements and the text elements appear consistently on the book for audiences. Hence, the art book speaks for both the artist’s identity and the organisation’s identity. This way, the principles and values that the artist stands for will be spread to the art world through the distribution of the book. As a result, the identity held by the artist would become a part of the identity held by the organisation. As such, these identities may be merged and form part of corporate brand identity for the organisation. Therefore, book distribution becomes a way of distributing corporate brand identity for the organisation in the art world.

There is also a logo of an organisation on the book; it shows this organisation believes in me [the artist]. In terms of how it benefits us [the organisation], we are providing opportunities for artists to do what they have never done before, which is sitting down and thinking about what they do, and imagine how it would be in the book.<sup>52</sup>

Apparently, Bewley believes in mutual benefit for artists and organisations when completing an arts project. Firstly, as discussed in Chapter 3, from the brand identity point of view, symbols and signs attached to the arts organisation play a significant role in identity distribution. For an organisation, these symbols and signs, such as logos, images, fonts and other elements are designed to form the visual identity of the arts organisation. Hence, during the distribution of an artwork or artist-related products, such as books or exhibitions, the symbols and signs help audiences to visually recognise the organisation. By so doing, symbols and signs become essential elements among other bearers that remind stakeholders of the identity of the corporate brand. At the same time, this visual recognition reminds the audience and other related people

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<sup>51</sup> Interview with Jon Bewley, July 2016.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Jon Bewley, July 2016.

what the organisation's identity is, what its principles are, and what are the mutual identity and principles shared with its artists. Here, the audiences and all of the related people become stakeholders of the organisation.

However, stakeholders of a cultural group may not have the same influence on a corporate branding process (for example, during marketing communication). Within Breeze Creatives' cultural group, the stakeholders who decide in which direction this corporate brand should develop (e.g. founders, directors) are the *directive-stakeholders*; the stakeholders who may react to the direction chosen for the corporate brand to develop (e.g. the artists, audiences and collaborators) are *reactive-stakeholders*. As discussed in Chapter 2, *The Interactional Model of Communication* reveals that, when communication is conducted in multiple dimensions, audiences are influenced more intensively by opinion leaders and opinions formers. This means that directive-stakeholders might have merit over reactive-stakeholders during communication. Moreover, The Interactional Model of Communication suggests that the information delivered in a multi-dimensional communication should be designed according to individual's needs and the characteristic of the field. Since arts organisations operate in the cultural sector, cultural factors are key influences. Therefore, for a branding process, such as positioning, close attention should be paid to the unique characteristics of the art world and the identity of artists.

### **Resistance from the art world**

Branding in the art world may be challenging, although it offers opportunities for contemporary visual arts organisations to achieve more success. Apart from the challenges, ambiguities, and uncertainties examined earlier, in contemporary visual arts, an organisation may face particular resistance against branding from people, as both artists and arts marketers may have their concerns.

For example, during the interview with visual artist Anna Campbell, a set of compliments are given to the branding practice of BALTIC – Centre for Contemporary Arts. It is believed that the branding practice and strategy have fully supported the success of BALTIC to become a well-known public art centre. Campbell expresses the significance of using a branding tool to assist the organisation, while refusing to give a branding strategy for herself:

...Branding is really important, it distinguishes its place, its identity. BALTIC is a very good example, it is clear, it is bold... I think, it is really important to support that organisation... for me, I am not interested in it. Maybe it is not important for me at the moment, I am just an artist, I am just making works, I collaborate with other artists... I

don't think you have to "brand" the arts, it all depends on if you are professional... brand is artificial, I am an artist, not a product.<sup>53</sup>

A paradox is revealed here. On the one hand, this artist believes that branding practice is significant for achieving a certain position or building up a certain image in the art world. On the other hand, she also believes branding is making her into merchandise, which is against her principles. Similar resistance is shown by a number of people, including artists and arts managers.<sup>54</sup>

As previously examined, branding tools and marketing communication theories are developed for the commercial world. With no adaptation, these tools and theories are not applicable to the art world. The relationship between the art world and the commercial world is complicated. On the one hand, artists know that they will be disadvantaged if they are isolated from the commercial world. They need to understand the commercial world and be aware of the commercial tools that may help them to interact with it. On the other hand, many artists are reluctant to accept that they may be influenced, or that they are already influenced, by the commercial world. They refuse to see themselves as commercial "products" for sale.

The resistance of artists against branding may result in hesitation about adopting branding practice. Managers of contemporary visual arts organisations, especially artist-led ones, are concerned about the opinions and the influence of artists. In an artist-led organisation, the artists may even have control over the projects and direction of the organisation, or the manager may be an artist too. After all, artists are the people with whom the organisation has to work on a daily basis.

Furthermore, some arts managers worry that their creativity may be restricted if they adopt branding strategies (Varbanova, 2013), although recent studies suggest that commercial tools, such as brand strategies, may lead arts organisations to engage with wider audiences (Preece & Kerrigan, 2015). In reality, the cultural sector and the commercial world cooperate with each other closely, as Day (2002, pp. 42-43) explains:

As management has become even more generalised, culture, in the form of criticism, has become ever more specialised. It has shrunk from being a normative discourse applied to the whole of society to a technique applied to texts, and the abstract character of some aspect of theory mirrors the abstract nature of the exchange itself... In short, what seems to have happened is that the discourse of culture now functions in a more

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<sup>53</sup> Interview with Anna Campbell, April 2016

<sup>54</sup> Observation summary, the interview with Jaisen Yates, Daniel Gibson, Zoe Anderson, 2016

cultural one. Managers, not critics, are deemed to know what's best for a successful society. Ironically, part of the reason for this lies within criticism itself. Its very existence as a discipline depends on its ability to manage the experience to art, to process the raw material and align it with society's governing values. Consequently, there was no real opposition between culture and commerce, just a merger waiting to happen.

Day suggests that the cultural sector, including contemporary visual arts organisations, cannot avoid the commercial world. The cultural sector and the commercial world overlap, and each influences the performance and development of the other. In the majority of cases, the cultural sector (e.g. contemporary visual arts organisations) gains reputation through commercial activities, such as advertising, whilst commercial systems may help the organisations to evaluate the projects that are undertaken. Hence, close cooperation with the commercial world is expected in the future. To ensure the success of such collaboration, commercial branding tools must be adapted.

## **5.7 Commercial branding theory extension is required**

### **The limitation of commercial branding theory**

As reviewed, commercial branding theory is deemed to be competition-oriented; it sets three aspects for organisations to position themselves on the market: category, target consumer group, and brand advantages. However, in the arts, it may be hard for managers to know where they stand even if they are willing to apply the strategies. This, as analysed, is partially due to the ambiguity of the definition of contemporary visual arts organisations, and the ambiguity of business categories. These ambiguities reflect the unclarified relationships between the art world and the commercial world. Branding research was originally a crossover study between marketing and management (see Chapter3). In many cases, branding theories and applications stem from marketing and management theories. Therefore, current commercial branding strategies vary according to competitive situations and business categories. However, when an organisations' business category is not clearly defined, a commercially derived branding strategy may find challenging to position itself from a competitive point of view.

The arts is a wide field, and branding research in arts is a complex area. As Fillis (2011) argues, neither art, nor the arts, nor art market, nor arts management is well defined. This ambiguity makes it harder for managers to apply branding to the arts, and in turn, makes it more challenging for researchers to evaluate branding in the arts. Crossover areas and vague boundaries may confuse managers and researchers. Under these circumstances, insisting on

applying commercially derived branding theories may cause problems for arts organisations as corporate brands.

This is because, firstly, the undefined relationship between the art world and the commercial world has caused a strong resistance for branding in the art world. Secondly, poorly clarified business categories and boundaries have created barriers for both managers and researchers to find competitors in the arts market. While according to commercial positioning theory, an organisation has to find its competitors in order to position itself on the market, this may confuse managers. Thirdly, the impetus of artists and artist-turned-managers of arts organisations may intertwine their personal identity with the organisation they run, unique tools and terminologies must be developed to fit the requirement and ideology of the art world. This way, commercial branding theories may find a new extension and may be able to embrace the uniqueness of the art world.

### **Breaking through**

When an ambiguity lies in the definition of contemporary visual arts, boundaries are needed. However, it is challenging to set a boundary that includes every aspect that is requested for an appropriate definition in this complex field in which contemporary visual arts organisations must operate, including artist-led ones.

Differences between each type of organisation, based on the first-hand data collected from the art world, have been listed in tables, which exemplify the possible classification of business categories in contemporary visual arts. As reflected in the examples, it can be seen that, in the art world, a number of different organisations are under the umbrella of contemporary visual arts: from non-profit to for-profit organisation, from service providers to space providers, from government/state-owned organisations to private-owned companies. These organisations vary in size as well. Moreover, some artist-led organisations in contemporary visual arts, for example, The Newbridge Project and Breeze Creatives, operate businesses across several categories. Their business activities comprise exhibitions, artists' studios, workshops, and other services. Therefore, different branding theories should be developed to guide the varying types of arts organisations.

Commercial positioning theory suggests that a brand should be positioned according to the competitive set and the subjective category (see Chapter 3). Taking arts organisations as corporate brands, an undefined field and blurred business categories in the arts disadvantages competition-oriented strategies. In the arts market, since the competitive situation is not clear

for each organisation, a manager of an organisation may have difficulties to discover who the competitors on the market are. Hence, when it comes to positioning, competition-oriented theory faces challenges and needs to be adapted.

Furthermore, brand identity is indicated in Chapter 3 to be negotiated through communication between the organisation and its stakeholders. As a result, when an artist turns into the manager of an organisation, his/her identity as an artist/manager may be challenged and negotiated. For example, in artist-led organisations, artists' impetus and personal identity may directly influence the manager of an organisation. In addition, artists themselves may become artists-turned managers in the organisation, thus, their artist identity may significantly influence the brand identity of an arts organisation. Therefore, commercial branding theories need to be extended to accommodate this challenge.

Considering an arts organisation as a corporate brand, this ethnographic case study provides fresh views and insights to the relationship between an arts organisation's identity and its artists' identity. The impetus and identities of the artists reveal that the identities of artists and the identities of the managers are significantly influencing the brand identity of the arts organisation. As discussed in Chapter 2, in marketing communication, opinion leaders play an essential role in delivering messages requested by a brand. Therefore, branding information delivered through marketing communication should vary according to the identity of the artists and the identity of the managers of each organisation. As a result, competition-oriented positioning theory may not be appropriate for some arts organisations. Instead, identity-oriented positioning may fit the art world better.

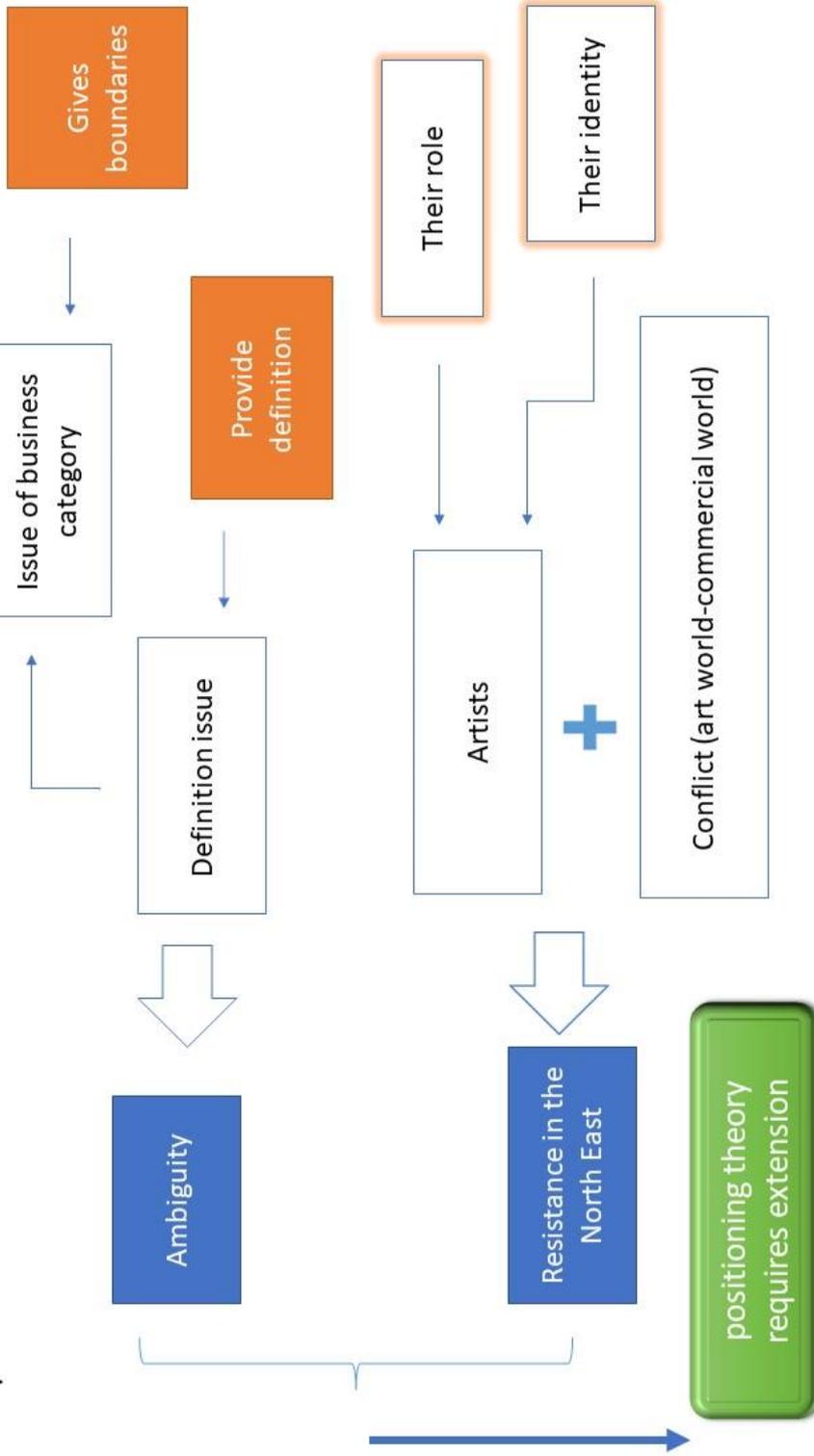
The art world is a highly symbol-related field. Therefore, with different positioning, the functionality of the symbolic content delivered through communication may differ greatly for different arts organisations. Chapter 3 has shown that brand identity is related to stakeholders' identity. Might symbols and signs play a role in identity-oriented positioning? Social classes are seen barriers for audiences to access the arts (Bourdieu et al., 1991). Might identity, ideological factors and social-class factors affect identity-oriented branding practice? The next chapters will analyse these factors.

In summary, the attempt to understand issues of branding in contemporary visual arts organisations prompts a clarification of the barriers and the uncertainties of this complex field.

Vague definitions and poorly defined business categories have caused difficulties for competition-oriented positioning theory to be applied to the arts. Moreover, the artists' impetus and identity factors cause resistance for commercial branding theory to break through. Hence, commercial branding theories require adaptations and extensions to fit the current business environment in contemporary visual arts in the North East.

The following chapters will analyse how artists can influence an organisation as stakeholders. The branding issues in the arts discussed above can be categorised into three aspects: strategic branding issues, stakeholders' identity issues, and communication issues. In the following chapters, they will each be explored.

## Chapter 5 - Two Reasons



## Chapter 6

### Identity and Branding

#### Introduction

This chapter discusses how identity influences the stakeholders of an arts organisation, how it impacts on key stakeholders from the social and personal aspects. The chapter analyses how the stakeholders' cultural group is shaped by identity, and how the impact affects brand positioning through marketing communication.

Current brand positioning theory was developed with reference to a commercial environment (see Chapter 3). It states that a brand should position itself according to the competition environment in the market, namely, competition-oriented (Kotler & Keller, 2016). As indicated by commercial branding theory, there are three major references for a brand to position itself: *category*, *target consumer group*, and *brand advantages*. However, as the business category is unclearly defined in the arts, the competitive group is not clear for each type of organisation in the arts. Since one of the major aspects of brand positioning is missing, competition-oriented positioning may not be applicable for arts organisations, the theory has therefore left a gap for researchers to fill.

Moreover, according to the investigation into contemporary visual artists, curators, scholars, and other managers in this study, a strong resistance against commercial branding practice is noted in the arts. Firstly, the motivations why artists create their artworks and why they

recognise their identities as artists may not be market-oriented. Artists may not see financial gain as the main purpose of their work. This finding supports Fillis's (2006) study: for artists, art is rather for art's sake than for business' sake. This distinctive feature forms a condition for brand positioning theory in the arts.

The special relationship between artists and arts organisations is another reason why the opinion of artists and the art world is worth taking into consideration, when it comes to positioning an artist-led organisation. Artists, as the stakeholders, play a key role in reputation building and identity representation for arts organisations. Considering these organisations as corporate brands, the identities they represent for artists form part of the identities of these corporate brands. Therefore, artists' identity should not be neglected during any branding process. This is particularly true in artist-led organisations.

For the reasons and issues addressed above, Chapter 5 found that commercial positioning is not always applicable in the arts. *Identity* replaces *category* to adopt in brand positioning in the arts. This theory extension may assist arts organisations' branding practice when they closely cooperate with the commercial world.

In addition, the term used in commercial positioning theory, *target consumer group*, closely associated with consumption and capitalization in the commercial world, leads to resistance of artists/managers against branding (see Chapter 5). Hence, this term is to be replaced with the term *cultural group*, to avoid this resistance. *Target consumer group* and *cultural group* refer to the same concepts, only the former emphasises purchase behaviour while the latter stresses cultural bonds. The term *cultural group* is more able to address the association between the artist/manager group and the corporate brand. Further, it can address the importance of support from the brand's audience group. This new terminology may facilitate the acceptance of branding practices by the art world. Therefore, *identity*, *cultural group*, and *brand advantages* are to be the three new aspects of positioning for an arts organisation. Here, *identity* replaces *category*, and *cultural group* replaces *target consumer group*. Replacing terminology enables positioning strategies and actions to gain acceptability in the art world.

Furthermore, brand identity is always negotiated between the organisation and the stakeholders (see Chapter 3). The shared identity of stakeholders is significant for the cultural group to which a brand belongs. The corporate branding toolkit also suggests that three major aspects significantly affect the branding of an organisation: *vision*, *image*, and *culture*. Taking Breeze Creatives as an example, may identity-oriented positioning assist this corporate brand to clarify

its strategic vision? How much may shared-identity of the artist group influence Breeze Creatives' brand positioning? May communication between stakeholders add value to brand image?

Studies are conducted through participant observations, narrative/semi-structured interviews and conversations with a number of artists/managers. Stakeholders' influence on and their relationships with a corporate brand will be discussed. Aspects of corporate branding will be examined in Breeze Creatives' cultural groups. More evidence will be provided as to whether the shared identity of the stakeholders assists in aligning these three key aspects of corporate branding, and whether it may create a coherent brand identity for a corporate brand in the arts. In addition, evidence will be provided to demonstrate if identity-oriented positioning helps distinguish brand identity and build up brand image, adding extra cultural value to a corporate brand.

## **6.1 Social, personal, and corporate brand identity**

Brand is a symbol-related concept, and its symbolic meaning operates in two directions: the outward direction relates to stakeholders' social identity and the inward direction relates to their personal identity (see Chapter 3). At the same time, whether the stakeholders of a brand accept it or not, the symbolic meaning is not only based on the function of the service/product the brand provides. Rather, it is based on whether or not the symbolic meaning of this brand can be accepted by its stakeholders. When it comes to brand positioning, the identity of the stakeholders, especially the identity of the directive-stakeholders (e.g. founders, directors) becomes essential. Their identity affects in which direction a corporate brand may go, and in which position the brand is placed.

### **6.1.1 Vision, brand identity and positioning**

#### **Mission-and-vision statement**

A mission-and-vision statement provides a clear view about what vision an organisation gives itself, what mission the organisation should fulfil, and what identity this organisation holds as a brand (see Chapter 3). Since my research focuses on Breeze Creatives, it is necessary to analyse its mission-and-vision statement, so that an overall view of how this brand expresses itself can be grasped before examining the details. On the front page of Breeze Creatives' official website, a mission-and-vision statement introduces this organisation's strategic vision,

mission, its business interests and its operational style. This statement clearly depicts the ideology and the purposes of this organisation.

Breeze Creatives is a contemporary visual arts organisation based in the North East, Breeze Creatives' dedication and passion towards the development of new sustainable approaches is driven by the ambition present in Abject and Abject 2 galleries, alongside commissioning and supporting artists with space, facilities and exhibition opportunities as well as funds to help realise exciting new ideas.

Abject Gallery is primarily focused on exhibiting works by contemporary visual artists from outside the UK, while Abject 2 is devoted to developing a critically engaged exhibition programme by visual artists based within the UK.

To further expand the substance of our exhibition programme, Breeze Creatives have hosted a number of curated exhibitions and have created an open-call residency programme, this selection method ensures the widest possible reach. The Experimental Studio provides artists with the best possible conditions, providing well-resourced opportunities and commissions.

Breeze Creatives are investing in the cultural landscape of the North East, championing new ideas and approaches, presenting pioneering exhibitions and nurturing artists to help them to produce critically engaged work that is paramount to the development and existence of the visual arts in our society.<sup>55</sup>

Introducing projects operated by Breeze Creatives, this mission-and-vision statement delivers three dimensions of its strategic vision: improving the regional situation of the arts, widening access to the arts, and sustaining through alternative operation. These three dimensions reflect the three major aspects proposed in Lipton's model for a mission-and-vision statement, discussed in Chapter 3 (i.e. mission, strategy, culture).

Firstly, this organisation's mission is to improve the regional situation of the arts world in the North East. The organisation is dedicated to the region North East England. As introduced at the beginning, Breeze Creatives "is based in the North East", while at the end of the statement, it is emphasised that this organisation is "investing in the cultural landscape of the North East". Secondly, to achieve its mission, this organisation's strategy is seeking opportunities for a wider range of people to access the art world. The statement shows that Breeze Creatives operates programmes (e.g. open-call residency programme) to "help realise exciting new ideas". The organisation sees itself "nurturing artists to help them to produce critically engaged

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<sup>55</sup> Breeze Creatives (2018). Breeze Creatives | Contemporary Art Gallery and Artist Studios | Newcastle upon Tyne. Retrieved 6 July 2018, from <https://breezecreatives.com/>.

work”, “ensure the widest possible reach”, and “providing well-resourced opportunities and commissions”. Thirdly, in terms of the organisational culture aspect, evidence shows that this organisation is exploring an alternative way of operation. The descriptions “development of new sustainable approaches” and “championing new ideas and approaches” indicate that Breeze Creatives prefers to adopt new ways instead of following traditional rules to fulfil its mission. Clearly, this statement has delivered the organisation’s strategic vision, yet the culture of this organisation is not described, as reviewed in Chapter 3.

The rhetoric in this statement is active, clear and straightforward. The majority of the sentences are formed with an active voice. Among the 187 words in total, this statement only uses three verbs in a passive voice. The active voice ensures Breeze Creatives’ stakeholders that the organisation is energetic and passionate about their projects. Paragraphs in this statement are clearly divided according to their meanings and information is delivered by clearly formed clauses in sentences. Moreover, each of the sentences introduces an aspect about the organisation. There is little repetition of information and no narrative involved in this statement. This clear-and-straightforward writing style demonstrates the three major themes of this organisation’s strategic vision. At the same time, some of the words, such as “widest possible”, “best possible”, “championing”, “pioneering”, and “paramount”, reveal the ambition of this organisation, showing that Breeze Creatives aims at high quality for the artworks it represents.

Overall, this statement delivers the vision of Breeze Creatives as a corporate brand and manifests that, focusing on high quality artworks, this organisation is actively aiming to improving the situation of the art world in the North East, and widening access to the arts through an alternative way of operation.

#### **Identity, positioning and stakeholders**

*Vision* is one of the major factors that affect corporate brand identity building, it reflects the aspirations of an organisation (Ingenhoff & Fuhrer, 2010a; Kantabutra & Avery, 2010). Breeze Creatives’ mission-and-vision statement reveals the vision of this corporate brand: its dedication to the region, intention of facilitating people, alternative attitude and its ambition of exhibiting high quality artworks. This vision is composed of traits that “are nested in perceptions of who the organisation is” (Schultz et al., 2005, p. 24). Hence, the traits form part of the brand identity of this corporate brand. The vision announced in the mission-and-vision statement clarifies Breeze Creatives’ brand identity to its stakeholders and seeks to occupy a

distinctive and valuable place in its stakeholders' minds (Kotler & Keller, 2016). This distinctive and valuable place is the positioning of a brand (Kapferer, 2012). This statement assists to understand Breeze Creatives' positioning.

To recap, commercial positioning theory is believed to be competition-oriented; the three aspects of positioning required are *category*, *target consumer group* and *brand advantage*, which in my study are suggested to be adapted into *identity*, *cultural group* and *brand advantage*, in order for the positioning to be applicable to the arts. In this statement, some supporting information clarifies the positioning of Breeze Creatives. Firstly, the statement shows that Breeze Creatives is “a contemporary visual arts organisation”. It indicates what type of organisation it is, although, “contemporary visual arts organisation” is a vague description, which does not clarify the business category required by commercial branding theory (see Chapter 5). Hence, one of the criteria for commercial positioning - *category* - is not applicable here. This, again, reflects the reason why commercial positioning may not be applicable to the arts. Secondly, the statement shows that Breeze Creatives works closely with artists. Therefore, artists are their stakeholders and artist group is to be their focused cultural group (target consumer group). Thirdly, the statement announces that Breeze Creatives aims to facilitate people's access to the arts; it also aims at high quality of artworks, which can be two of the brand advantages for the stakeholders. Moreover, in this statement, some traits revealed are distinctive to Breeze Creatives' stakeholders, such as the aim of improving the situation of the art world in the North East, alternative attitude, trying to “ensure the widest possible reach”. All these aims and traits form a distinctive place in Breeze Creatives' stakeholders' minds and create an identity for this corporate brand, and hence play a role in its positioning. So far, Breeze Creatives' positioning is revealed as: alternative way of boosting the art world in the North East through a widest possible reach.

Working with Breeze Creatives, I have had a variety of conversations with its stakeholders, both internal and external. The three founders are internal stakeholders as well as decision makers, deciding the vision and positioning of Breeze Creatives; they should therefore be considered *directive-stakeholders*. The artists are internal stakeholders as well as their identity is significant for the corporate brand. However, as they are not likely to make decisions on the vision and the positioning, therefore they are perceived *reactive-stakeholders*. The audiences and the collaborators are external stakeholders, as they are likely to react to the decision regarding the vision and positioning set by the founders, they are reactive-stakeholders too. My study found that, an organisation may be founded under the influence of their directive-

stakeholders' (e.g. founders') social and personal identity, and that the vision of this organisation may be answering the founders' personal expectations. As for Breeze Creatives, the founders had a perspective on what this organisation should stand for before the organisation was established. The vision of Breeze Creatives recognises some shared-identities of the directive-stakeholders. According to the interviews, the founders' personal experience may be a key reason why they started their own business and may subsequently have led the organisation's brand positioning. In Breeze Creatives' case, the founders' social identity and personal identity help form the vision of the organisation, positioning this corporate brand in the art world. The founders' shared identity later assists this corporate brand in shaping its operational style, which then forms part of its organisational identity.

Branding theory indicates that organisational identity adds a distinctive feature into corporate brand identity; it plays a significant role in corporate branding (see Chapter 3). In the next sections, analysis will demonstrate, in Breeze Creatives' case, strategic vision is derived from the founders' shared social and personal identity, and that the vision reflects this organisation's positioning. Later, analysis will focus on how these social and personal identities may also have a significantly influence on shaping the distinctive features of the organisation, and how these features are merged into one unified organisational identity, which further clarifies the positioning of this corporate brand. Eventually, the analysis will examine how the organisational identity may be formed into corporate brand identity. Overall, the next sections will demonstrate how directive-stakeholders' identities may influence a corporate brand's positioning and how these people's identities may enhance the brand identity.

### **6.1.2 Social and personal identity influence**

#### **Social identity**

During this two-and-a-half-year observation of Breeze Creatives, at various locations the founders of Breeze Creatives revealed their personal feelings and interest in topics that enable them to construct, reconstruct and enhance their social identity. These topics sometimes relate to the region where the founders are from, or a certain social class or artist community (cultural group) in the art world. The relationships and inspirations gained through the founders' experience are highlighted. For example, the region, North East England, is a subject that Breeze Creatives' directors are passionate about, while it is also a factor that influences the construction of their shared social identity. This shared social identity affects the vision of the organisation and eventually brings out the brand identity of this corporate brand. Alex Breeze's example is given:

I think I am very passionate about the region. I like the idea that there will be really good facilities out here for the creative world. I like the idea that people will be attracted to the region. I think, at the same time, I am excited about working in the region that in many ways is a blank canvas. I am going through many changes at the moment, with the economy and with the arts funding. It's kind of a tipping point, I think, my kind of ideology for what I perceive to be good rules for future is to make the best for the really shitty situation for this region, in terms of finance and things, you can make it possible now.<sup>56</sup>

Breeze Creatives invests in the cultural landscape. In Breeze's opinion, the passion about the region is an engine that drives him to found this organisation. Some words he used to express this emotional attachment are listed in the table below. He indicates that he is "passionate about the region" and he "likes the idea that there will be good facilities out here", hence he is "excited about working in the region". The table below lists the anticipation he has that is motivated by this emotional attachment: the expressions "really good facilities", "good rules" and to "make the best for the really shitty situation" are used in his words. As Breeze explains, in order to improve the environment of this region for artists, the passion about the region has motivated him to go through challenges.

**Table: Passion about the region**

|                      | passionate | like the idea | excited | really good facilities | good rules | make the best for the really shitty situation |
|----------------------|------------|---------------|---------|------------------------|------------|---|
| Emotional attachment | √          | √             | √       |                        |            |   |
| Vision               |            |               |         | √                      | √          | √   |

Regional factors form part of the social identity of human beings (Swank et al., 2013). Breeze's passion about the region forms part of his social identity. This social identity is developed into one of the traits that form the brand identity of Breeze Creatives. It shapes the brand positioning for his organisation and inspires him on the vision of his organisation. Here, social identity is found playing an essential role in forming the organisation's identity. Examples are provided by the founders:

<sup>56</sup> Interview with Alex Breeze, May 2016.

I grew up in Newcastle, but I didn't practise in here as an artist, I went to London straight away, and I found that being in those big cities, especially somewhere down south, the amount of opportunities is much greater. And because the opportunity is much greater, people won't be so afraid of losing space, people weren't be so adamant that they had to have this opportunity and this was theirs, not so insular. But when I moved back to Newcastle, this is the most shocking thing I have ever seen, I just could not penetrate the art world [in here]. I could show in London or Manchester working individually as a professional artist. But Newcastle is just like a closed book. Also, if you haven't been in the university structure, there wasn't really a place for you in the arts.

I think we are positioned within a country, we are here on the east coast of England, we are so disfranchised from anyone who makes any government rules. Actually, we are facing the whole of Europe, why aren't we being more ambitious? Why aren't we saying, if we can't work internally, let's work externally. Let's work with the rest of the world. If we can't work with London, if we can't get the money streams, if we can't get support, why don't we get other opportunities? Why don't we restructure ourselves? Just because I am living in a place, which is rather depressing economically, in terms of opportunities, it is completely forgotten about, why don't we change that? If it is not working, change it. We have the ability to do it.<sup>57</sup>

Founder Zoe Anderson grew up in Newcastle yet did not practise as an artist in the North East. Instead, she went to Manchester for her bachelor's degree before moving to London for a master's degree.<sup>58</sup> After studying in a variety of places (e.g. Newcastle, Manchester, London), she explains the influence of the region over her. In her interview, she describes the art world in the North East: "the most shocking thing I have ever seen". For her, Newcastle is "a closed book" and people are "afraid of losing space" and are "so insular". This situation worries her. Rooted in the North East, she constantly questions its reality, "why don't we change that?", although this region is described as "depressing economically", Anderson's emotional attachment motives her to "change it". She believes that Breeze Creatives should "work with the rest of world" to improve the art world in the North East.

I would like to be bringing in high quality international arts to the region, also taking the high quality arts from the region internationally. High quality art from the region to an international stage and high quality international art to the local region. Global collaboration.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Interview with Zoe Anderson, May 2016.

<sup>58</sup> According to Zoe Anderson's LinkedIn profile: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/zoe-anderson-breezcreatives348>

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Daniel Gibson, May 2016.

Founder Daniel Gibson puts emphasis on his professional anticipation for the region. In his 45-word quotation, he mentions the word “region” four times, and even adds an adjective, “local”, to “region”, emphasising the nature of the place. It can be seen that the regional factor plays a significant role in setting up the vision to his organisation. In addition, Gibson mentions “high quality” four times in the quote, which shows an agreement with the vision held by Alex Breeze (e.g. good rules). He stresses “international” or “global” five times, which shows an overlap with the vision proposed by Anderson, another founder (e.g. working with the rest of the world).

The table below demonstrates the expression used by the founders, the words show that these founders are motivated by *regional factor*, and a shared social identity can be found in these expressions.

**Table: Shared identity of the founders for the region**

|                                    | Alex Breeze  | Daniel Gibson   | Zoe Anderson  |
|------------------------------------|--|---|---|
| Emotional attachment to the region | <p>“passionate” ;</p> <p>“like the idea” ;</p> <p>“excited”</p>  | N/A   | <p>“so insular”</p> <p>“the most shocking”;</p> <p>“a closed book”;</p> <p>“depressing”</p>   |
| Vision for the region              | <p>“really good facilities”</p> <p>“good rules”</p> <p>“make the best for the very shitty situation”</p> | <p>“to the region”</p> <p>“from the region”</p> <p>“high quality art from the region”</p> <p>“high quality international art to the local region”</p> <p>“global collaboration”</p> | <p>“let’s work with the rest of the world”</p> <p>“why don’t we change that”</p> <p>“change it”</p> <p>“We have ability to do it”</p> |
| Shared vision                      | improving the situation of the art world in the North East region  |   |   |

In Breeze Creatives’ case, the directive-stakeholders’ shared-identity based on the North East region has influenced Breeze Creatives’ strategic vision, and later it becomes a part of the corporate brand identity of this organisation, as stated in its mission-and-vision statement.

Shared social identity is not only influenced by regional factors, but also by other factors, for example, social cliques. These different factors form the various traits of brand identity and clarify the brand positioning for the stakeholders of the brand. For instance, one of the reasons why the founders set Breeze Creatives' vision as facilitating more people to access the arts is because they see the barriers of social cliques for newcomers to break into the art world.<sup>60</sup>

You walk into a lot of galleries and you get a sheet of paper or it's written on the wall, and it's written in academic language that only Fine Art academics can really understand. Most people just get lots of bollocks, and that is an initial intimidating factor. Even they step forward into the gallery, they think "oh I don't understand this", so they get intimidated by it. We are trying to break down the barriers – the normal academic styled discourse within Fine Arts.<sup>61</sup>

There are lots of other studios kind of angle themselves towards criteria such as "Fine Art graduates", their first criteria of them. Some of them just only have craft-based artworks, I think we are trying to have a complete level of diversity in the sense that you can have a floor of studios, computer games makers, suit makers, knife makers, fine artists, graphic designers, in the idea that they all tagged to each other, while in some other studios want to focus so much, so they end up not looking out the outside world, and only in their area, and not really giving the creative diversity that the studio practice needs.<sup>62</sup>

I think all artists would like to believe that they are as inclusive as anyone else. But I think the core of the problem, and this is why I should never be allowed to run our company [Laugh], it sounds awful but I do mean it, the core of the problem is that the majority of the people who access the arts come from middle classes and upper classes, they are not coming from working classes. I come from the working class so I will always be cautious around other people. I think that we create an environment by which a man on the street who knows nothing cannot [emphasised] access this [the arts]. And mainly this is because if he comes in, he will hear that nobody else will sound like him. Everybody sounds intellectual, everyone has this BBC accent, and nobody has regional accent. It is not like I present this in a totalitarian sense, it is definitely like this.<sup>63</sup>

These quotations are from the interviews of three founders of Breeze Creatives. The key words are highlighted in the texts and a table below lists how these key words demonstrate the shared social identity of the three and how the shared identity is addressed by the vision of the

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<sup>60</sup> Referenced also by the observation summary.

<sup>61</sup> Interview with Daniel Gibson, May 2016.

<sup>62</sup> Interview with Alex Breeze, May 2016.

<sup>63</sup> Interview with Zoe Anderson, May 2016.

organisation. From different perspectives, the three founders depict how social cliques can create barriers for people to access the arts.

**Table: Shared identity of the founders and barriers created by social clique**

| 1 |  | Alex Breeze   | Daniel Gibson  | Zoe Anderson  |
|---|--|---|--|---|
| 2 | <b>Emotional attachment</b>              | N/A   | “bollocks”<br>“oh I don’t understand this”                         | “cannot [emphasised]” “it is definitely like this”  |
| 3 | <b>Reasons perceived</b>                 | “angle themselves”<br>Criteria x 2<br>“focus so much” | “a sheet of paper”<br>“written on the wall”<br>“academic language” | middle/upper/working classes x 4<br>“BBC accent/regional accent”<br>“nobody else will sound like him” |
| 4 | <b>Barriers created by social clique</b> | “not really giving the creative diversity”            | “intimidating”<br>“intimidated”                                    | “a man on the street who knows nothing cannot [emphasised] access this [the arts]”                    |
| 5 | <b>Shared view of these barriers</b>     | “trying to have a complete level of diversity”        | “trying to break down the barriers”                                | “the core of the problem” x 2   |
| 6 | <b>Shared vision</b>                     | widening access to the arts                           |  |   |

The second row of the table shows that Gibson and Anderson are emotionally reacting to the exclusiveness of the Fine Art world. The words “bollocks” and “cannot [emphasised]” suggest that they share a disagreement on it. Gibson shows empathy to the audiences by saying “oh I don’t understand this” from their point of view. Anderson uses “definitely” to confirm her concerns about the clique barriers. The third row lists the reason perceived by three founders, which demonstrates a shared view about what currently happens. Breeze indicates that the barriers are caused by the criteria set by organisations which exclude people. Gibson believes that the use of certain language can only represent the clique of academics, which “intimidates” “most people”. Anderson thinks that social “classes” and “accent” can be two factors that

prevent people from accessing the arts, because “nobody else will sound like him”. Specifically, Gibson indicates that the academic clique intimidates audiences, which reflects on “academic-styled discourse within Fine Art”. Breeze points out that arts organisations tend to “focus” on specific groups of people, and normally set “criteria” that exclude people from accessing the group. Finally, Anderson uses the word “classes” four times to stress the exclusiveness of social classes in the art world. She further points out that factors such as “accent” also divide people from majority groups in the arts world. Overall, the three founders observe current situation from different angles and believe that barriers are created by social cliques. As accessing the arts is considered a cultural consumption behaviour (see Chapter 3), the founders’ observations reveal a fact that the majority groups have formed cliques of artists/audiences, preventing people from consuming cultural products (e.g. exhibitions, events, artworks) in the art world. The fourth row of the table summarises the damage done by the barriers in art world: lack of diversity, intimidating audiences and preventing them from accessing the art world. This finding reflects what Bourdieu (2010) noted regarding the taste of art. The fifth row in the table depicts how similar the three founders’ views are: they think the barriers constitute a “problem” which they need to “break down”, so that a “complete level of diversity” can be brought in. These views, shown in the table, demonstrate a shared view and reaction of three founders, as well as what action should be taken against these barriers. These views form a shared social identity among the three.

For Breeze Creatives, the shared social identities are addressed in two themes of the strategic vision of the organisation: improving the situation and widening access to the arts in the North East. This shared social identity also forms a trait of the brand identity associated with the positioning of Breeze Creatives. Comparing with the positioning revealed by the mission-and-vision statement, one more aspect can be added: bringing diversity to the arts.

### **Personal identity**

In addition to shared social identity, shared personal identity may also be addressed in strategic vision and brand identity of a corporate brand. Moreover, personal identity may also affect the directive-stakeholders’ views on how this organisation should operate. The directive-stakeholders’ (e.g. the founders’) personalities may be embedded into the brand identity of the organisation, and eventually affect the organisation’s brand positioning.

One of the directors of Breeze Creatives perceive herself as a “rebel” who is against the traditional art world, even though she studied under the traditional Fine Art system. In her view,

the reason why most artists and creative ideas do not receive enough opportunities in the art world is due to the system of operation there. The hierarchy of the art world creates barriers for people from the working-class. She believes that the rules and the hierarchy of the art world are sometimes unnecessary and wasting resources. Because of this hierarchy, the people who are from an underprivileged social background do not receive equal chances and enough educational opportunities in the arts. Hence, one of the visions of Breeze Creatives is to facilitate access for more people, the people from the working-class in particular.<sup>64</sup>

I wanted to create a place that I felt it wasn't governed or dictated by the university and it wasn't governed and dictated by the Arts Council. I just thought Newcastle needed an alternative, just one thing that wasn't such hierarchy, wasn't so patriarchal. The idea shouldn't be like this: unless the University is leading it, or the Council is leading it, it cannot exist. I think artists need to be cleverer than that, artists have the ability to create the world that they want to live in. I think we should be more ambitious and say, if the structure is not working, as an artist we haven't informed anybody's voice, while we should be, and we should say that, instead of saying I accept this status, I accept that this is to be a people in the North East.<sup>65</sup>

One founder explains how personal identity is embedded with social identity and how these identities influence the strategic vision of an organisation. "I wanted to create a place that I felt it wasn't governed or dictated by the university and it wasn't governed and dictated by the Arts Council", "Newcastle needed an alternative", "just one thing that wasn't such hierarchy, wasn't so patriarchal". The words: "dictated" "hierarchy" "patriarchal" reflect this founder's personal identity – anti-authority. The whole view also reflects the vision – alternative operation – in the organisation's mission-and-vision statement. On the one hand, the social identity – being a member of a working-class family – is one of the motivations for breaking down barriers between classes for artists; on the other hand, the personal identity – being a rebel – prompts the opinion that arts should not be dictated by authorities like the Arts Council. However, there are more than one "rebel" within the founders.

Independent arts and culture is the highest calibre. That's sort of self-driven and self-motivated, and quite punk in some ways, because we are totally independent, we don't have to tick anybody else's boxes, so we are not doing things for the sake of fitting somebody else's criteria of what we should be doing and what this money is for.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Observation summary and the interview with Zoe Anderson, May 2016.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Zoe Anderson, May 2016.

<sup>66</sup> Interview with Daniel Gibson, May 2016.

Another founder uses “quite punk” and “totally independent”, expressions that associate with some personal traits as outside the mainstream, revealing his personal identity. He indicates that “we don’t have to tick anybody else’s boxes”, which also reflects the vision stated in the mission-and-vision statement. This view echoes the other founder’s view analysed above. Moreover, this founder explains how this organisation’s vision is established on shared identities and how Breeze Creatives positions itself through the founders’ shared identities.

One of the reasons why we set this company up was because we looked around, and we all just have similar opinions on seeing and agreeing on the way that we didn’t like the things that were done and presented in other places. We thought, yeah, we can have a crack at that and do it better, in the way that we thought is better.<sup>67</sup>

This founder indicates that shared opinions is “one of the reasons why” they established their organisation. “Opinions on seeing and agreeing on the way that we didn’t like the things that were done” refers to shared ideologies, which form part of personal identity. In this quote, he uses “we”, which reflects the strong connection between all three founders. At the same time, “we can have a crack at that” and “the way we thought is better” demonstrate how the shared personal identities have influenced the vision and the positioning of this organisation.

In conclusion, shared social and personal identity contributes to the vision of this corporate brand. *Vision* affects brand identity building for an organisation (Ingenhoff & Fuhrer, 2010a). For arts organisations, especially the artist-led ones, brand identity construction may be significant under the influence of the directive-stakeholders’ (e.g. founders’) shared social and personal identity. This shared identity subsequently affects the brand positioning of a corporate brand. In short, for a corporate brand in the arts, identity and positioning of a brand are significantly influenced by directive-stakeholders’ shared identity. A corporate brand’s positioning, such as Breeze Creatives’, is identity oriented.

## **6.2 A visual brand element and identity-oriented positioning**

### **6.2.1 Logo, identity, and positioning**

It is established in the previous section that directive-stakeholders’ shared identity influences Breeze Creatives’ brand identity, making Breeze Creatives’ positioning identity-oriented. How is this identity-oriented positioning applied by Breeze Creatives in the arts? Visual branding elements, such as logos, are deemed part of brand identity, representing some distinctive features of a brand (Jabbar, 2014). How does the shared identity influence Breeze Creatives’

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<sup>67</sup> Interview with Daniel Gibson, May 2016.

brand elements such as its logo? How is the corporate brand's strategic vision communicated within its cultural group? Is the marketing communication aligned? This section examines how the shared identity of the directive-stakeholders might affect the branding process of this corporate brand.

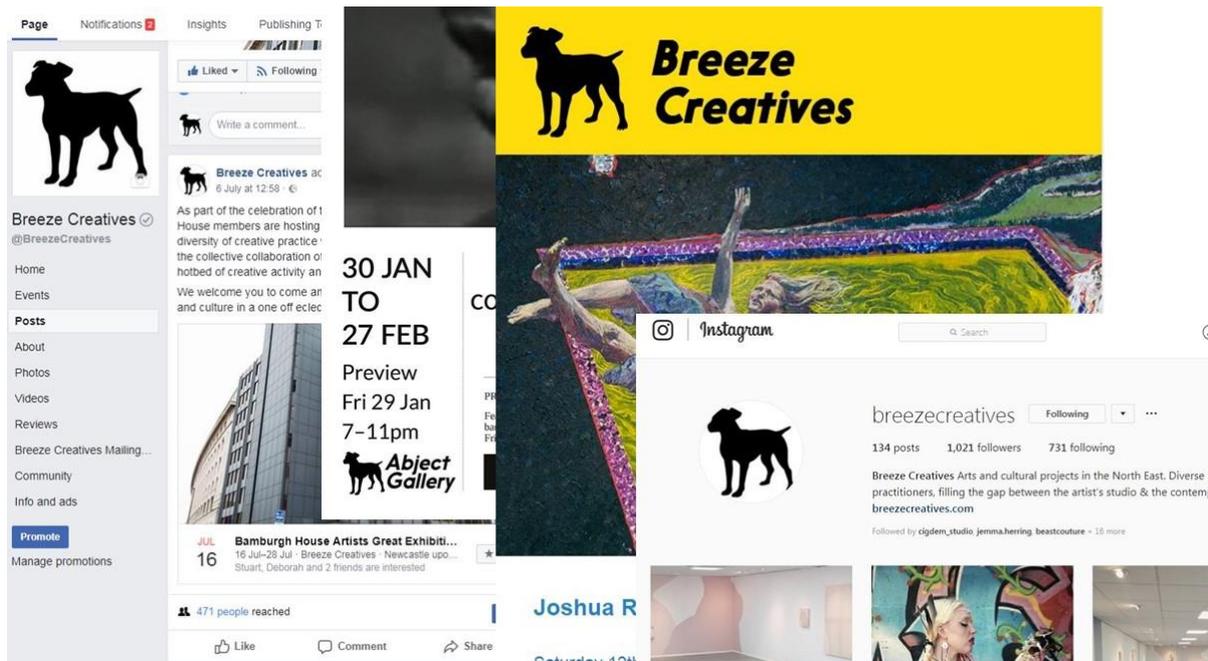
Figure 6 displays two logos of Breeze Creatives. The organisation's logo is on the left-hand side; its gallery's logo is on the right-hand side. The organisation's logo is formed by an image of a dog with the name Breeze Creatives written in italic font. The dog is placed on the left-hand side of the logo while the name, Breeze Creatives, is placed on the right. The dog is clearly displayed in the logo and shares the focus of the whole logo. This logo is used in both online and offline communication, for example, social media and posters. Moreover, the dog image is further adapted by Breeze Creatives and is used in Abject Gallery's logo. Therefore, the dog image appears to be visually representing Breeze Creatives in marketing communication.



**Figure 6 Breeze Creatives' logo and the adaptation**

Source: <https://breezecreatives.com/>

Figure 7 lists some examples of how the dog image is used in various marketing communication platforms: Facebook, Instagram account and two posters. It appears that, in some cases, the dog appears alone, without the organisation's name. For instance, on the Facebook page (on the very left) and the Instagram page (on the very right), the dog appears independently. In two posters (in the middle), the dog is combined with either Breeze Creatives or Abject Gallery forming different logos.



**Figure 7 Examples of the use of the dog image in communication**

Source: Author's screenshots from various media.

The dog image in the logo is a stylised image of a pet dog named Benson, owned by one of the founders.<sup>68</sup> This pet dog is a crossbreed Jack Russell in black, smaller than a normal Jack Russell. It inherited its tiny size while maintaining the Jack Russell's strength. As the researcher, I sometimes walked the dog with the founder. At times, this dog is found to be difficult to walk. Due to its extreme active nature, it normally finds its own path instead of following my lead. The founders believe this small dog represents the identity of their organisation. Daniel Gibson, the designer of Breeze Creatives' logo, confirmed this in an interview;<sup>69</sup> indicating that adding this dog into Breeze Creatives' logo is due to the similarity between the two: the organisation "is like Benson, like the dog in our logo, just runs around causing havoc, pissing on things. It's essentially what we do [Laugh]."<sup>70</sup> Here, the dog is perceived an individual that is full of energy and alternative ideas, it runs its business in its own way. This reflects the brand identity of Breeze Creatives, being alternative.

Figure 8 shows a photo posted on Breeze Creatives' Facebook page. In the photo, a tiny black dog is taking a giant branch in its mouth and walking on a road; the branch it takes is several

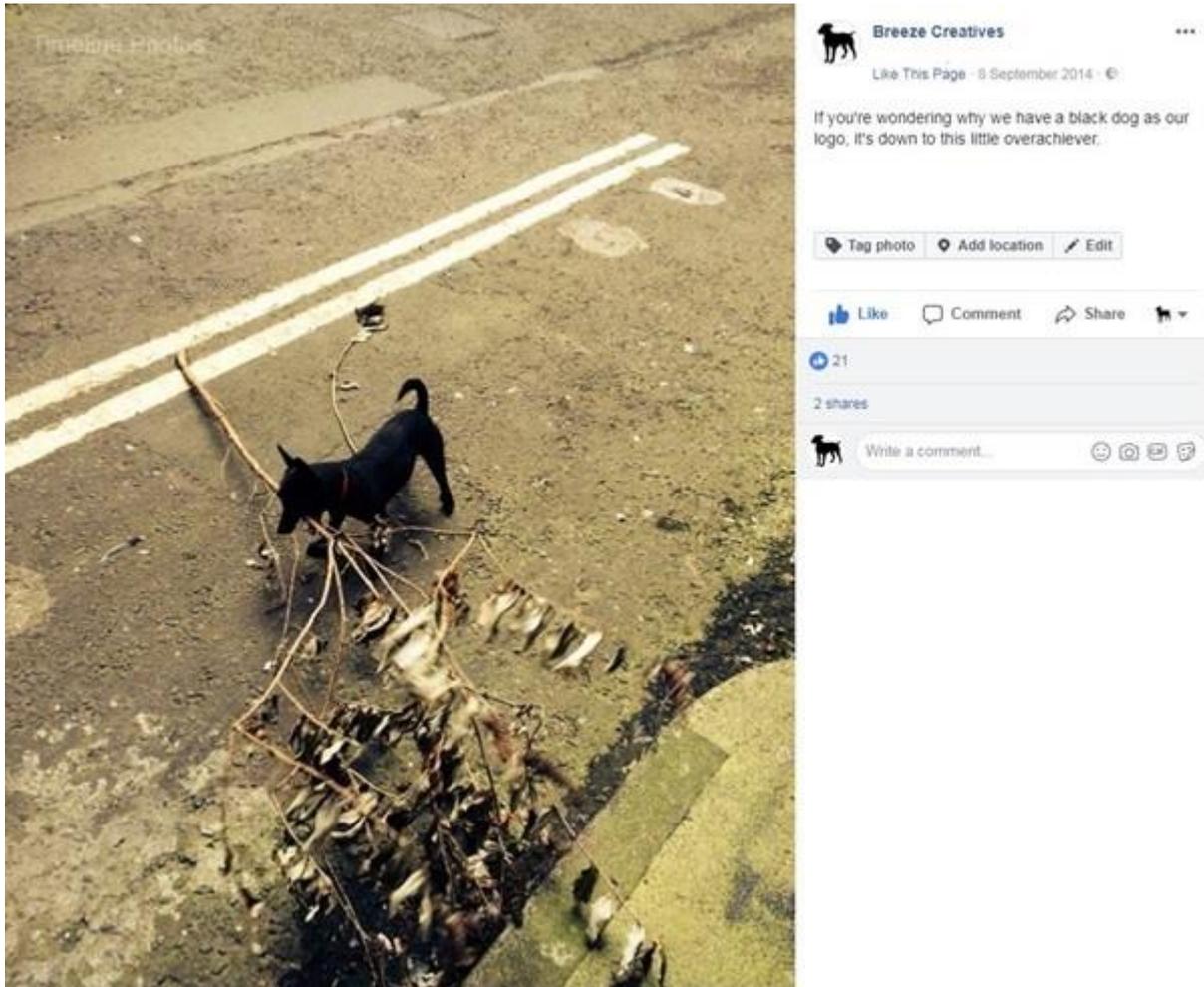
<sup>68</sup> Interview with Zoe Anderson, May 2016.

<sup>69</sup> Logo was upgraded in 2014, yet all elements of the logo remain the same. See the observation summary.

<sup>70</sup> Interview with Daniel Gibson, May 2016.

times longer than its body. The founders of Breeze Creatives comment: “if you’re wondering why we have a black dog as our logo, it’s down to this little overachiever.” In this comment, the dog is described as an “overachiever”. Firstly, the dog’s behaviour is not just obeying others’ commands. Instead, Benson gives itself an alternative task and is actively using its strength to fulfil it. Hence, it is a rebel, similar to the founders of Breeze Creatives. Secondly, compared to the size of the dog, the branch it takes is an ambitious task. This is similar to what Breeze Creatives is doing: for a three-people’s organisation, it is working on an ambitious task – changing the situation of the arts in the North East. The dynamism and ambition of this small black dog reflect the brand identity depicted by Breeze Creatives’ mission-and-vision statement. The dog also reflects the shared identity of Breeze Creatives’ directive-stakeholders. Therefore, the dog image enhances some of this corporate brand’s identity and positioning – alternatively way of boosting the arts in the North East.

Through the logo, a visual brand element, Breeze Creatives’ directive-stakeholders’ shared identity is embedded, the corporate brand’s positioning is represented. A corporate brand’s identity and positioning is enhanced.



**Figure 8 Facebook post about Benson**

Source: Breeze Creatives' Facebook page screenshot.

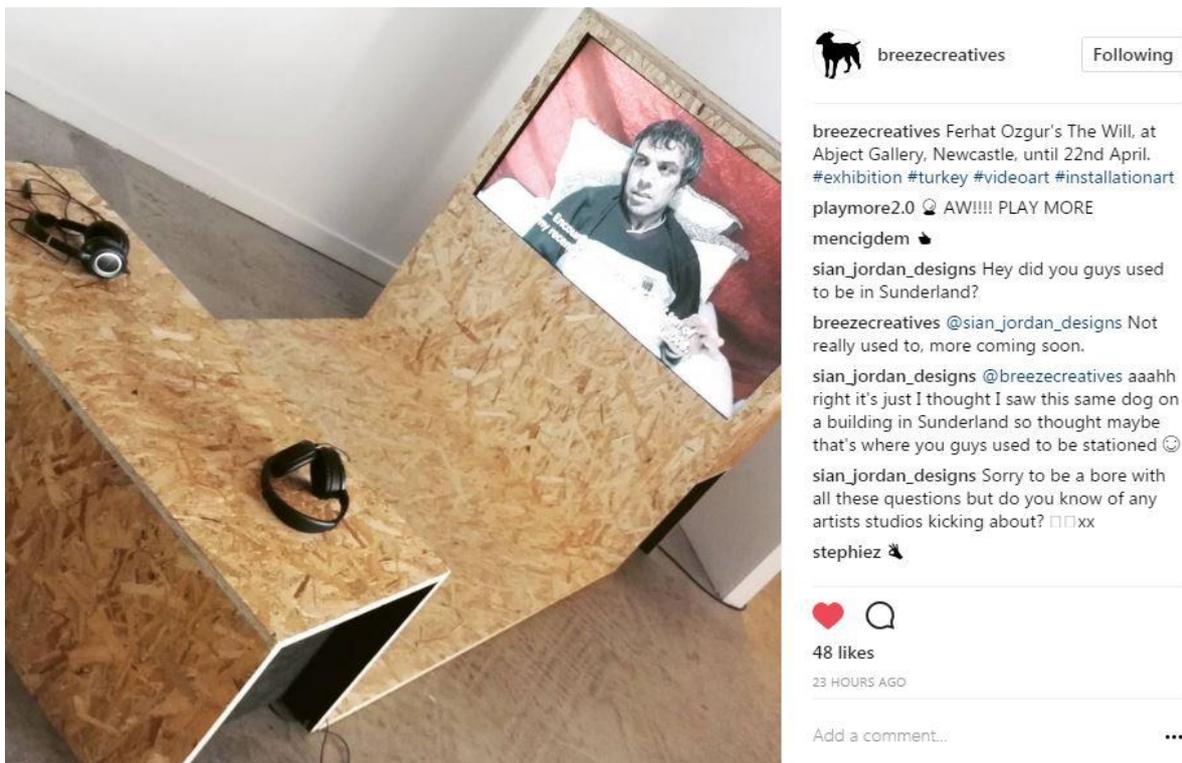
### **6.2.2 Identity-embedded logo in marketing communication**

Three key dimensions of corporate branding are vision, image, and culture. Vision refers to the strategic vision of the brand (see Chapter 3). When a corporate brand's logo is embedded in its directive-stakeholders' shared identity, may this visual brand element (logo) influence positioning through the communication of a brand's strategic vision? This section examines how the strategic vision is clarified and trusted by a brand's cultural group through its logo, an identity-embedded visual element.

In rich media such as social media, audiences can read a post and leave comments for the publisher (Daft & Lengel, 1986; Shirky, 2008). Hence, online communication provides opportunities for a corporate brand to interact with the stakeholders of its cultural group. Through interaction, information about the brand can be imparted to its cultural group

(Hodkinson, 2002). Corporate brand identity is formed by a set of beliefs and values held by the stakeholders of the brand's cultural group (Balmer & Greyser, 2003). When marketing communication is aligned, which is vital for corporate branding, the identities can be integrated into "one unified identity" (Heding et al., 2016, p. 48). Therefore, for an identity-embedded logo, such as the dog in Breeze Creatives' logo, an aligned marketing communication may help make the brand's strategic vision clear to its cultural group and by unifying the identity of the cultural group, the cultural group's trust may be enhanced. Brand positioning relates to how a brand's cultural group reacts to the brand (see Chapter 3). When the bond between a brand and its cultural group is stronger, the brand's positioning will be enhanced.

On 12 April 2017, a picture was posted on Instagram by Breeze Creatives, promoting its exhibition *Look at Me*. In addition to notifying the cultural group of its new exhibition, Breeze Creatives received extra attention through the discussions in the comment area of the post. This corporate brand's logo is mentioned by a stakeholder of its cultural group. The discussion proposes a connection between the logo and this corporate brand's vision.



**Figure 9 Breeze Creatives' Instagram post**

Source: screenshot of Breeze Creatives' Instagram post

A stakeholder actively asks Breeze Creatives whether the organisation was in Sunderland before. He/she is told by Breeze Creatives that Sunderland is the place to which the corporate brand is currently expanding. The stakeholder then tells the organisation that the reason why he/she thinks this way is because he/she saw the dog image used by Breeze Creatives' logo on a building in Sunderland. He/She then asks Breeze Creatives to recommend an artist studio for him/her.

Sunderland, the region mentioned in the post, is listed as the second most working-class region in the North East by *Chronicle Live* – the local newspaper – during 2015 general election period (Kelly., 2015). Therefore, the movement of Breeze Creatives reflects the vision given in the mission-and-vision statement: it is aiming at improving the cultural landscape of the North East and facilitating the arts for people from a diverse range of backgrounds. In addition, as previously analysed, the founders try to break the barriers in the art world and to bring diversity into the North-East art world. Therefore, the people with underprivileged social backgrounds, such as working-class people, are targeted by Breeze Creatives' strategic vision.

Firstly, Breeze Creatives' logo clarifies the organisation's vision. In this post, the dog image, which is identity-embedded, functions as a visual brand element that links the abstract vision of this corporate brand with a real movement that the brand is currently taking. This strategic movement can be checked by the brand's cultural group in their day-to-day lives. The strategic movement relates to Sunderland, a place that represents a group of underprivileged people in the North East. This movement demonstrates that Breeze Creatives is doing what it promises to do in its vision: improving the situation of the art world in the North East and widening access to the arts. By seeing the logo on the door in Sunderland, Breeze Creatives' cultural group may trust this brand's vision more. As a result, the bond between Breeze Creatives and its cultural group is strengthened.

Secondly, the dog image aligns the marketing communication that occurs in different places: on a door in Sunderland and on Instagram. Through this alignment, the identity of Breeze Creatives – helping people with underprivileged social backgrounds – is shared with multiple stakeholders (e.g. 4 people commented, 48 stakeholders gave Likes). As discussed, aligned marketing communication and visual branding elements (e.g. logo) enhance corporate brand identity (Podnar & Balmer, 2013). Hence, this identity-embedded logo assist Breeze Creatives to make its brand identity clear to its cultural group. Through the identity clarification, Breeze Creatives' brand identity is distinguished.

Thirdly, the online discussion caused by the logo informs the cultural group about the background of Breeze Creatives (e.g. Abject Gallery, Newcastle). Background information and discussions between a brand and its stakeholders help enhance the cultural group's trust for the brand (Habibi et al., 2014; Li et al., 2014). Because of this increased trust, one stakeholder has asked Breeze Creatives' advice to recommend a studio for him/her in the post.

Overall, in Breeze Creatives' case, one way of applying its identity-oriented positioning is embedding the directive-stakeholders' shared identity into the visual brand elements, for example, the logo. This identity-embedded logo facilitates the clarification of the brand's vision and identity, aligning Breeze Creatives' marketing communication. Therefore, the trust of the brand's cultural group is increased. As a result, the identity-oriented positioning is enhanced by an identity-embedded visual brand element. In fact, as a corporate brand, Breeze Creatives is considered as "a main mover" by *The Guardian* for its cultural influence in its region. On 21<sup>st</sup> December 2016 (modified on 14<sup>th</sup> February 2017) *The Guardian* published *The Alternative City Guide* to Newcastle, depicting the organisation as an "energetic cultural facilitator... which shows diverse, interrogative work from national and international artists in all manner of media" (Naylor, 2017).

### **6.3 Distinguishing a cultural group**

As discussed, in an arts organisation like Breeze Creatives, brand positioning is influenced by the directive-stakeholders' shared identity. However, can a reactive-stakeholder contribute to brand positioning in corporate branding? As my study suggests that cultural group is one of the three key dimensions (together with identity and brand advantage) of identity-oriented positioning, this section explores how, in the arts, identity may distinguish a corporate brand to its cultural group. The cultural approach finds that information exchanged between stakeholders, such as differences in ideology/identity, can cause cultural issues for a brand (see Chapter 3). The analysis of cultural issues may reveal the relationship between a reactive-stakeholders' identity and identity-oriented positioning.

In April 2015, Bamburgh House was about to be released to Breeze Creatives. A meeting was held to discuss Breeze Creatives' concerns on how to manage each floor. In this meeting, the three founders exchanged opinions regarding what happened before and what should be done in the future. In terms of how to manage the whole building, the founders wished to work with two artists (reactive-stakeholders). Some talks were held with the artists who were suggested to manage a floor in the building. However, as the strategy of this organisation was changing,

these two artists were no longer receiving a floor. One of the artists hence had an argument with Breeze Creatives and an issue arose. An explanation is given by one of the founders:

When we were first thinking about how Bamburgh House could run, we considered adopting the system of Commercial Union (CU) House, in which each floor is run by a different organisation. We were interested in this as we would have been able to divide the building into subject specialism areas. However, we quickly realised that it would be financially detrimental to our organisation, so we changed our mind. The catalyst for us to change our mind was that, at first we had spoken to Sarah Wilkinson (from Thinking Digital) and XXX (from YYYY) about the possibility for a design floor. What we quickly realised, however, is that in doing this we would be giving creative control away and the organisation would be diluted, and we would have to constantly negotiate with other people to make sure that the direction in which they would take the floor fitted with what we hoped for the building. Alongside this, we were worried that by separating the floors (into subject areas), we would generate clusters of the same type of artists; if this was to happen, then our hope for cross-collaborative practices would not be possible.<sup>71</sup>

In this case, the final decision of not dividing the building into specialist area is made according to the organisation's vision: "hope for cross-collaborative practices". This decision reflects the positioning of this corporate brand – providing opportunity to a diverse range of people. Therefore, the two artists are no longer assigned a floor to manage. Moreover, as the founder of Breeze Creatives expresses in the quote, it is significant for a corporate brand to be under control of its founders, as this is the only way that they can be sure that their brand is developed according to the given positioning. Strategic positioning is based on the shared identity of the directive-stakeholders. Hence, this decision reflects the identity-oriented positioning of the corporate brand.

However, two reactive-stakeholders of Breeze Creatives responded to this strategic decision in different ways. It is observed that, the founders (directive-stakeholders) had a discussion with two artists (reactive-stakeholders) and explained the reasons for the decision. The following explanation is given by one of the founders:

We have continued to have a great relationship with Sarah Wilkinson, who, after it was explained to her why she couldn't run the floor, was really happy. XXX on the other hand has not spoken with us since, despite the fact that she rents space from us. In fact, she has been very difficult to work with since. Sunderland 10x10 (which we won) was designed by Sarah Wilkinson, and we continue to work with her on this level, and will

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<sup>71</sup> Observation summary.

do more in the future as she has just taken on a role for Fusion, which is a regional arts initiative (focused on digital, as it is her subject specialism).<sup>72</sup>

After the explanation, one of the reactive-stakeholders, Sarah Wilkinson, appears understanding and continues to collaborate with Breeze Creatives on a large government-funded project in Sunderland in 2017. However, the other reactive-stakeholder, XXX, is believed to have broken off her relationship with this organisation. To understand the reason why these two stakeholders respond in very different ways, Wilkinson is interviewed and she reveals her ideology in the conversation:

I have been always very interested in doing public events, to generate a broader impact and to learn individuals while they are working on a daily basis, to know about their issues, which provides space for peoples, engaging conversations and bring up ideas and see what kind of strategies people are bringing into the sector. I think it is just a very practical way of evolving in and provoking the sector, in a proactive way, that is one of the most important reason of why I make big effort to try to do these public events.<sup>73</sup>

This quote explains the reason why Wilkinson becomes enthusiastic about public arts events and what kind of activities she thinks should be involved to provoke the arts sector: “to generate a broader impact and to learn individuals”. By doing so, Wilkinson believes ideas can be brought into the art sector. She thinks knowing an individual’s issues, strategies and ideas is the way of provoking the arts. The words “broader impact” reveal that Wilkinson believes in the idea that more people should be involved in the arts. The words “to learn individuals” and “to know about their issues” reveal that she is interested in individualism. These ideological thoughts reflect part of social and personal identity of Wilkinson. Overall, this quote reveals the fact that Wilkinson (reactive-stakeholders) shares a similarity with the founders (directive-stakeholders) of Breeze Creatives in terms of social and personal identity. As a person who has a bachelor and a master’s degree in Fine Art and currently doing PhD in Fine-Art research, Wilkinson believes that it is significant for the art world to interact with people from different backgrounds, which is also one of reasons why Breeze Creatives’ founders establish their organisation. Identity similarity enables Breeze Creatives to form a tighter bond with reactive-stakeholders such as Wilkinson. The bond may also help the organisation in solving problems and future collaborations, hence Wilkinson and Breeze Creatives collaborate on another project – Sunderland 10x10.

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<sup>72</sup> Observation summary.

<sup>73</sup> Interview with Sarah Wilkinson, May 2016.

The other reactive-stakeholder XXX refused to be interviewed and stressed the fact that she is only renting a studio from Breeze Creatives in her email.<sup>74</sup> In order to understand the reason, conversations with several other studio holders were conducted in Bamburgh House. Through these conversations, XXX is depicted as a funding-oriented artist. It was said that her decision would most likely be made upon the fact whether a project would bring funding.<sup>75</sup> Thus, she is perceived as an artist who is happy with following the pattern designed by authorities, such as Arts Council England or other funding bodies. This ideology appears to be in conflict with that of the directive-stakeholders of Breeze Creatives. As discussed, they believe in individualism and they do not wish to do projects only to satisfy the authorities.

Breeze Creatives' issues reveal that ideology/identity similarity distinguishes whether or not a reactive-stakeholder may commit to the brand's cultural group. In contemporary visual arts, this may distinguish with whom a corporate brand should collaborate, in order for the branding process not to deviate from its positioning. In Breeze Creatives' case, although reactive-stakeholders may come into conflict with the brand, as long as the ideology/identity similarity is shared, collaborations may still be formed according to the positioning. Therefore, in an arts organisation, identity similarity between directive-stakeholders and reactive-stakeholders may determine a committed cultural group – a mindshare group, and this mindshare group may help strengthening the corporate brand's positioning.

#### **6.4 Mindshare group and positioning**

Identity similarity shapes a mindshare group, yet for a corporate brand in the arts, may identity-oriented positioning be strengthened through the shaping process for a mindshare group? How may stakeholders' identity influence the brand's positioning? Answers may be revealed by analysing the online and offline branding process of Breeze Creatives.

##### **Online mindshare and positioning**

In a post published on Instagram on 6<sup>th</sup> October 2016, Breeze Creatives shows a painting by the artist Mao Kai, who is to have a solo exhibition named *Superior Animals* in collaboration with Breeze Creatives. The painting is posted the day before the preview night, for promotional purposes. In the painting, a long-necked rabbit sporting long brown waving hair, and attired in fur clothes, stands in front of a countryside scene resembling the Lake District. The description beside the post states: "one of Mao Kai's Superior Animals #paintings looks rather like

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<sup>74</sup> Observation summary.

<sup>75</sup> Observation summary.

someone from a certain royal family.” The hashtags beside the image include #katemiddleton #katemiddletonstyle #royalfamily #princess.



**Figure 10 Breeze Creatives' Instagram post 2**

Source: screenshot of Breeze Creatives' Instagram post

Social media is a type of rich media, in which information can be exchanged by different message senders and receivers for branding purposes (see Chapter 2). Push communication strategy is adopted in this post, and the brand (Breeze Creatives) tries to play a role of opinion leader delivering ideological ideas – a disagreement of social differences – to its cultural group. This idea is derived from the directive-stakeholders' shared identity. As discussed, the founders of Breeze Creatives declare that they do not wish to obey authority and do not agree with social differences. One of the brand's vision is to provide opportunities for diverse range of people to access the Fine Art world. It can be seen from the post that Breeze Creatives expresses scorn towards the royal family. The description indicates the similarity between the appearance of a rabbit and someone from the royal family, creating a metaphor about the royals. The rhetorical style of the language is sarcastic. This reveals that the directive-stakeholders of this corporate brand disagree with social differences. This attitude is carried by artist Mao Kai's painting and

is transferred into a message through the description representing the ideology of Breeze Creatives. This ideology is carried by the artwork, and is delivered through the social media platform on behalf of this corporate brand to distinguish this brand on the art market. Therefore, the ideology forms part of this brand's identity.

Elements such as texts, images, signs or rhetoric are used in communication as cultural carriers for cultural purposes (Barthes, 1977). These carriers assist people in their ideology construction (Berger, 2010). Ideology is "a point of view on one of these important cultural constructs that has become widely shared and taken for granted, naturalised by a segment of society as a truth" (Holt & Cameron, 2010, p. 174). Ideology forms a significant part of a brand identity; it is the foundation of branding and profoundly shapes the consumers' everyday evaluation and actions into a "mindshare group" (Holt & Cameron, 2010, p. 174). In other words, sharing ideological ideas shapes a cultural group into a "mindshare group". In Breeze Creatives' case, the online communication about ideological ideas acts as an instrument of mindshare. It shapes Breeze Creatives' cultural group into a mindshare group and, through this process, the brand identity of this corporate brand – the disagreement of social differences – emerges. Consequently, its positioning of bringing diversity into the arts is strengthened.

Brand positioning may also be strengthened by an enhanced brand image through sharing mind. As one of the key dimension of corporate branding (vision, image and culture), brand image reflects the impression stakeholders have for a brand (see Chapter 3). Brand image can stand out if the cultural group is shaped into a mindshare group (Holt & Cameron, 2010). In Breeze Creatives' case, social media provides platforms for this corporate brand to strengthen its branding positioning through enhancing its brand image.

During the communication in the post, the directive-stakeholders are the "message sender". The reactive-stakeholders are the "message receiver". The social media platform is the "medium". The "message" is the brand identity that is encoded by the directive-stakeholders' shared identity of Breeze Creatives. Social media discussion creates a dynamic environment, enabling people to exchange their opinions about a brand (Luo et al., 2015). In the comment area, stakeholders of Breeze Creatives' cultural group give feedback and the feedback can be seen by the whole cultural group. In this case, the directive-stakeholders play a role of opinion leaders who try to influence other stakeholders in the cultural group. The ideology and identity pushed by the opinion leaders may or may not be accepted by the cultural group. However, if

the cultural group accepts the ideology, this cultural group will be formed into a mindshare group (Holt, 2004).

In the post, reactive-stakeholders receive the messages about the brand identity of Breeze Creatives and leave feedback in the comment area. 32 Likes, 2 emoji icons and 2 texts are given by stakeholders. The emoji icons show *victory* and *loving eyes* signs; the two text-feedback are “Love this!” and “Well done!”. Signs and text express opinions that reflect identity (see Chapter 3). Here, the text and the signs left by comments reveal the identity shared by the directive and the reactive-stakeholders, that they are opposed to social differences. This shared identity constructs the group identity of Breeze Creatives. In this mind-sharing process, all stakeholders have contributed to the group identity construction, which forms the cultural group into a mindshare group. Through sharing mind, Breeze Creatives’ brand image – the impression held by the reactive-stakeholder – is enhanced. Stakeholders understand that Breeze Creatives is opposed to social differences and it is willing to bring diversity to the arts. This way, Breeze Creative’s positioning is further strengthened.

#### **Day-to-day mind sharing and positioning**

Sharing mind between stakeholders on daily basis may construct a unified identity for a brand’s cultural group. For a corporate brand, this unified identity may clarify the direction of the development of the brand, which further strengthens its positioning. The following is an example of a reactive-stakeholder, showing how he gains the feeling of being a member of the mindshare group built by Breeze Creatives:

The personalities of Alex and Zoe and Dan – the Breeze Creatives as a whole – are really important. In here, people bump into each other on the corridor and suddenly we are looking at each other’s work. Everyone is blown away by the power which has drawn us together, everyone is so supportive and on the same wavelength. I was going to say I don’t know if I was going to feel the same way about it in here if I hadn’t known Breeze Creatives on a personal level, but from what I’ve seen of how people have started to fit in, how we got on, I think there is something on that level, that just filters through. Again, I think that is about honesty as well. We’re just not corporate people, we are just ourselves. I think one of the things I’ve learned over the years is the capacity to smell bullshit. Sometimes I can see it’s pretty serious bullshit, it is pretty sinister and I want no part of it. Other times it’s just the usual day-to-day bullshit by which most people live their lives, but I just want something beyond that. I sense it whether they are an honest or dishonest personality, I can sense it quite quickly. I say personality rather than person, whether what they are projecting is an honest projection of them as a human being or whether it’s a concocted, sculpted, egocentric vision of themselves. There’s not much of the latter in Bamburgh House, that’s why my friends here are my

friends, that is how much it is valuable in here, searching enquiring minds, and don't accept the commonplace mentalities or moralities.<sup>76</sup>

In this conversation, David Turnbull, a studio holder in Bamburgh House, expresses how much he loves being a member of a mindshare group, Breeze Creatives' cultural group. There are particularly noticeable identity reasons that explain why he feels supported by this group. As he mentions, "everyone is blown away by the power which has drawn us together, everyone is so supportive and on the same wavelength", "we are just not corporate people, we are just ourselves". Here, the term "corporate people" used by this interviewee refers to the people who fit into the working environment of large enterprises, and who are happy to follow authorities. It underlines the similarity between people's ideologies in Breeze Creatives and David Turnbull's belief of individualism, which reflects the shared identity of the three founders of Breeze Creatives. Moreover, David Turnbull does not want to conform to the normal social convention, he explains, "searching enquiring minds" and rejection of "the commonplace mentalities or moralities" play an essential role for him in friendship searching. These beliefs show an intention that David Turnbull positions himself outside of a system, it reflects the positioning of Breeze Creatives' – to be alternative in the arts.

A shared identity tightens the bond between David Turnbull (a reactive-stakeholder) and the brand (Breeze Creatives). In addition, a concept, value, is proposed by him. He explains the value as "how much it is valuable in here". It shows that Turnbull has found an ideological agreement with Breeze Creatives. This shared ideological agreement forms a unified identity between him and the brand. As David Turnbull emphasises, the three founders' personality is really important, and in Breeze Creatives "people bump into each other on the corridor and suddenly we are looking at each other's work", "everyone is blown away by the power which has drawn us together". Turnbull's observation reveals that directive-stakeholders' shared identity can be delivered to the reactive-stakeholders through sharing mind daily. The mind sharing constructs a shared ideology for all stakeholders. When the mind sharing is completed, the unified ideology may guide the stakeholders' daily practice. In a successful mindshare group, stakeholders' practices reflect the positioning of the corporate brand. In Breeze Creatives' case, stakeholders' day-to-day practices reflect the brand positioning: bringing diversity and widening access to the arts.

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<sup>76</sup> Interview with David Turnbull, May 2016.

The following example demonstrate that, in a mindshare group, stakeholders are likely to support a brand's strategic decision. A conversation took place at the bar area of Abject Gallery in Bamburgh House; two studio holders started to talk about an issue caused by an artist. In the past, these two studio holders formed frequent professional collaborations with Breeze Creatives. Therefore, they have formed a strong bond with the founders of the corporate brand. The issue mentioned by them is about an artist who refused to pay rent, giving an explanation that paying rent may be "a cultural difference", as she is an American. This American artist is three-month late in paying rent to Breeze Creatives yet is still trying to keep using the studio. Two studio holders joked about it, "According to her, American artists would not realise that they should pay rent." "Ha-ha, I don't know what to say." One of the studio holders thought that cultural difference is a poor excuse, "What cultural difference is this? Americans don't pay rent? You're kidding me". In the end of the conversation, the two studio holders suggested an operational decision to the founders: "have a talk with her and kick her out if she refuses to pay rent." Later after this conversation, the founders arranged a meeting with their business advisor to seek a solution and were suggested to end the contract with the artist without pursuing back payment to avoid more potential management cost. It appears that the suggestion given by these studio holders is highly synchronised with the business advisor's.<sup>77</sup>

In this case, two stakeholders were not indifferent to the situation that Breeze Creatives face – somebody does not pay rent. Instead, they suggested an operational decision that benefits the corporate brand, as the brand has formed a strong bond with them. It can be seen from this case that agreements that may benefit a corporate brand are more likely to be made if stakeholders feel they are members of a mindshare group. This case suggests that, for corporate branding in the arts, a mindshare group is more likely to assist a corporate brand in achieving its brand positioning.

The analysis in this section shows that sharing ideas about ideology/identity helps shape a corporate brand's cultural group into a mindshare group. During mind sharing, the shared ideology/identity may be constructed into a unified identity of the group, which is agreed by all stakeholders in the group. Mind sharing clarifies a corporate brand's positioning to its stakeholders. When mind sharing is completed successfully, stakeholders of a corporate brand may even commit their practice to support the brand's positioning. In a mindshare group,

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<sup>77</sup> Observation summary.

strategic decision and actions are likely to be processed easier, which assists the positioning of the corporate brand.

### **6.5 Identity negotiation and positioning**

Mind sharing assists in constructing a unified identity for a brand's mindshare group, benefits the brand's positioning. However, identity is culturally educated and negotiated (Bourdieu, 2010). When communication takes place, an identity negotiation may occur between the brand and its stakeholders (McCracken, 1990). Hence, for a corporate brand, identity negotiation may occur between stakeholders during a mind sharing process. Might brand positioning be influenced by identity negotiation? This section explores stakeholders' identity negotiation which occurs in Breeze Creatives' branding process.

Taking Mao Kai's exhibition, *Superior Animals*, as an example, in an Instagram post, the understanding of one feature of his painting is negotiated and altered during branding process.<sup>78</sup> In Mao's paintings, every character has a long neck, no matter regarding a person or an animal. Each animal possesses a human body dressed in human clothes. This feature gives Mao's paintings a certain uniqueness when curiosity is caused by these long necks. At the preview night on 7<sup>th</sup> October 2016, an audience member found the style eye catching, prompting them to ask Mao why he painted this way. Mao replied, "I think humans are animals, we don't have much differences, I paint these long necks to show how proud we are [for being human], and actually, it's odd."<sup>79</sup> This idea is also reflected by the conversations with Mao before paintings created. He said:

This is how the young generation sees itself, especially the generation born in 90s China, they always see themselves as superior to the others. However, no generation is better than the other ones. Self-righteousness, that is what I would call the new generation. No, not just the new generation, the entire human society. This is also the common mistake that human beings make. We always see ourselves as superior to other animals, yet, at the end, we are animals too. This long neck is a metaphor of human behaviour, the smugness and self-satisfaction, sometimes the selfishness. Especially in modern society, people couldn't care less about others. It is all about satisfying human beings themselves, to become what we want to be in this society.<sup>80</sup>

Originally, the long-neck feature is created to show human's conceit. Mao Kai sees the long necks as metaphors for "smugness and self-satisfaction", "self-righteousness", complacency

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<sup>78</sup> <https://breezecreatives.com/object-gallery/mao-kai>

<sup>79</sup> Observation summary.

<sup>80</sup> Observation summary.

and “sometimes selfishness” of human beings. However, as exemplified in the Instagram post, more meanings are added into this image when it is communicated for marketing purposes. Firstly, in terms of the long neck, the self-righteousness is reinterpreted and linked to the upper class, the feature is interpreted into a meaning of superiority of upper class. Secondly, the rabbit is interpreted as a metaphor of a certain person from the royal family, while originally Mao does not see the animal this way. Thirdly, the rhetoric of the description scorns the upper-class family. Therefore, in the branding process of Breeze Creatives, the painting is used to express the idea of resisting inequality in society, which reflects this corporate brand’s positioning. In the corporate branding process of Breeze Creatives, the artist’s idea is reinterpreted and reinvented by the brand. The artwork functions as a cultural carrier expressing the identity of this corporate brand. By doing so, the brand’s positioning is strengthened. The artworks created by Breeze Creatives’ artists are likely to represent their identities (see Chapter 5). In this case, the reinterpretation and reinvention of meaning is a process of identity negotiation between the artist and Breeze Creatives. In this identity negotiation, the artist’ identity is negotiated according to Breeze Creatives’ brand positioning – bringing diversity to the arts. Mao Kai has little chance of knowing how the brand would promote his paintings for his exhibition. After the post is published, he has few opportunities, even if he would, to correct the ideas shared by the brand. In this negotiation, the identity of the artist is altered in order to benefit the brand. This way, the brand identity and positioning of Breeze Creatives is enhanced.

What is notable is that online communication enables everybody to comment and to alter the meaning of the original content published online (Valcke & Lenaerts, 2010). The reinvention of artists’ ideas may not only be done by a brand; it is possible for any audience or marketer to generate these reinventions. Therefore, this case highlights that, after an artwork is published and discussed on social media, the meaning expressed through the artwork may no longer be the same. The ideology/identity may be negotiated through online discussions. Branding benefit, such as strengthening the brand positioning, may be created by the discussion, although new interpretation may not reflect the artist’s original thoughts.

Another example is a misinterpreted proposal for artist Fang Qi’s exhibition *The Reversible Future*.<sup>81</sup> The topic of this exhibition is misunderstood by the founders of Breeze Creatives. In order to access the thoughts of the founders about Fang’s solo exhibition in Abject Gallery, a conversation was held with one of the founders and an event organiser after Fang submitted

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<sup>81</sup> <https://breezecreatives.com/abject-gallery/fang-qi>

her proposal. Their response was surprising, as they believe the proposal is bold and cool, because the exhibition is about human being's nature – orgasm. “It is about orgasm, it is alternative and cool, nobody did this before. We think that it will be really bold.” “I know it should have been done long time ago but just nobody did it, surprisingly.” “It is a natural thing, it is something that human beings share, I wonder why nobody did it.” However, in Fang Qi's proposal, the word “orgasm” was never mentioned. The word used in the proposal was actually “organism” (although, organism may be little used in English). Therefore, I was confused, as I was sure that there was no ‘orgasm’ mentioned in the proposal. I asked another founder to check if I misremembered: “is it orgasm or organism?” She reassured me, for what she recalled, “it is orgasm”. To establish which was correct – “orgasm” or “organism”— I phoned the artist, who was also surprised and suspected that she had put a wrong word in the proposal. However, after a double check on the document, she confirmed that she put the correct word in the proposal: “It is ‘organism’ not ‘orgasm’.”<sup>82</sup>

Freud and Freud (1986) indicated that repressed intention may lead people's behaviour in the way that satisfies their subconscious. The founders share an identity of positioning themselves outside the mainstream, which is why they declare that they are anti-authority. This is one of the reasons why Breeze Creatives is positioned as a brand that creates an alternative way of operation in the arts. As a result, the founders are keen on representing bold thoughts. With the motivation of being bold, the founders of Breeze Creatives mistook the key word “organism” as “orgasm”, because the latter may enable the exhibition to express their shared identity. In this incident, Fang's idea “organism” was adopted as a key concept of her exhibition; so, becoming a representation of her ideology and identity. However, this ideology/identity is negotiated with the shared identity of the founders and the event organiser of Breeze Creatives. Namely, the artist's identity is negotiated according to the brand positioning. As a result, the positioning – improving the situation of the art world through alternative ways – can be strengthened.<sup>83</sup>

In summary, Fang's case reveals that, in the arts, a corporate brand is likely to choose an idea over others when the idea can represent its founders' shared identity, as this shared identity affects the positioning of the brand. The shared identity also affects the identity negotiation between the brand and its stakeholders.

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<sup>82</sup> Observation summary.

<sup>83</sup> “Organism” was used in Fang's exhibition after the founders realised their mistake.

## **6.6 Identity negotiation and the cultural myth**

Identity negotiation is influenced by the founders' shared identity and brand positioning. However, does the negotiation enable corporate branding? Cultural myth is one of the key elements of cultural expression, it is a narrative created with symbolic value and attached to a brand (Holt, 2005). It increases the symbolic value of a brand (Barthes, 1973; Oswald, 2015). Does identity negotiation create cultural myth? Unplanned communication may bring unexpected influences for a brand (see Chapter 2). In this study, unplanned communication observed between an artist and an audience member creates a myth. What aspect cultural myth may help the branding of Breeze Creatives? Brand image, which refers to the impression that stakeholders have for a brand, is one of the three key aspects of corporate branding (see Chapter 3). This section explores whether and how the cultural myth created by identity negotiation may influence brand image of Breeze Creatives.

At the preview night of Mao Kai's exhibition, I worked as his interpreter, explaining the genre of the paintings and how they were created, and introducing his artworks, concepts, and ideology. Hence, there were opportunities to converse with the audience regarding the artist's ideas. In some conversations, the audience provided more profound interpretations of Mao's work than the artist himself. Some metaphors were deeply analysed through the knowledge processed by the audience. For some paintings, audience interpreted each of the elements, regarding them as metaphors. Yet the artist did not create these elements from a metaphorical point of view. Instead, the paintings were created from a more aesthetic perspective, with initial thoughts on the overall ideas and styles in mind.



**Figure 11 The pregnant woman**

Source: Mao Kai, 2016

For example, *The Pregnant Woman* (figure 11) shows a stag standing beside the swollen belly of a pregnant woman. At the preview, an audience member asked whether the artwork was influenced by the psychoanalytical theories of Freud, and why the woman was wearing an ancient Chinese costume. In response to this question, Mao privately told me that it was simply because he thought the painting would look better with something beside the woman, in order not to let her stand alone. The costume was added for the same reason – to make her look more beautiful. However, Mao could not decide whether or not to accept the explanation given by his audience. He thought the new explanation may give a more profound interpretation to his work, so that the art world may pay more attention to it, although he is aware of the fact that the new interpretation did not match his original ideas.

This unplanned communication between Mao Kai and the audience member is an identity negotiation caused by discussion of imagery. Images represent ideology and identity (see Chapter 3). People maintain identities in a personal and social world by consuming items that convey symbolic meaning. It is indicated by Bourdieu (2010) that people attach their identity to artworks. Therefore, clearer symbolic meaning with added value benefits people by fulfilling their needs of identity construction. In this case, Mao's original ideology did not relate to

psychoanalytical theory, a western-dominant theory, instead, he wanted to reflect human's self-righteousness through his paintings. However, during this unplanned communication, what Mao's ideology is and how to explain his ideology are negotiated. The artist's identity is negotiated with the audience member. Extra meanings are created into a narrative about Freud's theory. This narrative is suggested for Mao's artwork.

Narratives are considered elements facilitating brands to strengthen their brand images for stakeholders (see Chapter 3). For Breeze Creatives, the narrative created in this identity negotiation can be perceived as a cultural myth, which adds symbolic value to a brand (Preece & Kerrigan, 2015). Cultural myth can facilitate branding if it is conveyed from a brand's ideology. In this process, cultural myth carries the brand and imparts an ideologies to its stakeholders (Oswald, 2015). After studying some of the brands that carry a certain ideology, such as Jack Daniel's whiskey, it is assumed that only when the ideology is embedded in myth the conceptual statement makes sense and becomes comprehensible at a visceral level, resonating with the brand's consumers (Holt, 2002; Holt & Cameron, 2010). Studies on artworks also suggests that, when a concept or an idea about an artwork is represented by a cultural myth, it brings out the cultural features and the ideology behind the artwork, which makes it easier for audiences to understand. This way, the artwork's symbolic value will increase, and benefits will accrue to both the artwork and the artist (Preece & Kerrigan, 2015).

During the discussion about *The Pregnant Woman*, a cultural myth is created by the audience member. The myth is based on Freud's psychoanalytical theory, which is acknowledged by the public for its analysis of the relationship between mothers and children. The audience member indicates connections between the belly and the stag while artist Mao Kai accepts the interpretation. This is due to the fact that psychoanalytical theory has established a reputation in its field. The theory appears in various types of critical works in the arts (Spector, 1972). Hence, Mao sees the opportunity of adding extra value into his painting. If the artist adopts this myth, his painting, *The Pregnant Woman*, may no longer only be about the beauty of the composition, but may also be about significant human issues between mothers and children: a critique of human society. This added symbolic value may be attached to this piece of artwork, which is what the art world prefers.

Being an artist, Mao Kai is aware of the fact that this cultural myth may drive more attention in the art world, which may bring benefit to him. He therefore becomes hesitant on whether he should retain his original idea or should embrace a new one. Here, the cultural myth created

through this negotiation enables both artist and audience to form a new concept for the painting. Although the artist's ideology is negotiated, a created cultural myth provides possibilities to add extra value to artworks. The artist thus believes the new interpretation may be beneficial for him. At the same time, as painting is exhibited on behalf of Breeze Creatives, this concept constitutes an updated brand image of the corporate brand. In other words, a new cultural myth is created through identity negotiation, and the symbolic meaning of the myth may add extra value to the brand image. However, for Breeze Creatives, the new cultural myth is embedded with an academic theory, which may not be understood by people from all educational backgrounds. Therefore, embracing this myth may deviate Breeze Creatives from its brand positioning.

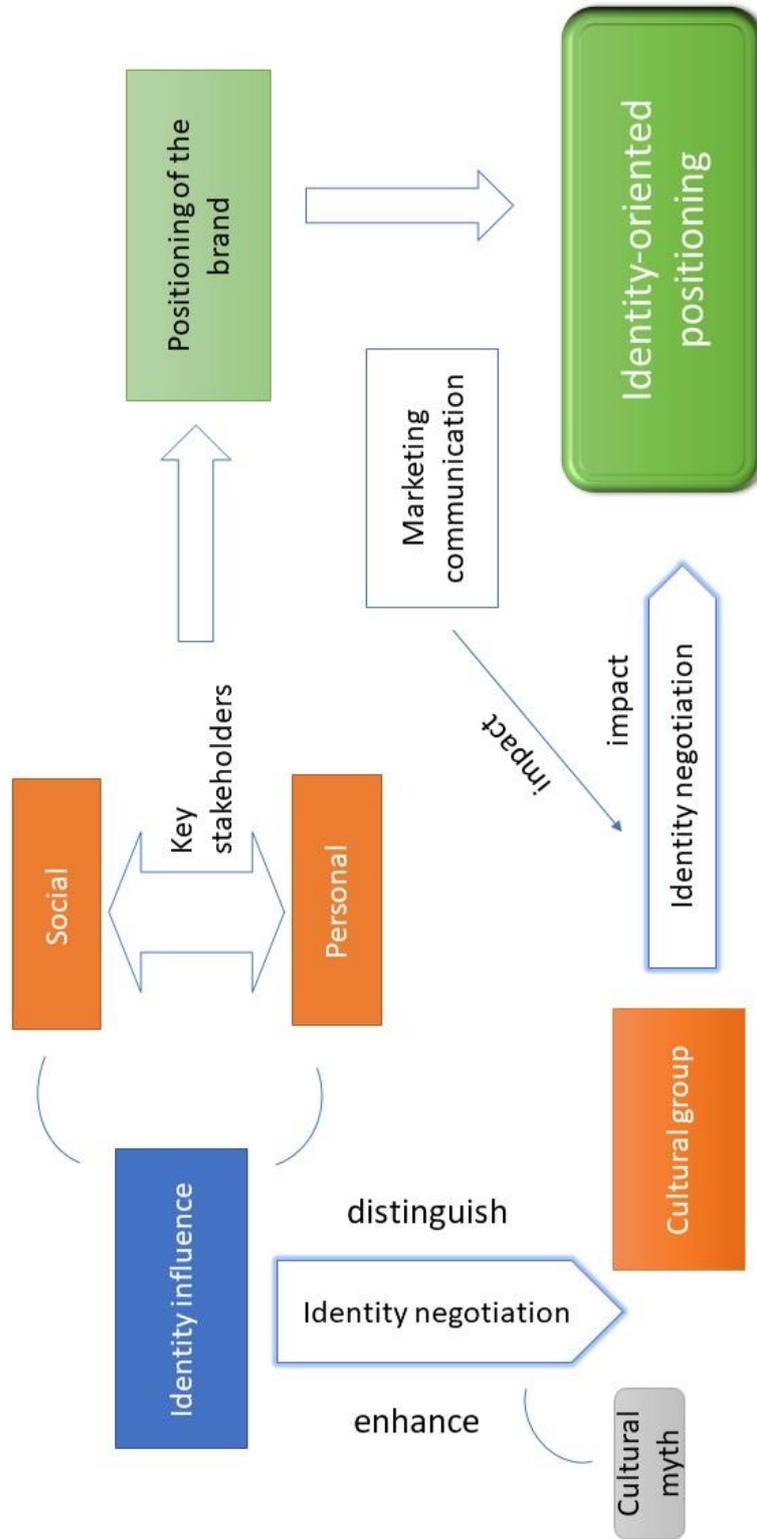
In addition, this case can demonstrate that the result of the identity negotiation may manifest itself randomly, since the identity negotiation may depend on stakeholders' knowledge, ideology, and identity, although, overall, extra value may still be created through communication between stakeholders and be added to the brand image that benefit corporate branding.

In summary, this chapter analysed how identity influences corporate brand positioning through the cultural group. To determine this influence, three dimensions are involved: strategic vision, brand identity, and brand image. It is found that, the founders' shared social and personal identity significantly affects the corporate brand's strategic vision and its brand identity. As a result, shared identity affects brand's positioning. This study indicates that positioning should be identity-oriented instead of competition-oriented, which constitutes a theory extension for corporate branding research. It is demonstrated in this chapter that, when a visual brand element is identity-embedded, the element aligns the marketing communication and facilitates corporate branding. The case shows that visual brand elements enhance Breeze Creatives' identity-oriented positioning.

Shared identity/ideology distinguishes the cultural group that has a potential to be shaped into a mindshare group. Through constructing a unified identity, a brand's positioning can be further clarified and accepted by its cultural group. As a result, the brand's stakeholders may commit their practice according to the brand's positioning.

It is revealed in this Chapter that, while the founders' shared identity significantly affects the brand's positioning, the identity between a brand and its stakeholders is negotiated, and the negotiation may, in turn, impact on the brand's positioning. During the negotiation, extra symbolic meaning may be produced.

## Chapter 6 – How the Group is Affected



## **Chapter 7**

### **Brand Advantage and Barrier**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter discusses how regional identity, social identity, and group identity reinforce, yet, at the same time, create barriers for branding in the arts. It analyses how brand advantages can be brought about by engaging in identity-oriented positioning.

Although branding is perceived to be necessary for the art world, difficulties and barriers still exist in the arts (see Chapter 5). Since corporate branding theory is designed for the commercial world, the theory does not take into consideration the macro level of the branding environment – the cultural environment – of the art world. The motivation to create artworks for artists in contemporary visual arts may vary according to their identities, and the business purposes of each arts organisation may be very different from the commercial world. Vague business categories in contemporary visual arts have created barriers to the application of commercial positioning theory in the arts. Therefore, for a corporate brand, especially to an artist-led one, its brand positioning should be identity-oriented instead of competition-oriented. Identity should take the place of business category and become one of the three key aspects of positioning for corporate branding in contemporary visual arts.

Chapter 6 analysed Breeze Creatives' cultural group and demonstrated how identity influences this corporate brand's positioning and other branding aspects in the arts. It is concluded that

identity influences a brand' positioning through visual brand elements, marketing communication and a mindshare group. It is found that identity even motivates stakeholders to commit their daily practice according to the positioning. Moreover, it is found that identity negotiation creates extra value for the brand image. These findings further constitute an extension to theory to current corporate branding research.

In this chapter, an analysis will be conducted on the final aspect of brand positioning – brand advantage. Data from the case study will be investigated to see whether identity-oriented positioning may influence corporate branding in the arts in a positive or negative way, and how it may underpin the branding in the arts. First of all, this chapter will investigate whether or not a corporate brand needs to study its competitive environment before it adopts an identity-oriented positioning strategy. Advantages and disadvantages may both be developed by this strategy. Second, the influence of the shared identity of a cultural group needs to be examined to establish whether brand advantage may increase when a corporate brand adopts an identity-oriented positioning, and how a corporate brand may achieve its identity-oriented positioning. Third, a cultural group is formed by various stakeholders, who may have different social backgrounds and completely different ideologies, therefore, whether or not these differences may cause barriers for corporate branding is key to answer. In addition to opening a discussion regarding potential branding barriers, this chapter will suggest ways of breaking through them.

## **7.1 Advantages brought by identity-oriented positioning**

### **7.1.1 Identity-oriented positioning and the competitive environment**

Commercial brand positioning theory believes that positioning for a brand is competition oriented (see Chapter 3). However, in arts organisations, positioning is influenced by the directive-stakeholders' social and personal identity (see Chapter 5). Positioning for an art organisation is more likely to be identity oriented. To recap, this result rests on three reasons. At the point of set up, the positioning of the organisation is influenced by the construction of the founder's shared identity. The need for identity construction affects an artist-led organisation's positioning from very beginning. Secondly, influence comes from the artists with whom an organisation collaborates. Artists play a major role in collaborating, because the organisation has to represent what artists believe. Therefore, their identity and ideology affect the positioning of the organisation. Thirdly, the positioning of a corporate brand, Breeze Creatives, is influenced by shared identity created through communication between the brand

and its cultural group, and between the stakeholders in the cultural group. During marketing communication, stakeholders negotiate their identities through topics about artwork. As a result, the stakeholders' shared identity created by this communication becomes accepted, and resonates with other stakeholders as well as the brand.

However, competitive advantage is not neglected by the founders of Breeze Creatives, even if their organisation's positioning is significantly influenced by their identity. In other words, even if Breeze Creatives practises identity-oriented positioning, competitive advantage is still considered, as the founders of the organisation are aware of its significance.

### **Identity-oriented positioning and competitive environment**

According to the observations, the founders of Breeze Creatives investigated the environment in North-east England prior establishing the organisation. The environment includes similar business types, products/services provided, and operational styles. The founders compared their organisation with other organisations and evaluated what potential advantages it might have in the North East, and even in the whole UK. The positioning of their organisation has taken account of competitive factors, potential advantages are anticipated.

I think there are similar organisations if you break it down into different sections... I don't know if there is anyone that replicates Breeze Creatives. There are studio buildings in Manchester and London offering an art course, [but] I don't know if they offer an art course that is certified in the same way as ours is, recognised by universities? I know there are studios out there who offer lecture series, but maybe they are not running as long as us, not being every week or every other week. There are lots of other studios, kind of angle themselves towards criteria such as "Fine Art graduates", their first criterion of them. Some of them just only have craft-based artworks. I think we are trying to have a complete level of diversity, in the sense that you can have a floor of studios [including] computer games makers, suit makers, knife makers, fine artists, graphic designers, in the idea that they all tagged to each other. Other studios want to focus so much, so they end up not looking out the outside world and only in their area and not really giving the creative diversity that the studio practice needs.<sup>84</sup>

In this quotation, one of the founders compares Breeze Creatives' operation to other organisations. Through this comparison, the competitive environment is clarified. It provides a clearer view of what business situation Breeze Creatives may face if they position this organisation according to the three founders' shared identity: bringing diversity to the arts. This founder gains his confidence through the comparison, when Breeze Creatives' positioning is

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<sup>84</sup> Interview with Alex Breeze, May 2016.

considered unique on the market. Here, the evaluation of the competitive environment is a supplement that offers support to a corporate brand's positioning in the early stage of the organisation's development. It provides evidence to the branding operation that the founders choose. Moreover, it gives a clear vision of what advantages the chosen positioning may bring to the corporate brand.

However, as stressed, the competitive environment is only a reference by which the directive-stakeholders measure their initial thoughts. It supports the idea of brand positioning rather than generating the idea. Here, the competitive evaluation did not change the founders' initiatives. In other words, the positioning – bringing diversity to the arts – is set by the shared-identity of the directive-stakeholders from very beginning, the competitive environment only provides reference to the founders on how far the positioning may be applicable, and based on the positioning, what kind of operational style may bring greater advantage. The competitive evaluation assists the organisation to realise its brand positioning. For example, in which market segment this organisation should lie, and how much should be charged for using the facilities. The competitive environment does not change the way in which the founders want to set up the organisation. However, through comparison, brand advantages can be thought about and decided upon, which enhances the founders' confidence about the brand's positioning.

We are trying to bridge a gap at the moment, certainly with the building of Bamburgh House. There are studios like us, but they are not as polished as we are. They are more kind of DIY. The studios are built with spaces but not linked to different elements of construction. On the other end of aspects, you've got spaces like Baltic 39, top end artist studios, they are very well polished, but they are very expensive – the cost compared with us. We are trying to go in the middle somewhere, so, offer the space at a fraction of the price of the Baltic 39, but also offer something more than the kind of shantytown of traditional artist studios, somewhere artists are practising in painting and sculpture in it. The graphic designers would share a corridor with fine-art professionals around them.<sup>85</sup>

In order to reach the positioning set for Breeze Creatives, an operational plan is unveiled by the founder of Breeze Creatives previously quoted. After comparing Breeze Creatives with other arts organisations, this founder gradually depicts how this organisation should be operated according to the market. Firstly, in terms of market segmentation, he considers that Breeze Creatives should be marketed as a middle-range organisation, which provides better

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<sup>85</sup> Interview with Alex Breeze, May 2016.

space for artists but charges a reasonable price. Secondly, he depicts how traditional artists and other contemporary artists should be arranged to work together. In his plan, a corridor should be a place shared by different categories of artists to stimulate inspiration.

This case indicates that, for an organisation, especially an artist-led organisation, competitive evaluation may back up the brand positioning for a corporate brand in the arts. It enhances the founders' confidence about this positioning, and it assists in managing their organisation according to the market, which benefits the corporate brand. For other stakeholders (e.g. the artists), appropriate operation offers more opportunities, which benefits them too. Therefore, although positioning for a corporate brand is set according to the shared identity of the founders, the evaluation of competitive environment helps branding operation find the place in the market, which enhances the corporate brand's brand advantages in the art world.

#### **Branding support offered by competitive environment**

When Breeze Creatives was founded, the founders were aware that the competitive environment was not ideal, especially for the art world in the North East. As discussed, they compared their own organisation with other organisations in one competitive environment: putting their organisation into the system of the art world, they evaluated competitive advantages and risks according to Breeze Creatives' positioning:

I think we are positioned within a country; we are here in the East coast of England. We are so disfranchised from anyone who makes any government rules. Actually, we are facing the whole Europe, why aren't we be more ambitious? Why aren't we saying: "if we can't work internally, let's work externally?" Let's work with the rest of the world, if we can't work with London. If we can't get the money streams, if we can't get support, why don't we get other opportunities? Why don't we restructure ourselves, just because I am living in a place which is rather depressing, economically, in terms of opportunities, which is completely forgotten about? Why don't we change that? If it is not working, change it! We have the ability to do it.<sup>86</sup>

This founder is offering three solutions in order to resolve the potential issue brought about by Breeze Creatives' positioning. These solutions are offered in consideration of this organisation's competitive environment. Firstly, the founder believes that Breeze Creatives should collaborate with organisations outside the North East. It should pay attention to the organisations from other regions in the UK, from Europe or even outside of Europe. "Let's work with the rest of the world" is suggested as a long-term strategy for Breeze Creatives.

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<sup>86</sup> Interview with Zoe Anderson, May 2016.

The reason why this corporate brand is offered this plan is firstly because this founder has realised that fierce competition exists in the North-east England due to the lack of economic development. The economy in the North East may not be able to support Breeze Creatives' positioning – building up a platform for people from all backgrounds to access the arts. Secondly, it is suggested that Breeze Creatives, as a corporate brand, should “restructure” itself in order to achieve its positioning. After comparing Breeze Creatives with other organisations, the founders realise that their organisation will be “disfranchised” and it will have less access to the “money streams”. As discussed previously, due to their shared identity, the founders decide to steer their organisation towards an alternative role, one that is not under the aegis of the authorities. Therefore, the founders have anticipated that Breeze Creatives may not receive support through traditional methods, prompting this corporate brand to set its own positioning in an alternative way. To survive, its operation style has to suit this positioning. Thirdly, an action about changing the impression and the reputation of the region is implied by this founder. The North East, where Breeze Creatives is located, is considered “a place which is rather depressing, economically, in terms of opportunities, which is completely forgotten”. Yet because of the positioning set for Breeze Creatives, a “change” is called for. The founders decide to form more collaborations with organisations outside this region in order for more opportunities to be brought into this region. Breeze Creatives' case shows that the evaluation of competitive environment may support identity-oriented positioning by offering specific branding strategies that assist in achieving the positioning.

### **7.1.2 Advantages brought by identity-oriented positioning**

#### **Identity similarity and competitive advantage**

Competitive advantage can sometimes be gained by an organisation through employing identity-oriented branding strategy. Its brand identity may facilitate it to distinguish compatible partners, especially when a corporate brand is relatively new. The advantages may be brought by factors related to social identity (e.g. region) and ideology. These factors affect how much advantage a corporate brand may receive in an art market, for example the North East. A corporate brand's positioning in the arts is likely to be affected by, and sometimes is a result of the shared identity of the founders of a corporate brand. Shared identity indirectly influences the advantages a brand may receive. In other words, the competitive advantage received by a brand is influenced by the shared identity of the founders. Therefore, if the founders change their shared identity, the brand positioning may be changed accordingly, as a consequence, their competitive advantage may end.

As discussed above, evaluation is necessary in order for an organisation to suit the competitive environment so that it can achieve its positioning. In contemporary visual arts, it does not appear to be the other way around, as is assumed in current branding theory. Identity-oriented positioning enables a corporate brand to alter its branding operations for competitive advantage, and sometimes similarity in identity brings unexpected advantages to a corporate brand, enhancing it in the market. The collaboration between Breeze Creatives and Arts Emergency is an example.

A launch event was held on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2015 at BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art by Breeze Creatives. This event was to announce a collaboration between Breeze Creatives and a national charity, Arts Emergency, a London-based organisation co-founded and run by Josie Long and Neil Griffiths.<sup>87</sup> It is dedicated to enabling disadvantaged people gain access to arts education through a mentorship programme, helping and encouraging underprivileged students to study arts. The two organisations decide to work together to draw more public attention to the fact that many students may not have a chance to study arts if they come from underprivileged family backgrounds. Breeze Creatives is to be the North East response centre for Arts Emergency.<sup>88</sup>

A major purpose of this event is to encourage people to do volunteer work in different forms. To attract public attention, this event involves multiple forms of arts: opera, dance, folk music, rock and roll bands, performance arts, and painting. The ground floor is occupied by different types of performances alongside several other participating organisations. A keynote speaker gave a speech on the principles of Arts Emergency and its mission-and-vision. The mission-and-vision statement is found on Arts Emergency's official website:

Learning to read poetry or philosophy or how to understand a painting or film are not elite pursuits, but now rising tuition fees and the withdrawal of public funding for the teaching of Arts and Humanities at university means they risk becoming so.

“Arts Emergency are highlighting the reversal of decades’ of social access to the arts, and by association the possible disappearance of whole strands of discourse and the loss

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<sup>87</sup> Josie Long is a well-known British comedian who has been performing for national television channel such as BBC 3; Neil Griffiths is a British writer who has gained public visibility through his books. *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/profile/neilgriffiths>

<sup>88</sup> Breeze Creatives (2018). The Arts Emergency Response Centre | BALTIC | 1st May 2015. Breeze Creatives. Retrieved 19 April 2018, from <https://breezecreatives.com/events/the-arts-emergency-response-centre>

of educational enfranchisement to future generations. Save the thinker!” – Stewart Lee  
89

What is addressed in this manifesto is that Arts Emergency has identified inequality in the art world, preventing access to the arts for people from underprivileged social backgrounds. This organisation consider that studying arts should not be a privilege for the elites. Instead, it stresses that the lack of support from Government is creating barriers for people with underprivileged backgrounds. A program is hence proposed in the manifesto supporting these underprivileged people. Here, firstly, Arts Emergency’s mission-and-vision statement happens to coincide with Breeze Creatives’ on certain aspects of their brand identity. As Breeze Creatives stands for bringing diversity into the arts, which reflects what Arts Emergency does: everybody should have an equal right to access the arts. Secondly, both organisations disagree with the current elite-oriented system in the art world. Breeze Creatives is working on an alternative way of boosting the arts instead of following this current system (see Chapter 6). Arts Emergency is trying to provide opportunities for underprivileged groups to access the arts. Therefore, the two corporate brands, Arts Emergency and Breeze Creatives, bear a great degree of similarity in their identity.

Approximately 200 people submitted their applications volunteering to help underprivileged young people during the public event. A plus for both brands, Breeze Creatives’ public visibility is increased and Arts Emergency’s reputation is enhanced. Founder Gibson expresses his gratitude for this collaborating relationship: “they are an established organisation, and they are from London”; another founder comments: “they are so excited about our idea to create a space that is accessible to everyone”.<sup>90</sup> Both comments indicate that identity-oriented positioning has gained Breeze Creatives’ advantages.

In addition to this event, more opportunities were proposed in January 2017. Breeze Creatives is chosen to hold another national event for Arts Emergency in Newcastle, to be held in December 2017. Bamburgh House was chosen over London Barbican Centre – a prestigious, national art centre – to be the host of this event. This event was perceived a significant step for Arts Emergency to build up their national reputation. Celebrities and famous artists were to be invited.

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<sup>89</sup> About us - Arts Emergency (2017). Arts Emergency. Retrieved 17 March 2017, from <http://www.arts-emergency.org/about-us/>

<sup>90</sup> Observation summary.

For a new corporate brand such as Breeze Creatives, this proved to be a rare opportunity. Comparing the two arts organisations, London Barbican Centre is a long-established organisation located in central London, it is well known nationally, whereas Breeze Creatives is a new and small organisation located in the North East. In order to establish why Arts Emergency chose Breeze Creatives over London Barbican Centre to be their venue for promotional event, a conversation is conducted with a directive-stakeholder of Breeze Creatives:

We just told them that if the event was held at the Barbican Centre in London, it would contradict the principles of the charity [Arts Emergency]. Arts Emergency's aim is to help underprivileged groups to gain equal right in arts education, and this event aims to encourage more people to pay attention to underprivileged kids, and unprivileged areas. So, if the event was held in a prestigious arts centre like the London Barbican, it would deliver the opposite message to the public, one that goes against the essence of Arts Emergency.<sup>91</sup>

In this case, identity-oriented branding strategy is competing with the commercial competition-orientated strategy, influencing the selection of partnership for Arts Emergency, an established national arts organisation, while identity-oriented positioning prompts this collaboration. In terms of brand recognition, London Barbican Centre clearly is more recognised by the public than Breeze Creatives: its location, reputation, and public visibility surpass Breeze Creatives, a new organisation in the art world. Collaborating with Barbican Centre may bring more visible benefits to Arts Emergency on this project. However, because of the brand identity Barbican Centre possesses, the high level of public visibility and its location (London) are suggesting a different brand image – that Barbican Centre is addressing the elite. As mentioned by the founders of Breeze Creatives, what London Barbican Centre represents may conflict with what Arts Emergency stands for. However, what Breeze Creatives represents share a fundamental similarity to Arts Emergency: it is located outside of London, its vision is to bring equality to public events and, as previously noted, it is moving into one of the most working-class regional areas. This is why Arts Emergency decided to enhance its positioning and chose Breeze Creatives as a partner.

In Breeze Creatives' case, identity-oriented positioning has brought opportunities, long-term partnerships and public awareness. It enhances this corporate brand by distinguishing appropriate partnerships. In this case, identity similarity is considered more important than

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<sup>91</sup> Observation summary.

other qualifications a corporate brand may have. Intangible benefit (such as brand identity clarification) wins over tangible benefit (such as public visibility) for Arts Emergency, so that more possibilities are brought to Breeze Creatives, a new and small corporate brand. It can be seen from this case that identity-oriented positioning may enhance the branding for an arts organisation through sharing its brand identity with other organisations. This suggests a distinctive feature of the art world suggested through Breeze Creatives' branding analysis: tangible benefits (such as public visibility) may be important for supporting a brand's positioning, however, if the tangible benefit conflicts with the intangible benefit, the intangible benefit (such as clarifying brand identity) may weigh more. From this example, it appears that identity clarification for a corporate brand is key for contemporary visual arts organisations, particularly when it comes to an artist-led one.

#### **Advantages brought by intangible factors**

Some intangible benefits, such as cultural myth, can be attached to artworks or arts organisations through communication or interaction with stakeholders (see Chapter 6). Intangible benefits can be attached to competitive advantages to enhance a corporate brand. Through this two-and-a-half-year study, intangible factors are found significant to the evaluation on an arts organisation in the art world.

Regional factors, social identity factors, and symbolic meaning factors appear to be key, when it comes to how artworks are evaluated. These factors may also influence the branding of an artist or an arts organisation. In other words, in the arts, cultural factors such as regional value, social identity and symbolic meaning significantly affect the overall brand image of a corporate brand. As a result, the brand advantage of a corporate brand in the art world will be increased. In comparison, tangible benefits may not be essential. When it comes to competitive evaluation for an arts organisation, some tangible benefits considered valuable in the commercial world may even harm the arts organisation as a corporate brand.

The case of Breeze Creatives demonstrates that financial gain is not a driving principle for running this organisation for the directive-stakeholders. Although income sometimes is an issue, the directive-stakeholders are proud of what they have done and will do in the future. For example, in a casual conversation on 1 February 2015, the founders revealed that each of them had to risk a large debt while being paid less than national minimum wage: "We would each have a half-million-pound debt, if this didn't work." The payment they received is considered inappropriately low: "Considering the risks and what we are doing, we get paid next

to nothing really; we are paid less than a bar-tender.” However, this serious wage issue did not discourage them from creating a platform to enable a diverse range of people to access the arts. Although some frustration is evident, the conversation kept going on about future plans.<sup>92</sup> This conversation reflects, again, the conclusion made in previous discussion: an arts organisation, especially an artist-led arts organisation, may not alter their positioning to obtain financial gain. In Breeze Creatives’ case, the founders are proud of what they have done because they are on track to achieve the final goal they set for themselves. This shows that, although in the art world, the evaluation of success may be generally based on tangible benefit that an organisation can bring, being successful may also be based on an identity-oriented evaluation (for example, has this organisation achieved the positioning set by its founders?). However, in the art world, some arts organisations put tangible benefits (such as financial gain) before intangible benefits, obtaining income by operating arts events and exhibitions. The example below exemplifies how an artist reacts to this operation.

In October 2016, Chinese artist Mao Kai was invited to hold his solo exhibition at Abject Gallery, which was very successful. Breeze Creatives’ public visibility is facilitated by the communication with audience, studio members, collaborators and other stakeholders. In addition, another factor also enhanced Breeze Creatives’ reputation: its disinterest in financial gain. Breeze Creatives did not charge Mao for showing work in their gallery. Instead, it paid his shipping cost. Moreover, the corporate brand contacted media in order for the artist to have appropriate media exposure, which helped the public access his show. For the effort Breeze Creatives made, Mao Kai felt grateful, revealing that he had to pay fee and shipping by himself to show his work in previous exhibitions in Japan, France and Italy: “I paid fees for the exhibition in Paris and in Italy. [...] Many organisations charge fees to show work for me, I was charged at the exhibition in Japan, and I will be charged for the show in France and in Italy.”

Financial gain is discouraged in the art world. The fact that Breeze Creatives did not charge fee is considered by artists as evidence of being “a professional organisation”. The artist comments: “This gallery is really professional. They didn’t charge me for my exhibition and the audience that came today is really interested in my work. [...] Some galleries invite random people to come to my exhibition, the audience were not interested in art at all.” In April 2017,

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<sup>92</sup> Observation summary.

the artist told me that he would have another solo exhibition in Venice, Italy, which is a part of Venice Biennale. It is also a paid exhibition. However, paying to show work is discouraged in the art world as well. After Breeze Creatives' directors realised that Mao Kai paid to have his work shown in exhibitions, they briefly discussed it and were scathing of it. One of the directors even commented: "I wouldn't put this kind of exhibition on my CV if I were him [...] It is a scandal in the view of the art world".<sup>93</sup>

Decisions may be influenced by other factors when choosing projects in Breeze Creatives, here is another example. Facing the under-pay issue, the founders have been trying to develop ideas for generating income. However, bringing income would clash with the organisation's identity, the project would not be taken forward. For example, in September 2016, an idea about having more fee-oriented education programmes over the "quiet time" in summer were brought up in a Breeze Creatives' meeting. Yet after discussing the benefits and potential damage this programme may generate, it was abandoned. A founder considers this idea is a "short-sighted" view: "If we do projects just to get more income, people [from the art world] will think we are not professional".<sup>94</sup>

There is often a negative relationship between the economic value and the artistic value of artists and artworks. "In commerce everything is measured in monetary term, which tends to degrade art; it lowers a particular artwork's aesthetic value. And so evidence of commerce must be swept under the mat" (Abbing, 2008, p. 57). Breeze Creatives' attitude towards the economic value of the arts reflects certain prevalent views in the art world: financial gain should not be something to be proud of. Although not having an appropriate income may be an issue for both the founders and artists, the operation of generating income by directly charging a fee to artists is still considered inappropriate. At the same time, paying fees to show work is perceived as a "scandal" in the view of Breeze Creatives. These cases demonstrate that, although tangible benefit (such as financial gain) may not be purely excluded from the purposes of producing artworks, exhibiting artworks is likely to be expected as a non-economic task, for both artists and arts organisations, if they expect to be critically accepted in the art world. Running an arts organisation is considered not directly related to tangible benefits, especially financial gain. However, from the art world's point of view, not prioritising financial gain does not mean an arts organisation is expected to work for nothing. Fillis (2006) states that artists

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<sup>93</sup> Observation summary.

<sup>94</sup> Observation summary.

work for art's sake more than for business' sake. Artists are more likely to work for self-expression and personal interest. However, research shows that "all cultural production is reward-oriented and guided by a desire for real or symbolic profit or advantage" (Swartz, 1997, p. 67). It supports my findings in the sense that, in the contemporary visual arts sector, a corporate brand may prioritise symbolic capital over financial gain.

Bourdieu (1993) suggests that financial gain may be brought by self-expression and personal interest, as long as these expressions and interest are produced, introduced, or promoted under the form that match the social group's expectation. This expectation is named "symbolic capital" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 171), which is defined as "a degree of accumulated prestige, celebrity, consecration or honour [...] founded on knowledge [...] and recognition" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 7). Symbolic capital is considered "the form of prestige and renown" that is "readily convertible back into economic capital" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 179). Therefore, it can be assumed that economic capital and symbolic capital are interconvertible in arts activities. During the process when symbolic capital is converted into economic capital, symbolic capital acts as "denied capital" (Swartz, 1997, p. 43). The exchange process is described by Bourdieu (1977, p. 171) as "a disinterested exchange", in which a "principle of disinterestedness" is essential. Artworks and arts activities "are primarily designed not to make money, but to make some sort of statement about the artist's vision or the social universe" (Webb, 2002, p. 150). Bourdieu (1993) suggest that symbolic capital plays a significant part in earning a reputation as gatekeeper, controlling the power of discourse in the art world. Consequently, for the art world, even if symbolic capital is not an instant reward, it is as rewarding as instant financial gain and may even be translated into financial gain in the future (Rodner & Kerrigan, 2014). In other words, symbolic capital may assist a corporate brand in contemporary visual arts to obtain financial gain. By the same token, a corporate brand will be more likely to be considered a gatekeeper if it does not take financial gain as its priority in its branding strategy and operation, and being a gatekeeper will eventually bring the brand financial gain in the long run.

#### **Advantages/disadvantages brought by regional factors**

Regional value affects the evaluation of artworks and the recognition of arts organisations in the art world. It is observed that, dealing with arts highly relates to the economic situation of the location where this business occurs. For Breeze Creatives, a corporate brand in the arts, the significance of the brand is influenced by the cultural significance of the region where the brand is located and is recognised by the art world. In the summer of 2016, I was working on contacting galleries through my social network to seek collaborations between British artists

and Chinese galleries. On 19 September 2016, this project finally received a confirmation from a gallery. A meeting was held to discuss future opportunities on developing this new market outside the UK. How the art world perceives the North East region was brought up by an event manager of Breeze Creatives, emphasising the significance of showing artworks outside of the North East for a British artist:

Jaisen has never had an exhibition in a place other than the North East. [...] So, he is just considered a ‘local’ artist, people basically wouldn’t accept his proposal for anything outside Newcastle, especially a prestigious place like London. [...] People think that he would never leave the North East. [...] Jaisen was crying when I told him this news.<sup>95</sup>

The artist is deemed less important by the art world because of the location –the North East— where his work was showed in the past. Instead, a city – London – is mentioned, holding a prestigious position in the arts. The conversation above reveals that the art world demonstrates preference in terms of the location for an exhibition. The locations that are economically stronger are seen as having more cultural significance. In general, London, as the capital and centre of the economy of the UK, is thought to own the power of discourse over the North East in the UK art world. Another example also reflects this phenomenon. During conversations in a meeting, one of the directors of Breeze Creatives stressed that, even for established organisations such as BALTIC, the art world does not show as much respect as it does for the ones in London, despite the fact that it has gained public reputation throughout the years.

“The marketing director of BALTIC had said to me, ‘There is geographic discrimination in the art world. Although BALTIC had more than 300 exhibitions and lots of the artists are internationally known, BALTIC never had a single chance to have a feature in *Frieze* magazine, unless it had a show in London, not the North East.’”<sup>96</sup>

For this founder, BALTIC’s case exemplifies “how London has centralised worldwide artworks.”<sup>97</sup> Hence, artists’ shows in the North East are considered less significant. This may relate to the economic situation of the North East. As indicated by Jon Bewley in his interview, the North East has a relatively small population, hence its economy has a “very small pocket”.<sup>98</sup> Its economy may not be able to support business with artists who hold significance in art

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<sup>95</sup> Observation summary.

<sup>96</sup> “*Frieze* is the leading magazine for contemporary art and culture. Set up in 1991, published 8 times a year and with offices in London, New York and Berlin, *frieze* includes essays, reviews and columns by today’s most forward-thinking writers, artists and curators.”

- About Frieze. (2017). Frieze Magazine. Retrieved 24 March 2017, from <https://shopcc.frieze.com/>

<sup>97</sup> Observation summary.

<sup>98</sup> Interview with Jon Bewley, July 2016.

history. This phenomenon is reflected in artist Mao Kai's exhibition. Although the exhibition is successful, at the preview night, no original paintings were sold. The price of the paintings is an issue for collectors as each of them is worth over £10,000. One of the founders of Breeze Creatives stresses that the paintings are out of the range of what the collectors can afford in the North East. In comparison, prints are welcomed by the collectors. At the preview night, two prints (£200 pounds each) were bought by audience members.<sup>99</sup>

In this case, the regional factor strongly influences the evaluation of the artworks. Although in Arts Emergency's example, the regional factor – being in the North East – increases competitive advantage for Breeze Creatives, the same factor may decrease the brand advantage for Breeze Creatives when the art world evaluates the significance of its exhibitions and artists. As discussed in Chapter 6, the regional factor enhances the positioning of this corporate brand, and consolidates the founders' shared social identity. However, when it comes to brand advantage, the regional-factor-related positioning may disadvantage Breeze Creatives' stakeholders. Therefore, regional factor brings brand advantage and disadvantage to the brand at the same time. Consequently, careful consideration has to be taken when a corporate brand decides to employ identity-oriented positioning. When a corporate brand is positioned within an underprivileged geographical location, its regional identity may cause negative reactions in the art world. Under these circumstances, if a corporate brand decides to position itself according to a region, linking its brand identity to the region, the way of presenting the brand identity has to be carefully planned: when and how to present the regional identity must be strategically evaluated and designed. Moreover, as regional identity forms part of the shared social identity of the founders of Breeze Creatives, it may also form part of the shared identity of the brand's cultural group (see also Chapter 6). Hence, barriers between cultural groups may be caused by regional identity.

## **7.2 Barriers and breaking through**

### **7.2.1 Barriers created by cultural groups**

Maslow (1954) classifies human needs into three hierarchies: basic needs, social needs and self-fulfilment needs (see Chapter 2). Difference in ideologies may cause differences of preference over brands in cultural consumption (see Chapter 3). Artworks are highly symbolic-meaning-related products; for some artists, creating artworks falls into the category of their self-fulfilment needs (see Chapter 5). Art is for art's sake, not business' sake (Fillis, 2006).

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<sup>99</sup> Observation summary.

Differences in ideology and social status cause differences in the shared identity between cultural groups. These differences may create barriers for corporate branding in the arts.

The art world is formed of artists and arts organisations. As a part of the art world, an arts organisation cannot exist without interacting with its cultural group (e.g. artist community). At the same time, the cultural group may have its own standard of evaluating the arts, of evaluating artists and evaluating arts organisations. The shared identity of a cultural group influences each group member's opinions, and the shared identity is formed by identity negotiation between the members (see Chapter 6). Sometimes, extra values such as cultural myth are created through negotiation and are added to the artworks. In the arts, this process enables a corporate brand to gain advantages from its cultural group.

A cultural group's shared identity may also set standards for the preference of artworks. The interaction between group members enables each other to understand what is mutually agreed by each member in the group. This way, a cultural group creates its own standard. No matter for a piece of artwork, an artist, or an arts organisation, this standard may influence the evaluation of artworks. In other words, group members' shared opinions may significantly affect the preference of artworks for the group. As discussed, the shared social and personal identity of a cultural group affect the opinions of the members. Therefore, how the members view artworks and how they evaluate an arts organisation are affected by their shared social and personal identity. Consequently, these shared identities affect the brand advantage a corporate brand can provide to its stakeholders. As a result, whether or not an organisation (corporate brand) holds a position in the art world may depend on the cultural group it represents. In short, the cultural group evaluates its organisation (corporate brand).

However, a cultural group may not always have enough power of discourse to stand against the authority of the art world for various reasons. Firstly, the cultural group that an organisation represents may be relatively small in scale. Compared with what is commonly agreed by a larger cultural group, what is represented by the small group (e.g. the identity, the region) may hardly be noticed. Hence, its voice may be unheard. Secondly, what the small cultural group represents may oppose the idea that the larger cultural group stands for. When conflict occurs, the small cultural group does not have the power to win the argument. Thirdly, the larger cultural group may constantly enhance their viewpoints when they are challenged to maintain the position of authority, and this may influence the small cultural group's opinions. In some circumstances, the members of the small cultural group may doubt themselves and change their

identity and beliefs to seek approval of the larger cultural group. For a new organisation, this influence from the larger cultural group may create barriers for a corporate brand that adopts identity-oriented branding strategy.

During my study, I co-curated exhibitions for both Chinese and British artists. From the middle of 2016 to the beginning of 2017, I worked on curating a solo exhibition in China for a British artist named Jaisen Yates. The reason why Breeze Creatives is keen on showing artworks in China is because the founders see China as a booming market for contemporary visual arts. Possibilities for large-scale collaboration in the future are expected. Moreover, as a newly established arts organisation, holding an exhibition abroad is believed to be a quicker way of building up its reputation. One of the founders considers that future collaborations will be easy to form for Breeze Creatives after showing works in China: “it will be really helpful for us to show work abroad anywhere.” “If we can help Jaisen grow [to become famous], we will benefit.” An exhibition schedule finally was confirmed by a Chinese gallery in the beginning of 2017. Accordingly, a meeting was held in early 2017 to discuss the artist’s works and future moves. However, after a six-month period of creating artworks, this confirmation from the Chinese gallery did not give Yates greater encouragement. Instead, it caused more pressure. Yates seems to have gradually lost confidence in himself and in his paintings. Just as what the founder commented: “he’s been too conservative” and “he seems too scared as he knows this exhibition is so important for him. His style has set back too much, has become more and more ‘classic’. This is not Jaisen, this is boring.”<sup>100</sup>

Yates’s painting style is edgy, dark, and personal. he adopted an alternative lifestyle and used to live away from society for a long time (see Chapter 5). His work is an expression of individualism and his unique contemporary style is what Breeze Creatives likes, yet his style is not yet accepted by the art world. Bourdieu (2010) indicates that, in terms of the taste of artworks, a dominant cultural group may set its standard for rest of the people. The artist is considered by the art world (i.e. a larger cultural group) as a local artist whose work will never get a chance to be shown outside the North East. Hence, this exhibition is seen as a precious opportunity to get approval from the art world, yet it also means that Yates needs to provide artworks for that to happen. This anticipation increased pressure on him to create works and led to him not being confident enough to keep his own style. Instead, the strong expectation of getting approval from a larger cultural group – the art world – made him change his style. This

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<sup>100</sup> Observation summary.

expectation makes him abandon his own style to follow a classic style already approved by the art world.

In Yates's case, the exhibition in China was an opportunity for Breeze Creatives and the artist to expand their cultural group into a larger one. This may earn them intangible branding benefit. These intangible benefits include regional benefit (as the region that shows artist Yates's work is expanded into another country), and symbolic meaning benefit (as the artworks and the artist may receive approval from the art world on a larger scale). Moreover, this Chinese exhibition may also earn Breeze Creatives and the artist tangible benefit because China is considered by professionals a "booming market for contemporary visual arts". As a result, artist Yates and the organisation Breeze Creatives are likely to receive approval from the art world. In other words, their cultural group will be expanded from the North East to a larger scale across two continents. The work done by both the artist and the organisation will no longer be recognised simply by the North East but will also be recognised by another country. This way, the directive-stakeholders (the founders) see the potential that, in the future, the organisation will find collaborations more easily. However, when the anticipation of being accepted by a larger cultural group is too strong, it may damage the artist, who is no longer able to create works that represent his original cultural group. In Yates's case, knowing the significance of being approved by the art world, the artist chose to discard his original cultural group and follow a safer way (creating classic painting style) to show respect to the larger cultural group, although his choice does not represent the cultural group to which he and Breeze Creatives belong. This action causes issues for the organisation as a brand, since the organisation (Breeze Creatives) positions itself according to the identity of its original cultural group.

Issues arise for the artist too. Yates wants to be recognised as a professional artist representing a larger cultural group other than the North East, and so does the organisation. However, when his painting style moved far from his original style, his cultural group is not able to recognise him, while the new cultural group that he anticipates is not ready to accept him. Hence, by doing this, Yates removed himself from both the cultural group to which he belongs and the organisation that supports him. By doing so, he may no longer belong to any cultural group.

Through a strategic meeting, Breeze Creatives took action to help the artist with this issue. Jaisen Yates is asked "to go back to his own style and be more Jaisen", since this is where Breeze Creatives sees his potential and the cultural group he is speaking for. As a result, the founders made a decision to delay the China exhibition in order to let the artist "sort himself

out”, going back to his iconic style. As the original plan was to show work in June 2017, I had to contact the Chinese gallery to change the schedule, giving the artist more time to rediscover himself and re-establish his confidence.<sup>101</sup>

In this case, the organisation believes that showing work on a market that has prosperous future in the business of contemporary visual arts will accelerate the organisation as a brand. Exhibiting abroad may expand the organisation’s cultural group on a larger scale. At the same time, it should boost Breeze Creatives’ brand recognition in the art world. However, the organisation also clearly realises that if the artworks are not able to represent the identity that the organisation stands for, the artworks may not be a good instrument to achieve the organisation’s goal. Its positioning will fail. Therefore, the organisation prefers delaying the exhibition rather than letting poorly conceived artworks be shown. Here, a battle occurs between achieving brand recognition and achieving brand positioning. Apparently, the organisation chooses the latter. This operation allows time for the artists to create works that represent the ideology of current cultural group: being alternative, outside of the mainstream. As a corporate brand, this operation may further strengthen the bond with its cultural group, enhancing the identity of the group.

This example demonstrates that, although nobody really knows what “the authority of the art world” is, the concept still has such a strong influence that it may even prevent an artist from expressing his own identity. This tendency is known as *habitus* (Bourdieu, 2010; Ignatow & Robinson, 2017). It acts like an invisible authority, influencing the behaviours and opinions of members of a cultural group (Wagner & McLaughlin, 2015). This cultural tendency penetrates many aspects of human interaction, creating barriers for communication. Some artists call the cultural tendency “clique” and believe that it sometimes significantly influences the branding operation of an arts organisation.<sup>102</sup>

#### **The barriers that may help branding**

While cultural groups create barriers, the barriers may also benefit corporate brands. For an arts organisation, being recognised as an insider of a certain cultural group is sometimes significant. Especially when the cultural group is considered an authority in terms of knowledge on Fine Art. Being insiders of this kind of cultural group keeps a corporate brand’s brand image professional in the art world. This professional image enhances the brand

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<sup>101</sup> Observation summary.

<sup>102</sup> Interview with Amy Carr, May 2016.

advantages of the organisation. For Breeze Creatives, although its goal is to provide a platform for all people to access the arts, the founders realise that they need to attach a professional brand image to their organisation. Therefore, as part of branding strategy, they decide to remain in academia. This is because, for the public, academia is where knowledge lies. Being academia insiders brings more brand advantages to Breeze Creatives for the public:

I think it is important to remain in academia, because if you want to change something you need to present yourself at the right level. It is so easy to be criticised by the institutions that you are standing against, it is so easy for them to say: “you know, they just don’t know enough”, or “they are just not clever enough”, or “they just don’t have all this kind of wisdom”. So it is important to go “yes, we absolutely do have that level of training”. We feel that there is absolutely an alternative way. We are not saying the traditional way is no good, we just think there can be an alternative way. You know, I am not saying to get rid of Arts Council, to get rid of those funded organisations or anything like that, we believe that we can sit alongside of them. We don’t have to be dependent or relying on the bodies, while within a city we should have the same level of exposure and the same platform. We try to keep that balance to run the organisation, and be happy that they are there, and we can work with them. Yet we are not necessarily following the same pattern.<sup>103</sup>

Here, this founder is aware of the barriers created by the cultural group – academia. However, she confirms that it is necessary to work with existing authorities, although the organisation she runs has a different goal and opinions for the arts. The founders believe that being an insider of the cultural group that is accepted by the art world will enable other bodies and the public to recognise the organisation’s significance. In other words, the founders believe that the brand identity of this corporate brand will not change if acknowledged features are added to it. On the contrary, the added features will increase its brand advantages. As brand advantage is one of the key features of positioning, increasing brand advantage will thus enhance the corporate brand’s positioning. In this case, the decision made by the founders of Breeze Creatives reveals that, apart from the founders’ shared identity, added features that increase brand advantage may also enhance a corporate brand’s positioning. Brand advantage may be increased by an attached intangible benefit, such as cultural myth (discussed in Chapter 6), and by being an insider of a recognised group (discussed above). The barriers created by the differences between cultural groups increase the benefit of the insiders. If a brand makes itself an insider, the barriers may benefit the brand.

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<sup>103</sup> Interview with Zoe Anderson, May 2016.

## 7.2.2 Potential solutions and discussions

### Breaking through by online communication

Online communication is believed to assist corporate branding in the arts in four ways: affiliation, expression, problem solving and circulation (see Chapter 3). My study finds that online communication also helps to deconstruct the barriers created by differences in identity of cultural groups, which is called “social cliques” by some arts managers. For some artists, the art world is a social-clique-dominated place where barriers are set preventing newcomers from entering. These barriers are perceived as invisible sabotage for those people who intend to pursue arts yet have no recognised social backgrounds. The social clique is seen as playing the role of protecting the existing values and identities for a certain group of people from similar social backgrounds. It may or may not be welcoming to newcomers seeking enter. Examples and cases are given and discussed through the interviews and observations conducted in my study. Some artists reveal that, in some cases, the social clique can be so tightly controlled that newcomers are not able to break in, even with a professional educational background. However, online communication such as social media communication may help artists to break down the barriers of social cliques. The online platforms are seen as providing equal opportunities for newcomers to access the art world.

Amy Carr is a Fine Art technician teaching the F.A.D. foundation course that Breeze Creatives runs in collaboration with Northumberland College. She has degrees in Fine Art and used to work in Fine Art, yet did not successfully pursue her career as a fine-art artist until recently. She experienced difficulties of breaking through the social clique in the art world, and explains that she only is able to pursue her career as an artist when she found organisations that welcomes her:

I found myself in arts in place like Bamburgh House, opening its door to artists and studios. Coming to places like this I feel more positive about the art world. I was aspiring to go to Goldsmith University 10 years ago, with other people, but to be fair the reality there wasn't quite the same. But now I feel I have found the place again, where I feel happy, and I am really falling in love with Fine Art again and that is because of the place like this, because it is accessible and it is full of not just everyday people, they make Fine Arts.<sup>104</sup>

For Carr, when she was new to the art world, the barriers created by cliques used to make her too scared to believe that she was qualified to be an artist. She explains that the Fine Art world

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<sup>104</sup> Interview with Amy Carr, May 2016.

was a closed world that needs a great effort to open up. The art world has its exclusiveness, separating outsiders from insiders. Hence, a newcomer has to make social efforts to break through. When she was a student, she was not studying in her hometown where her social network enabled her to break the clique barriers. At the same time, the information about the art world was based on word-of-mouth. Therefore, she had to find ways through social activities to access the art world. The anticipation of being approved by the insiders in the art world was so strong that it scared her and made her lose her confidence.

When I was in university, to get yourself into a certain groups and communities, it is like a proper world-of-mouth, you have to find them yourself and when you found them how can you penetrate them?

It is hard to get into the communities, I felt it was hard because there is exclusivity about it. And then, it is like the art world, generally, it has its term “the outsiders”, which refers to the artists who didn’t go to art colleges and universities but they make a name for themselves. Some people still have that mentality that “I am art trained, I am better than you on artworks and I am more important”.

I felt lost and I felt I wasn’t good enough to be a fine-art artist. I felt I needed validation that you are good enough, but now I just realise that is just bullshit, I don’t know if I am resentful but I am so angry about how I felt in my early 20s because I wasted a decade.<sup>105</sup>

However, she indicates that the closeness and exclusivity of the art world is been penetrated by the use of social media. She considers young students are not as scared by the exclusivity of the Fine Art world as she was. Social media platforms have been providing more information and opportunities for outsiders to access the world of insiders in Fine Art. More information and artist communities can be found through online communication. Equal opportunities are created on social media groups and more discussions are generated by online communities. This way, newcomers are gaining entrance to the art world.

Ever since there was social media, you can introduce yourself to communities and you can invite yourself to arts organisations every day, so it is not that scary, I don’t see that much fear anymore, I feel a bit more confident. In my 20s there wasn’t social media, so to get myself into this small art world I really had to try my best to know the right people, had to go to the right place, which I could but sometimes it is by chance. But now it is so open, when I was in art event, it literally invited every artist in Newcastle, I sometimes met people I have never met before, so it is like people have got their arms and eyes open and say “come in”! Social media has put the arts out there so much, so it is definitely more inviting now. It [Fine Art] doesn’t feel so exclusive anymore. I do think social media has helped so much in this way. I know there are other ways which

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<sup>105</sup> Interview with Amy Carr, May 2016.

the art world hasn't helped so much but just in terms of finding art communities, then I think social media is a massively beneficial tool and it can only get better.<sup>106</sup>

What is called social clique in this quotation is discussed in Chapter 6 as cultural groups. To recap, in a cultural group, stakeholders share similar identities and ideologies. The shared identity/ideology may stabilise the group. Yet, at the same time, it prevents outsiders from accessing the group. Carr points out that social media communication provides opportunities for outsiders to access the previously inaccessible social clique. The outsiders are receiving more information about what is going on in the art world now, while previously they would only know it "by chance". Social media platforms are opening doors for outsiders to enter without personally knowing the insiders. In Carr's case, she gained the opportunity to meet people she "have never met before". Hence, Carr believes that social media communication creates opportunities for arts organisations to gain larger audiences, it also provides opportunities for outsider-artists to enter the art world: "it is like people have got their arms and eyes open and say 'come in'". The outsider-involving process may reform and reinforce the old cultural groups into a new cultural group. At the same time, the cultural group may increase its scale. Under these circumstances, if the cultural group represents a corporate brand, the brand is strengthened. Therefore, online communication may assist to break down barriers created by cultural groups, and the stakeholders of the group (e.g. artists) may benefit through interaction with each other.

#### **Potential help from marketing communication**

Marketing communication is a tool for encouraging particular behaviours (see Chapter 2). One of its functions is to enhance relationships between a brand and its stakeholders, and this function is categorised by marketing 4Ps as promotion. As discussed, promotion is a significant part of branding action. Moreover, since a variety of organisations operate in the arts in the North East, each organisation gets less attention from the public (see Chapter 5). Therefore, for a corporate brand, to encourage behaviours that can enhance the relationships between the brand and its stakeholders, marketing communication has to be personalised. This means that the communication needs to be adapted to suit the particular stakeholder. In addition, as indicated by involvement theory in Chapter 2, when products are highly symbolic-meaning related (e.g. artworks), the stakeholders will be impacted more by communication. In my study, the stakeholders refer to the audiences, managers and the people who are related to the brand. Therefore, for corporate branding in contemporary visual arts, the way in which each

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<sup>106</sup> Interview with Amy Carr, May 2016.

organisation communicates with its stakeholders may significantly affect how its stakeholders view this organisation, without knowing if they may accept it as a brand.

The previous section discussed how online communication may help to break down the barriers created by cultural groups. However, the exclusivity of Fine Art may not be always taken away by online communication, as the world of Fine Art sometimes maintains an exclusiveness of its own, using certain ways of communication between the members of each cultural group. For some arts managers, the reason for doing this is to protect the shared identities of each cultural group and the agreed ideology between members. When artists show themselves in different cultural groups, the barriers created by these shared identity of the group members show. Carr's experiences exemplify this phenomenon:

The term "Fine Art" has always been a funny one, it tells itself if should be exclusive because it is "fine", it is posh, it is exclusive. But I don't find there should be a boundary, and the boundaries are getting more blurred, which is what I am trying to say.<sup>107</sup>

Some artists believe that barriers exist between different cultural groups and it is a distinctive feature of the art world. For a corporate brand, this may not be beneficial, if the brand positions itself in a cultural group that has a large population. In order to let more people access the brand, efforts need to be made according to different stakeholders.

Rebecca Gardiner is a visual artist working on videos, texts and performance art. She is also a PhD researcher in Fine Art studying at the University of Leeds. Having years of experience in Fine Art, she has attended exhibitions and events held by different organisations in a variety of locations. During the interview with Gardiner, she particularly indicates that certain art spaces and organisations felt more welcoming to her than others. She suggests that, if an arts organisation wants to expand its audience group, it has to work on marketing communication in relation to how to involve outsiders.

I really liked the event I went in the miner's society space, it was in a very odd space but the most amazing space, atmosphere. I personally don't like going to spaces that are quite cliquey. You know, in the arts, sometimes you went to some space you felt you don't belong to that clique, that crowd, because you are not. I don't find them very welcoming. I don't know what the word is, I just don't find them welcoming. I am not talking about a particular space, just sometimes in the arts, the spaces can make you feel, well, not intimidated, but not particularly welcomed. I think a lot of art spaces need

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<sup>107</sup> Interview with Amy Carr, May 2016.

to work on their welcoming a bit more. For example, sometimes in The Newbridge Project, you can feel a bit uncomfortable in some art spaces. They make you feel a bit different, walking in a gallery and walking into a museum, you can feel a bit uncomfortable, intimidated. For example, if you go to BAL TIC, you are quite anonymise but again it is not such an intimate space. Also, for The Newbridge's space, it can be quite intimate for the member of the space but may not be quite welcoming for people from outside. It is not that bad but it is a bit cliquey, that's what I mean. Sometimes it can make you feel you are not in the club sort of thing. It made me feel I am not from their social circle. Well, but then it depends on what the space is for isn't it? Are the spaces for all the people or the spaces are for only the studio holders? But, they have exhibitions and they invite people, so, I don't know, maybe the spaces have got an identity crisis? [Laugh].<sup>108</sup>

Here, Gardiner compares several organisations and their arts events. She concludes that some events are more welcoming for the outsiders than others. She particularly stresses that, although all the organisations tend to invite more outsiders to access their cultural groups, some of them have done better than others. For her, some of the organisations have given the impression that they are a bit unwelcoming. She does not feel that she is welcomed enough to be a new member of the cultural group. Although she believes that these organisations want to involve her as new member of their groups, she considers they have failed on doing so. This case opens a discussion on how an arts organisation may need to do to involve more audiences, linking with the marketing communication theory reviewed in Chapter 2.

Firstly, marketing communication theory indicates that the communication towards different stakeholders has to be based on their needs (see Chapter 2). *Consumer 4Cs Typology* classified potential stakeholders of a brand into four categories: mainstreamers, succeeders, aspirers and performers (see Chapter 3). Each of these categories is classified according to Maslow's hierarchy of human needs. The typology explains the differences between the cultural groups and what these different stakeholders may look for when they interact with a brand. Although it requires further study to examine whether it is applicable in the arts, this typology suggests an alternative way and guidance for future corporate branding in the arts. Moreover, it may guide art marketers on what way they may need to consider when they communicate with their cultural groups. Different consumers have different needs when they attend an event. Presumably, the outsiders and the insiders may have different needs and may be seeking different things when they attend art events. Therefore, to involve more outsiders (e.g. artists,

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<sup>108</sup> Interview with Rebecca Gardiner, July 2016.

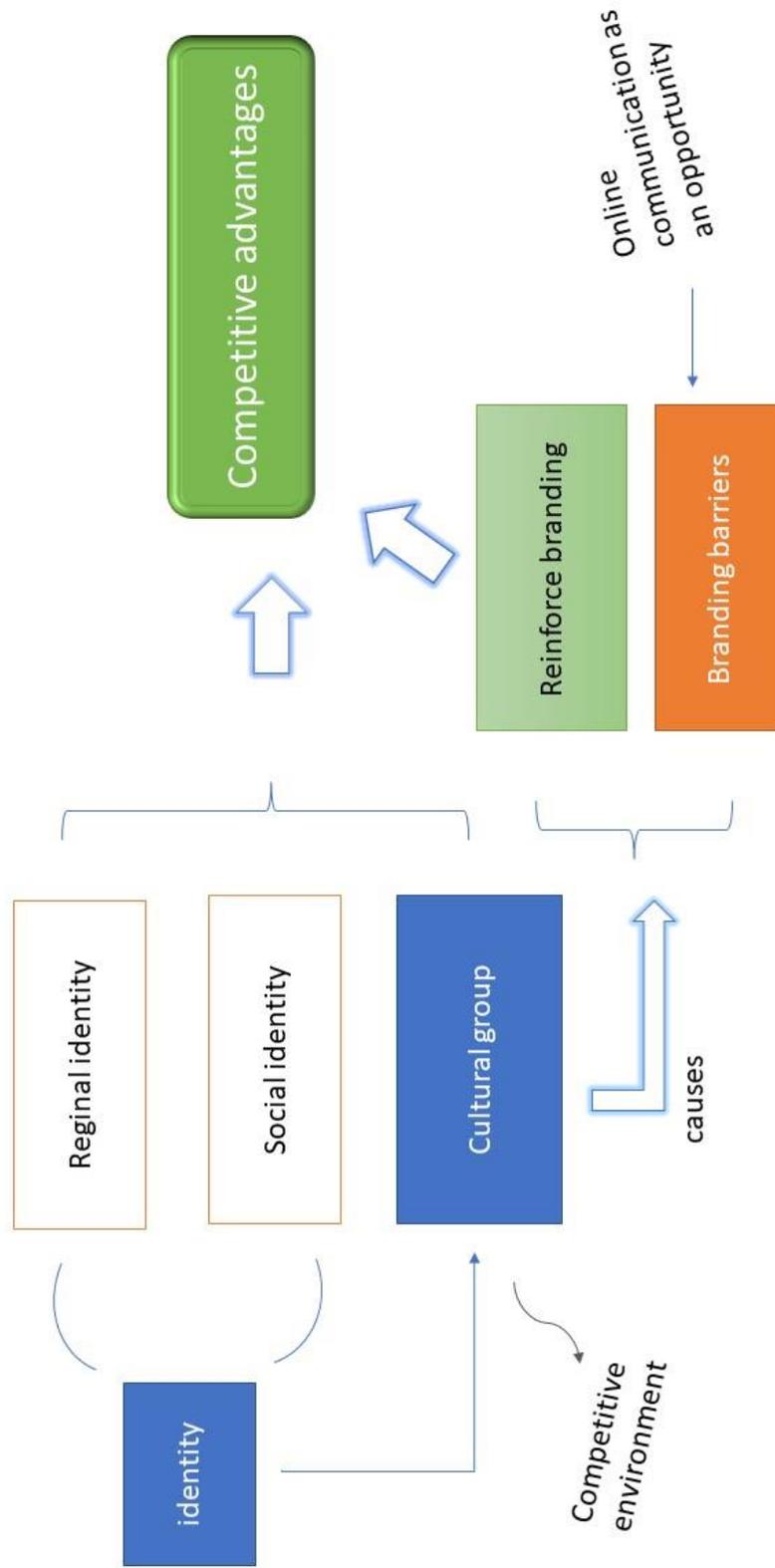
audience), the organisation has to pay attention to the needs of the outsiders so that they can be addressed.

Secondly, communication theory indicates that the information is encoded by the sender and decoded by the receiver. For outsiders, as they may not have as much knowledge as the insiders for the topics discussed during the event, the encoded information will be decoded in different ways, hence, misunderstandings may occur. As a result, in an arts event, as communication between the insiders and the outsiders may not be conducted according to the type of the audience; the outsiders may end up believing that they are not welcome, although those organisations indeed want to involve them and have made efforts to invite them to join in. Therefore, for a corporate brand in the arts, if the information is not placed through an appropriate way or not expressed through an appropriate method, brand identity may be misinterpreted, and brand positioning hence may be hard to achieve. This misunderstanding may harm corporate branding.

In summary, this chapter discussed what competitive advantages may be brought by identity-oriented positioning. With caution to the competitive environment, identity-oriented positioning may reinforce a brand by enhancing the shared-identity of its cultural group. However, identity-oriented positioning links a corporate brand to the shared identity of its founders, possibly bringing disadvantages to the brand. The application of identity-oriented positioning requires a carefully planned branding operation.

Identity differences between cultural groups may create barriers to a brand. Potential solutions are found in online marketing communication, which may guide marketers for applications in the future. Evidence shows personalised marketing communication is required in contemporary visual arts sector for better corporate branding results. In many occasions, similarity in identity is the key for the results, although, as a tool, corporate branding may be rejected wholesale by stakeholders because of its commercial characteristics related to its origin.

## Chapter 7 – Advantages vs. Barriers



## **Chapter 8**

### **Conclusion**

#### **Introduction**

The major contribution of this study falls into four categories: examining, identifying, and enhancing existing theory. The study starts by examining the arts in the North East by closely analysing current ambiguities lying in the definition and the business category, with attention being paid to the resistance of the North East art world, which is established in the field work. Then, it proceeds to analyse why and how identity factors influence and impact on brand positioning in the branding process, suggesting the theory extension to current positioning theory. The study also suggests solutions to redefine contemporary visual arts, the business category, and potential opportunities are noted to overcome the branding barriers. Two-and-a-half years of ethnographic field work also contributes to current branding research methods. In this chapter, the contributions are discussed in sequence: theory examination, theory extension, other theoretical contributions, and method-related contributions.

#### **8.1 Examining current positioning theory**

The first original contribution of this study is based on the results from examining current brand positioning theory. It is apparent that corporate branding in arts organisations, especially in artist-led organisations in the North East, is undertaken based on a poorly conceived strategy. The study points out that unless current theory is adapted, branding theory is not universally

suitable for the art world, at least not in the North East. The study first identifies ambiguity in defining contemporary visual arts organisations, by examining differences between the academic views and managers' views of what constitutes contemporary visual arts organisations. This ambiguity causes issues for organisations seeking to position themselves in the contemporary visual arts sector. The study then investigates the differences between organisations operating in the contemporary visual arts sector, finding that the category of the business in this sector remains unclear. Ambiguity has been identified in terms of business category in contemporary visual arts, causing issues for organisations positioning themselves in the sector according to their business category. The study then investigates the relationship between the artist/people group and arts organisations, indicating that there is strong resistance to branding in the arts sector. The study argues that this resistance partly derives from misunderstanding and miscommunication between the commercial world and the art world. During current branding applications of some organisations (corporate branding), neither the artists nor the commercial tool is understood properly. By investigating the factors that cause branding issues, the study demonstrates why current theory is not always applicable in contemporary visual arts. The study argues that, to assist corporate branding and enable organisations to position their brands in the arts, identity should play a significantly larger role in brand positioning.

In essence, the attempt to understanding issues of branding in contemporary visual arts organisations suggests that barriers should be set out clearly and the uncertainties in this complex field brought to the fore. Vague definitions and a poorly defined business category have caused difficulties for applying current competition-oriented positioning theory to the arts. At the same time, the motivations and the identities of artists/managers have led to resistance for commercial branding theory to become accepted. Due to these three reasons — ambiguous definition, poorly clarified business category, and resistance — the study draws the conclusion that brand positioning theory demands an extension for the contemporary visual arts sector.

## **8.2 Brand positioning theory extension**

The second and key original contribution builds on extending current positioning theory. As reviewed, current brand positioning theory is competition oriented. Based on the conclusion expounded above, the study points out that the three key factors (*category*, *target consumer group*, and *brand advantages*) of the current theory need to be adapted and replaced by factors that are significantly affecting corporate branding in contemporary visual arts. Due to the fact

that *identity* significantly affects corporate branding in the arts, and the fact that terms such as *target consumer group* do not sit readily with people working in the arts, *Identity* is to replace *category*, while *cultural group* is to replace *target consumer group*, to become the appropriate factors in positioning theory proposed to the arts. After adaptation, the three new aspects of brand positioning are *identity*, *cultural group*, and *brand advantages*. Accordingly, positioning theory for the arts is suggested to be identity-oriented and not competition-oriented.

Identity-oriented positioning is discussed in two chapters (Chapters 6 and 7) through a set of investigations on corporate branding process in a chosen case. The investigation consists of three dimensions of corporate branding: *strategic vision*, *brand image* and *organisational culture*. The issues (strategic branding issues, stakeholders' identity issues, communication issues, social barrier issues) are studied in the investigations. The investigations demonstrate why and how identity-oriented positioning is applicable for an organisation in contemporary visual arts and new approaches are given to facilitate branding.

First, the functionalities of different stakeholders in corporate branding operation are clarified through the development of the theory extension. Decision makers (e.g. internal stakeholders such as founders, managers) of an organisation are revealed to be directive-stakeholders in branding, while other stakeholders (e.g. internal/external stakeholders such as artists, collaborators, audiences) are revealed as reactive-stakeholders. Preece (2015) attempted to classify the stakeholder group for a brand in the arts, yet the study was conducted for an artist's personal branding (i.e. Ai Weiwei) not corporate branding. Further, the classification only assigned general categories (i.e. art world, media, public) to the stakeholder group without clarifying how each group might or might not impact on branding. The findings in this thesis complements current research on stakeholders' relationships and their influence in branding, in that current study only categorises stakeholders as internal or external stakeholders, the categorization does not address the functional differences between the two.

Identity-oriented positioning theory is proven to be applicable through evidence revealed in the corporate branding process in the chosen case from seven perspectives. First, identity assists brand positioning in a *strategic vision* aspect. In the chosen case, the shared identity of the brand's directive-stakeholders can be shown to significantly influence the corporate brand's strategic vision and its visual brand elements (e.g. logo). For Breeze Creatives, the founders' shared social identities are found to contribute to the corporate brand's strategic vision: improving the situation, widening access to the arts in the North East, and bringing diversity to

the arts. The founders' shared personal identity is found to contribute to the corporate brand's operational style, particularly in its alternative style of operation. The visual image (dog) used in Breeze Creatives' logo is found to be representing the shared identity of its founders. Hence, Breeze Creatives' strategic vision and visual brand elements construct its brand identity, positioning this brand in the way the founders (directive-stakeholders) find desirable.

Second, identity assists strategic alignment on brand identity during the organisation's communication, which strengthens a brand's positioning. In the chosen case, an identity imbedded visual brand element (logo) has helped Breeze Creatives in communicating with its reactive-stakeholders online. Through communication, this identity-embedded element aligns the brand's strategic vision and its operational decision-making, enhancing trust between the brand (Breeze Creatives) and its reactive-stakeholders, as a result, this identity-embedded element further strengthens the positioning of this brand with its reactive-stakeholders. In terms of the relationship between organisational identity and branding, this finding filled the gap left by Voss and Grabel (2018), which is mentioned in introduction.

Third, identity assists a corporate brand in distinguishing and strengthening its cultural group. Evidence revealed in the branding process of the chosen case demonstrates that, to distinguish the cultural group for a corporate brand, identity relies on four channels: collaboration, communication, daily interaction, and project operation. For collaboration, Breeze Creatives' case shows that conflict may occur between directive-stakeholders and reactive-stakeholders during collaboration; yet, as long as identity/ideology similarity is shared between these stakeholders, collaboration can still be carried on. Therefore, in a contemporary visual arts organisation, particular in an artist-led one, similarity between directive- and reactive-stakeholders in terms of their identity may distinguish a committed cultural group – a mindshare group. This mindshare group assists in strengthening the corporate brand's positioning. For communication, an example of online communication shows that sharing ideas about identity enables Breeze Creatives' cultural group to reconstruct and reinforce its shared group identity. This reinforcing of identity turns Breeze Creatives' cultural group into a mindshare group, enhancing the corporate brand. In terms of daily interaction, Breeze Creatives' examples prove that sharing similar thoughts about identity/ideology is another way of turning a cultural group into a mindshare group. Mind sharing makes the brand's positioning clear to its reactive-stakeholders and facilitates directive-stakeholders' decision-making on strategy, which assists its brand positioning. For project operation, an organisation (corporate brand) is likely to choose an artist's idea when the idea can represent its directive-stakeholders'

shared identity. By running projects that may support the brand's positioning, the operation underpins the brand's positioning. These four functions of identity on cultural group confirms the significance of identity for brand positioning in corporate branding in the arts, showing that identity is in the leading positioning in all three factors (identity, cultural group, brand advantage). As such, corporate brand positioning in contemporary visual arts is identity-oriented, not competition-oriented.

Fourth, identity negotiation between stakeholders may create extra value that can influence the positioning of a corporate brand. Evidence reveals that, artists' ideas may be reinvented through communication between stakeholders. In terms of online communication, after an artwork has been published and discussed online, the meaning expressed through the artwork may no longer be the same, and new interpretations may be attached to it. In terms of face-to-face discussion, audiences may discuss an artwork with an artist according to their knowledge, experience, and ideology. The discussion can reinterpret and reinvent narratives (cultural myth) adding new symbolic meanings to the artwork, which creates extra value for the artwork and the organisation that exhibits the work. However, at the same time, this reinvented value may represent an identity that differs from what the organisation stands for. Therefore, identity negotiation between stakeholders affects the positioning of the organisation as a corporate brand. This finding filled the gap left by other studies, for example, Preece (2018), and Morgan (2018), which are mentioned in introduction too.

Fifth, identity facilitates brand positioning in that an arts organisation may gain different competitive advantages in the market according to the identity it represents. Consequently, it may provide different brand advantages to its stakeholders (e.g. artists, audiences). The study of the chosen case shows that, for directive-stakeholders, competitive evaluation is considered a preparation before identity-oriented positioning is applied. Directive-stakeholders need knowledge about the market before an organisation (corporate brand) is positioned according to their shared identity. Competitive evaluation also underpins the operational strategy made under the influence of directive-stakeholders' shared identity. Positioning an organisation according to identity may gain the organisation competitive advantages if the identity is accepted by its competitive group, while it may also become a disadvantage if the group rejects the identity it represents. If the identity is accepted, the organisation's brand advantages provided to the stakeholders may accelerate.

Supporting the theory extension on brand positioning, the five dimensions listed above result from investigations guided by three aspects of the corporate branding toolkit: strategic vision, brand image and organisational culture. The first and the second dimension support the element of strategic vision in corporate branding, aligning the organisation's strategic visions with its brand identities. The third, the fourth, and the fifth dimensions support the element of brand image and organisational culture in corporate branding, forming a brand image and creating organisational culture that distinguishes this organisation from others in the eyes of stakeholders.

Two additional identity-related dimensions, the sixth and the seventh, support extending the theory of brand positioning too. Not being included by corporate branding toolkit and other corporate branding theories, these two dimensions contribute to the theory of corporate branding, bringing deeper understanding of how branding applies in organisations, especially in artist-led organisations in contemporary visual arts. These two dimensions contribute new understanding in both positioning and corporate branding theory in general, two more original contributions.

As for the sixth dimension, identity-related factors (e.g. regional factors, social cliques, symbolic meaning) affect the brand image of an arts organisation, particularly an artist-led one, hence positioning should take account of these factors. This is because identity-related factors influence the evaluation of artworks and artists and their quality. Being representative for artworks and artists, the brand image and brand value of a contemporary visual arts organisation (corporate brands) are affected by this evaluation. In other words, intangible benefits sometimes weigh more than tangible benefits in the art world, because the intangible benefits may affect the way people evaluate the artworks and the artists that are represented by an organisation, and the evaluation will eventually affect the organisation as a corporate brand. These intangible benefits are seen as symbolic capital in this thesis. The thesis further points out that the symbolic capital of an arts organisation is influenced by regional factors, social factors and other identity-related factors. This finding is expounded in sociological research, for example, Berger (2011), Bourdieu (1993), and MacCracken (2005) all explored symbolic meaning and taste relating to artworks and cultural consumptions, however, little explored in business studies, especially in a corporate branding context. Overall, in the arts, identity-related factors such as regional value and social cliques significantly affect the overall brand image of a corporate brand through affecting its symbolic meaning. Therefore, in the Fine Art world, an organisation is likely to be considered as a gatekeeper if it does not take financial gain as the

priority underpinning its branding strategy. At the same time, being a gatekeeper will eventually bring the brand financial gain.

As for the seventh dimension, the shared identity of stakeholders assists an organisation (corporate brand) in distinguishing its own cultural group, yet, at the same time, the shared identity creates barriers for the organisation (corporate brand) from involving more members in the cultural group. The chosen case shows that outsiders may feel rejected by the insiders of the cultural group of an organisation, if the outsiders do not share the same group identity as the insiders do. This happens even when the outsiders are invited as new audiences by the organisation. This is to say that identity divides audiences into different groups and creates shared ideologies as barriers to prevent newcomers from challenging it. For corporate branding study, this finding contributes to positioning in two ways. On the one hand, a shared identity makes the positioning of an organisation (corporate brand) clear to its stakeholders, and sharing identity-related information (mindshare) further strengthens its positioning. Shared identity protects outsiders from violating the value of the brand. On the other hand, the shared identity creates barriers for newcomers, increasing difficulties for a corporate brand wishing to expand its cultural group (for example, involving new audiences and new artists who have different ideologies). From a business point of view, identity is double-edged sword that requires strategic considerations.

In conclusion, according to the seven dimensions investigated in this study, identity-oriented positioning theory should be taken to replace current competition-oriented positioning theory in that the competition-oriented positioning theory is developed for the commercial world, which is a different business environment from the one an organisation may face in contemporary visual arts.

### **8.3 Other theoretical contributions**

In addition, this study has made other original contributions to knowledge. Referencing arts managers' opinions, the study gives a new definition to contemporary visual arts based on current definition and preliminary research evidence. The definition further clarifies of which range of the artworks is involved in this category of art, and clarifies the characteristics of the artworks and the types of artists potentially involved.

The study then classifies the business categories for contemporary visual arts organisations. Identifying the gap existing between the academic studies and the artists/managers' thoughts, the study collected first-hand data through interviews with directors of different arts

organisations, council managers, curators, and marketing managers. A set of categories are given to classify contemporary visual arts organisations according to their business operations, products, and services. The classification facilitates future branding research in the arts, demonstrating the complexity of the study in corporate branding in this field. The classification complements current marketing studies in creative and cultural industries, providing references for quantitative research testing the theory for arts branding in the future.

In terms of applying branding to contemporary visual arts organisations, especially an artist-led one, the thesis points out that knowledge provided by marketing studies can assist organisations in overcoming barriers created by cultural groups. As audiences may have different motivations, appropriate marketing communication skills are required to break down the barriers. *Consumer 4Cs Typology* is suggested as a reference to arts managers to assist their branding operation. Personalised marketing communication is suggested as a tool for branding in contemporary visual arts, for artist-led organisations in particular.

#### **8.4 Method-related contribution**

The last area in which this thesis makes original contribution refers to its method. Firstly, by employing an ethnographic case study, this study brings diversity to research methods in business studies. As introduced, ethnography is a rarely used method in business research due to the fact that business studies are usually conducted in a short period of time to address up-to-date issues occurring in the commercial world. Two of the most commonly used methods in business research are surveys (with quantitative studies) and semi-structured interviews (with qualitative studies) (Saunders, 2016). However, as addressed in the methodology chapter, surveys and interviews are not able to address culture-related issues, as these issues are often built up during a long period of time under the influence of a combination of different factors. Only a long-term study can reveal the complex relationships between these factors, which is required by current branding studies in the arts. Secondly, the duration of the observation (two-and-half years) and the intensive involvement of the researcher ensures maximum precision of data collection for this study. Multiple sources are used in the study; the large amount of data enables the analysis to be conducted from different perspectives, which is why the extension of branding theory can be proposed. This study demonstrates the necessity and merit of conducting a long-term study for business research.

#### **8.5 Research limitation and future recommendation**

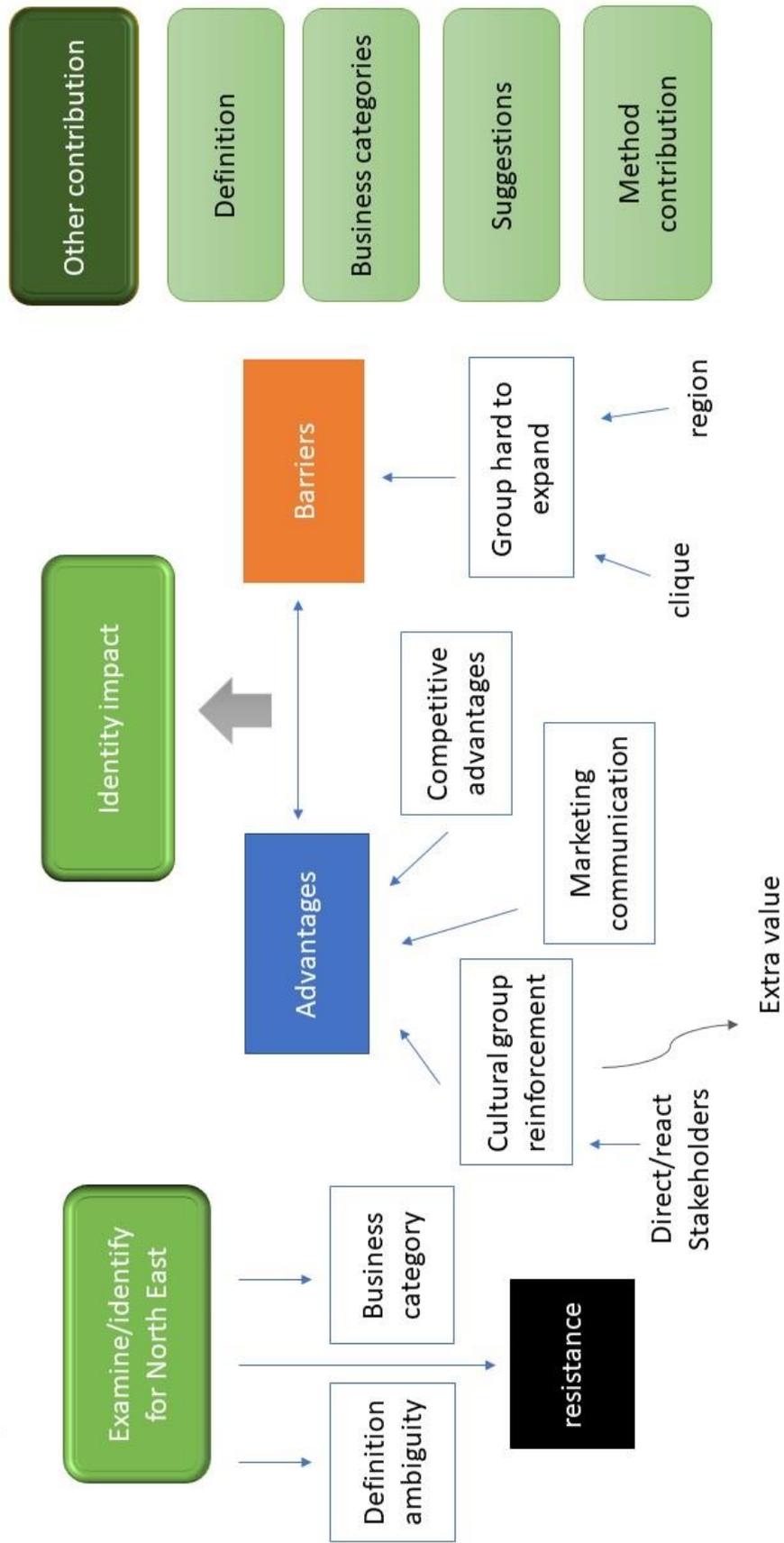
Apart from the strengths listed above, certain limitations of the ethnographic method are also inevitable. Focusing on one organisation provides an opportunity to perform a deep study on

branding, as it allows the researcher to observe the case and the complexity of the branding environment in the organisation closely, which assists the extension of the theory in brand positioning. However, as discussed, business operations in contemporary visual arts exist in a variety of forms, managers of organisations may have different motivations and purposes, non-profit organisations and for-profit organisations may face different difficulties. Under these circumstances, a qualitative study based on ethnography is not able to address the issues for every type of organisation. Therefore, a quantitative study would be required to test the new extension of the theory, to determine whether or not and to what extent it may be applicable in different types of organisations in the contemporary visual arts sector.

Future research is recommended to be conducted using quantitative methods with different types of organisations in the contemporary visual arts sector. Through a set of criteria, future research may examine different organisations' strategic visions, managers' purposes, stakeholders' opinions, and artists' motivations. Assessing the influence of positioning as a percentage in different arts organisations may reveal the feasibility of identity-oriented positioning theory. Furthermore, as this study has collected more data than is actually used in this thesis, some aspects of branding could be analysed further, for example, the barriers caused by social clique and social class, as well as the influence of regional factors on the brand value of arts organisations. These areas are expected to be explored in future research. Lastly yet importantly, this study suggests *Consumer 4Cs Typology* as a reference for art-related promotion. However, to what extent this typology would be applicable has not yet been examined. Future research might focus on exploring this area, in order for branding in the arts to be supported more by commercial business theories.

As a final remark, this study examines to what extent commercial branding theories might be applicable in the contemporary visual arts sector. Adapting current brand positioning theory, the study argues that, in contemporary visual arts, especially an artist-led organisation, a corporate brand's positioning is identity-oriented, not competition-oriented. In essence, the study complements current brand positioning theory, extends branding research into the cultural sector and brings a sociological point of view into business research.

## Chapter 8 – Contribution



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## Appendix

## **Ethnographic Observation Summary**

This is a long-term participant observation, which lasted for two and half years, from November 2014 to April 2017. The reasons for choosing Breeze Creatives are explained in methodology chapter.

This ethnographic observation was undertaken for a long period while I was busy with other PhD duties. Therefore, I was unable to be present at Breeze Creatives and work with its directors on a daily basis. I accordingly decided to focus on the most important occasions, observing each strategic meeting, casual meeting, and crisis meeting. Moreover, I co-curated exhibitions for Breeze Creatives and joined Breeze Creatives' directors on 3-day business trip to Glasgow. At the same time, I was at Breeze Creatives to observe the directors/stakeholders' daily work whenever possible. To maintain casual interactions – those that the stakeholders of Breeze Creatives seem to prefer – I talked to them in various locations: in the gallery, during events, in the office, on the roof, at home, at a barbecue party, in a restaurant, and on the street. After realizing that, for the stakeholders in Breeze Creatives, professional life was inseparable from personal life, I immersed my professional and personal life in Breeze Creatives. I talked with the stakeholders as much as possible about the details of each exhibition and event they were organizing; I tried to understand their hobbies, their ideologies and their life experiences. All the observations have given me the opportunities to discover their ideology and identity,

which is essential for this research project. However, below I include only those observations that I consider relevant to my research project.

In addition, I was granted permission to check the organisation's diaries and to receive the emails, application proposals, documents, strategic reports drafted either by themselves or by a third party – a business-consulting agency. Furthermore, I conducted narrative interviews and semi-structured interviews with the stakeholders in Breeze Creatives as the other part of this ethnographic research.

As part of the participant observation, I was offered work on two exhibitions. On the first exhibition, I worked for a month; on the second one, I worked for about seven months (the two working periods overlapped). Moreover, I was offered a commission to update the organisation's logo. The updated version of logo was used in the stakeholders' interviews to seek answers for the research questions. In addition, I worked as a curating coordinator negotiating with galleries in China on behalf of Breeze Creatives in order to help the organisation to expand to this new market. This job as curating coordinator was conducted for the case study for about two years, from 2015 to 2017, and it continued after this case study ended on April 2017.

According to the directors (founders) of Breeze Creatives, which, also, is supported by my observations, a huge amount of working hours are spent on building construction and administration. The majority of work concerns ordering equipment, installing lamps and lights, managing cash flow, repairing locks, and ensuring that the building entrance password remains secure. The majority of work is safety and security related. For example dealing with security issues for the studio holders, making ceiling wiring safe, and maintaining the cleanliness of floors and toilets. One of the directors said, "95% of the work is building and administration work, 5% is about art; no, actually, even less, 2%". "Picking art-work is like a 2-minute thing", he said, snapping his fingers, before adding, "but we try to create a good environment so that good things may happen in here." "Probably because we are small, yeah, I guess, the curators in BALTIC would have more time to focus on arts. We don't have their resources. An artist-led organisation doesn't mean that the work is more about art, unfortunately."

Another reason for this may be that Breeze Creatives is a newly established organisation, created on 14 May 2014. The directors had been working in Commercial Union House before

Bamburgh House was released for their use in April 2015.<sup>109</sup> During 2015, the floors and the studio spaces in Bamburgh House were to be refurbished. Only three people are in charge of this organisation: on the one hand, this means that the organisation is flexible and can react quickly to problems; on the other, it means unclear job responsibilities and uncertain strategies. The directors consider the size of this organisation to be both its strength and weakness. “We work through our instinct”, one director said. Even though all three directors are artists, they must do everything else in addition to art-related work.

In general, the art-related work includes writing applications for the council, drafting articles for the media, communicating with artists, planning the annual exhibition schedule, checking applications for the artist-residency position and talking with collaborators from other companies or fields. Business advice appears significant for this organisation. At the end of 2016, the directors hired a business consultant as an employee to work part-time for them, in order to get strategic and management advice from a business aspect and quicken the organisation’s growth.

From April to December 2015, the organisation did not hold strategic meetings. This is because the directors had to focus on the refurbishment of the whole building, on organizing the installation of the walls for the blocks, taking timber from the ground floor to the top floor, painting the walls, putting up wall papers, hiring people to build a bar area, removing carpets, installing sockets for the studios, and so forth. Bamburgh House is a nine-floor building, with only three people to do these manual construction works.

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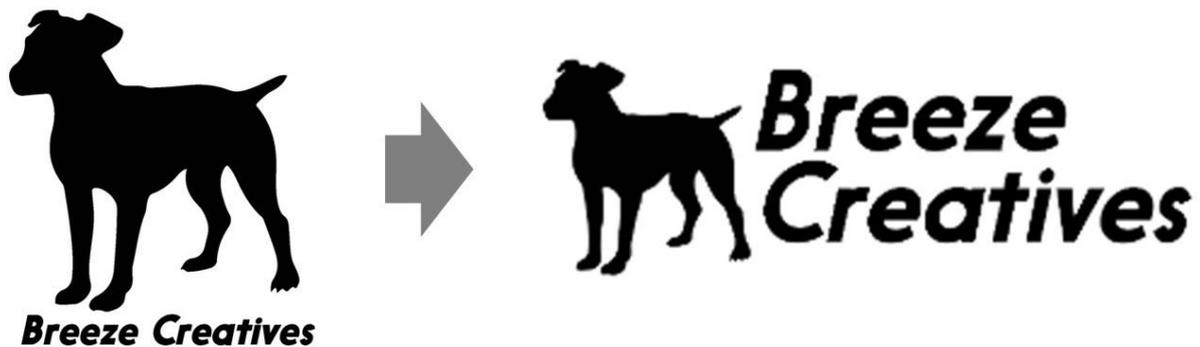
<sup>109</sup> From September 2014 to April 2015, in seeking to create an artistic environment, the founders from Breeze Creatives negotiated with the building owner and Newcastle-upon-Tyne council for about seven months to obtain a contract for using the building before the building was released to them.

## Redesigning the Logo 15 November 2014

Location: Commercial Union House, Newcastle

I was offered the opportunity to work with a director/graphic designer to redesign the Logo for Breeze Creatives. Major adjustments included:

1. Reducing the size of the image on the logo – the dog is now much smaller
2. Increasing the size of the text on the logo, and enhancing it by using a different font
3. Rearranging the overall image-and-text combination of the logo (the logo now has a rectangular shape, rather than squared)



### Example:

This post was published on Instagram 12 April 2017, to promote the exhibition *Look At Me*. However, in the post, a stakeholder asked in the comment whether Breeze Creatives was in Sunderland, because he noticed the iconic image of Breeze Creatives' logo –the dog – appeared on a building in Sunderland. Later, this stakeholder was informed that Breeze Creatives was about to expand to Sunderland. This information exchanged on Instagram increased the stakeholder's awareness of the current plan and movement of Breeze Creatives.



breezcreatives

Following

breezcreatives Ferhat Ozgur's The Will, at Abject Gallery, Newcastle, until 22nd April. #exhibition #turkey #videoart #installationart playmore2.0 🗨️ AW!!!! PLAY MORE

mencigdem 🖱️

sian\_jordan\_designs Hey did you guys used to be in Sunderland?

breezcreatives @sian\_jordan\_designs Not really used to, more coming soon.

sian\_jordan\_designs @breezcreatives aaahh right it's just I thought I saw this same dog on a building in Sunderland so thought maybe that's where you guys used to be stationed 😊

sian\_jordan\_designs Sorry to be a bore with all these questions but do you know of any artists studios kicking about? ☐☐xx

stephiez 🖱️



48 likes

23 HOURS AGO

Add a comment...



## **Strategic meeting 1 February 2015 21:00**

**Location: a private house, Newcastle**

The meeting was held at my home, while we were eating hotpot. People sat around the table listening to music and smoking, while spicy food was boiling in the soup. The three directors showed very good mood: they were proud of what they had done and excited about what they were going to do.

Some ideas of how to increase the gallery's income were discussed, such as selling Scottish Whisky in the gallery. They were worrying about the rate relief for using the building, which would be calculated by the building owner and the local council in Newcastle. They hoped that the rate relief could be increased so that they could work on more projects.

There were major concerns about the directors' potential incomes in the future. "How much would we get paid?" Apparently, they were paid less than national minimum wage. "We would each have a half-million-pound debt, if this didn't work." "Considering the risks and what we are doing, we get paid next to nothing really; we are paid less than a bartender", one of the directors was complaining. The directors were laughing, but I could sense frustration behind their faces.

## **Strategic meeting 3 March 2015 20:00**

**Location: a restaurant / a pub, Newcastle**

In April 2015, Bamburgh House was about to be released to Breeze Creatives. A meeting was held to discuss Breeze Creatives' current concerns about how to manage each floor in Bamburgh House, and to celebrate the hard working of the past few months.

The meeting started in an Italian restaurant, where they ate pizza, and it continued in a pub in Newcastle city centre. On the first floor of the pub, people were sitting around the table in a corner where red candles were burning. The pub's environment was somewhat quirky, very dark, and full of old-fashioned leather furniture. There was a chandelier on the ceiling, made of green bottles. The environment somewhat reminded me of something from Dracula's castle.

*The communication with the founders:* Concerning the best way to manage each floor of Bamburgh House, the directors' minds had been changing. Some talks were held with the collaborators (stakeholders) with whom the directors wished to work. As a result, two stakeholders thought they were to be given a floor to manage. Yet, the directors later changed their minds and told the stakeholders this would not happen. One of the stakeholders was upset. I asked the directors for more details about the issues:

“When we were first thinking about how Bamburgh House could run, we considered adopting the system of Commercial Union (CU) House, in which each floor is run by a different organisation. We were interested in this as we would have been able to divide the building into subject specialism areas. However, we quickly realised that it would be financially detrimental to our organisation, so we changed our mind.”

“The catalyst for us to change our mind was that, at first, we had spoken to Sarah Wilkinson (from Thinking Digital) and XXX (from YYYY) about the possibility for a design floor.<sup>110</sup> What we quickly realised, however, is that in doing this we would be giving creative control away and the organisation would be diluted, and we would have to constantly negotiate with other people to make sure that the direction in which they would take the floor fitted with what we hoped for the building.”

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<sup>110</sup> Through my observations, I found that Sarah had a good relationship with the directors of Breeze Creatives.

“Alongside this, we were worried that, by separating the floors (into subject areas), we would generate clusters of the same type of artists; if this was to happen, then our hope for cross-collaborative practices would not be possible.”

XXX refused to participate my interview and case study. Here is her reply in the email:

XXX@YYYY.com Mon 23/05/2016 13:00

*Title: PhD reserach participation request*

*Dear Wang Jin,*

*I've been forwarded this email today. Thank you very much for your invitation but I'm not part of Breeze Creatives, I only rent a studio from them as a tenant. The arts organisation I run is called YYYY: [www.YYYY.com](http://www.YYYY.com)*

*Best of luck with your project!*

*Regards,*

*XXX*

*YYYY*

In 2017, I again mentioned this issue to Breeze Creatives, when asking how the stakeholders had been doing since this issue arose. One of the directors said: “We have continued to have a great relationship with Sarah Wilkinson, who, after it was explained to her why she couldn’t run the floor, was really happy. XXX on the other hand has not spoken with us since, despite the fact that she rents space from us. In fact, she has been very difficult to work with since.” “Sunderland 10x10 (which we won) was designed by Sarah, and we continue to work with her on this level, and will do so more in the future as she has just taken on a role for Fusion, which is a regional arts initiative (focused on digital, as is her subject specialism).”

I had some conversation with several studio members, the overall image they had for XXX is that she is a very funding-oriented artist. Whether she would take one project or not depends on whether she would get money from the council or not. She would not want to do project without income coming from somewhere.

A year after this issue was raised, I interviewed Sarah Wilkinson to investigate this stakeholder’s ideology, identity, lifestyle and opinions on arts industry. The detail can be checked in the interview.

## **Strategic meeting 10 April 2015 22:00**

### **Location: one of the founders' home**

The meeting held in a director's home instead of the office. People sat on the sofa and listened to music from an online radio station with a 1960s flavour. The interior decoration of the director's home complimented this music, with its 1960s to 70s style.

The strategic meeting was held in a very casual way: the organisation's mission and the projects were discussed while comments on personal issues and interests were exchanged. The personal interests and the company's issues were not discussed separately.

Possible future ideas were discussed in depth:

1. They want a gallery to be built on the top floor, so that the audience can enjoy the view over Newcastle.
2. The gallery should be what they called a "posh" gallery, which means showing prestigious works, critical thinking and showing that Breeze Creatives has good taste. At the same time, it should not be limited to certain social circles. "We are going to make good works accessible to everybody", "not just to the people from the art world, but also to the people outside this circle". They planned to make the gallery for "everybody", not just people who are of a certain social class, or people with a certain background. "This is an issue for the art world, the people who go to the gallery are normally the artists themselves, the artists' friends or people from a certain background, and this is wrong", a director commented.
3. They would try to collaborate with institutions within and outside Newcastle, and they were starting an arts education project with Northumberland College to deliver a different experience of arts education. "The student would benefit if they worked with arts organisations before they graduate, not just to gain skills and learn theories, they need to see what the reality is, and this will help them to get into a better university." "Like JO, she would have been asked to do a foundation course if she didn't work with us, but she did, so she wasn't required to do the foundation course. She got an offer straight away to study at Newcastle University."<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> In April 2017, I again asked the directors whether the central idea of this arts education project (giving the students experience of the art world) was successfully applied. One director told me "Oh yes! FAD [the name later given to the arts education project] did really well", while another director said, "this year, a lot of

## **Babble: Sound-based performance art event 27 April 2015 19:00**

**Location: BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead**

This sound-based art event was held by Breeze Creatives in collaboration with other organisations, including BALTIC. The introduction of this event can be viewed on Breeze Creative's official website: <https://breezecreatives.com/events/babble>

The event was held on the first floor of BALTIC, Gateshead. About 150 people attended the event. The event was held in a dark room, where a small square stage was installed.

1. More tickets were sold online than on the door. Although the event was attractive to the public, a number of tickets were sold by the artists through their social networks. Charlie Dearnley said, "I persuaded four of my flatmates to come."
2. Instant interaction on Twitter is a prominent characteristic in this event. A huge screen was held up to show what kind of messages people share in public through # tags on Twitter accounts.
3. The whole performance was poem-based; the audience casually sat on the floor instead of seats.
4. Drinks were provided on the door.

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students have been accepted by top universities in arts, like Chelsea [Chelsea Collage of Arts, UAL], Royal Academy [Royal Academy of Arts], Glasgow [University of Glasgow] etc. Yeah, FAD has done well."

## **Launch event for Arts Emergency response centre in the North East**

**1 May 2015 19:00**

**Location: BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead**

This was an event that contains multiple forms of arts. At the entrance, an opera singer sang for people when they arrived, while a dance group and performance artists performed as scheduled inside the gallery. When on stage, rock and roll bands and folk singers drew the largest audiences. At the end, the keynote speaker gave a speech about the principles of the organisation Art Emergency including its mission and vision.

The main purpose of this event was to encourage people to volunteer their work, in different forms, for Arts Emergency. About 200 people submitted application forms to help this charity organisation.

The reasons why Arts Emergency chose Breeze Creatives are the following: Firstly, one of the directors of Breeze Creatives met the head of this organisation previously at a personal social event. Secondly, this organisation's principle is that they want to give people equal rights to get an education in the arts. On its website, Arts Emergency writes:

“Learning to read poetry or philosophy or how to understand a painting or film are not elite pursuits, but now rising tuition fees and the withdrawal of public funding for the teaching of Arts and Humanities at university means they risk becoming so.”<sup>112</sup>

One of the directors from Breeze Creatives said, “They are so excited about our idea to create a space that is accessible to everyone”. Another director felt “grateful”, because “they are an established organisation and they are from London”.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> About us - Arts Emergency (2017). Arts Emergency. Retrieved 17 March 2017, from <http://www.arts-emergency.org/about-us/>

<sup>113</sup> Information was released in January 2017 notifying that Arts Emergency will launch their national event at Bamburgh House in Newcastle, where Breeze Creatives is located, in December 2017. I was told by a director that “many celebrities and famous artists will be invited to this event as it is a significant event for Arts Emergency to build their reputation nationally”. To gain the right to host this national event launch, Breeze Creatives competed with London's Barbican Centre – a prestigious, nationally known art centre.

To discover why Arts Emergency chose Bamburgh House in the North East over the Barbican Centre in London, I had a conversation with a director from Breeze Creatives, who said, “We just told them that if the event was held at the Barbican Centre in London, it would contradict the principles of the charity (Arts Emergency). Arts

## **Creative Quarter Block Party 29 January 2016 19:00 ~ 00:00**

**Location: Bamburgh House, Newcastle**

1. About 1300 people turned up.
2. Very strong creative connections were shown through this party: many different creative organisations and arts organisations took part in this Creative Quarter collaboration. Breeze Creatives became a major mover for cultural collaboration in the North East.
3. In terms of attracting visitors, the community network and online media showed their effectiveness. Friends brought friends and, at the end, more than a thousand people were drawn to this party through online media promotion: Facebook event pages, Twitter accounts and company websites.
4. There was an intermedia contemporary exhibition on the 8<sup>th</sup> floor, Abject Gallery. Other than this, different activities were held on all floors, from video games to education programs, from an electronic music DJ set to a community networking event. The bar on the 8<sup>th</sup> floor generated good income.
5. People didn't want to leave, even after the planned closing time, so they gathered around the bar area and drank until midnight.

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Emergency's aim is to help underprivileged groups to gain equal right in arts education, and this event aims to encourage more people to pay attention to underprivileged kids, and unprivileged areas. So, if the event was held in a prestigious arts centre like the London Barbican, it would deliver the opposing message to the public, one that against the essence of Arts Emergency."

## **Stakeholder talk 10 March 2016 18:00**

**Location: Abject Gallery, 8<sup>th</sup> Floor, Bamburgh House, Newcastle**

This conversation took place at the bar area of the gallery. It was raised during a casual talk with two stakeholders, who are event organisers, and with whom the directors collaborate professionally and have built solid connections.

A studio holder refused to pay rent, giving the explanation that paying rent may be a “cultural difference”, because she is an American artist. She was late in paying three months of rent to Breeze Creatives, and she was trying to find a way of using the studio without paying rent.

“According to her, American artists would not realise that they should pay rent.” “Ha-ha, I don’t know what to say.” “What cultural difference is this? Americans don’t pay rent? You’re kidding me”, some stakeholders said. A stakeholder suggested, “have a talk with her, and kick her out if she refuses to pay rent.”

\*\* In April 2016, a meeting was held with a business advisor of Breeze Creatives, Toni. Breeze Creatives was advised to end the contract with this artist but give up chasing the rent to avoid wasting more time and efforts on dealing with this issue.

## **The Late Show 14 May 2016 19:00 ~ 00:00**

**Location: Bamburgh House, Newcastle**

Abject Gallery –Breeze Creatives: Solo exhibition of Elizabeth Eamer (the paintings of pixels) premiere (8 Floor)

Abject 2 Gallery – Breeze Creatives: Julian Germain - Ashington District Star- Photograph exhibition (2<sup>nd</sup> Floor)

Left leg Gallery -- Breeze Creatives: Inter-media installation art / installation art (1<sup>st</sup> Floor)

FAD foundation course exhibition – Project of Breeze Creatives (6<sup>th</sup> Floor)

Nosebleed – Stakeholder of Breeze Creatives: interactive digital game (4<sup>th</sup> Floor)

1. Group visiting: People came to the show in groups. By the calculation on the door, in total, of 907 visitors, about 95% of people came as part of group, and 5% of people came alone (as an estimate following 2 hours of observation, about 80% of the groups were formed by 2-3 people, while 20% of the groups were formed by more than 3 people).

2. Came to visit the friends who work here: Some of the visitors came to meet the friends who were working on this visual art event on the day. They tried to catch up with acquaintances and old friends to form a more stable social network.

3. Teens felt cool when they visited the gallery with their peers: When groups of teenagers came visited the gallery unaccompanied by adults, they were excited. Judging by their talk (“hey, look here, it’s cool”), they were gaining new experience through participating in The Late Show. When I looked at them and expressed some surprise, they were proud of themselves. Perhaps this is because visiting a gallery is *not* a common activity for a teenager.

4. The observation of group-discussion of audiences: People discussed the idea of visual arts in group, expressing their own ideas about certain visual artwork, thereby seeking recognitions from within the group. They expected their ideas to be accepted by others in the group.

5. Artist-led discussion: The artist-led discussion was welcomed by attendees. When the artist was expressing the ideas behind her work, other people would pay more attention, and would

show more interest in the work. They tended to join the discussions, and tried to gain a deeper understanding by the end of the discussion.

6. *People stay longer if they can socialise or they are entertained:* People stayed longer when they were entertained or when they could socialise with others. For example, Nosebleed provides video games for people to play; their studio was crowded all the time. For such a small studio (about 20 m<sup>2</sup>), it was a successful engagement. Meanwhile, on the 8<sup>th</sup> floor (Abject Gallery), a bar is available for visitors. People stayed there till 00:00 despite the advertised time for closure of the event being 23:00.
7. The artist who was offered this exhibition is a friend of a director of Breeze Creatives. The artist and Breeze Creatives both benefited from this collaboration: for the artist, she held a solo exhibition to boost her CV; the organisation gained a chance to display what is generally considered as “good work” within the art world, and, at the same time, it expanded its social circles through the new exhibition.

## Strategic meeting 18 May 2016 21:30 ~ 00:00

**Location: a director's home, Newcastle**

The strategic meeting was held in the backyard of a director's home, during a barbecue party. Surrounded by other stakeholders (Stu – artist in residence, Heather - event participant, and John-event organiser), and by Prosecco and food, music and dogs, a very casual meeting took place. The environment and atmosphere were enjoyable.

1. A decision was taken on the spur of the moment. The directors decided to apply for funding to Sunderland local council, using Breeze Creatives as a case study to measure the cultural impact resulting from the future conversion of part of The Athenaeum, a historical building in Sunderland.
2. There was a discussion about how to realise the project of attempting to convert The Athenaeum into a contemporary art centre, to replicate the success of Bamburgh House.
3. The marketing communication budget spent on The Late Show was discussed.<sup>114</sup> “Last year, ‘The Late Show spent’ £70,000 on advertising”; this year, it was estimated to be significantly less than that, “presumably around £35,000”, a director said. In general, according to the director, the budget is spent on advertising on the outdoor advertising on the windows of the Tyne & Wear metro and the flyers on buses.

In Bamburgh House, the people who were attracted by the promotion of this year's ‘The Late Show’ were fewer in number than those for the Block Party. The Block Party was organised and held by Breeze Creatives in Bamburgh House in January 2016. The Block Party only spent £65 of its budget on marketing communication, promoting only through online media (Facebook, Twitter and emails). Yet, there were 1,300 people turned up at

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<sup>114</sup> The Late Show is a free cultural crawl that takes place annually in Newcastle upon Tyne and Gateshead. It is supported by a variety of sponsors, councils and museums. “During The Late Shows, museums, galleries, studio collectives and landmark historical buildings come together to offer visitors one-off events including hands-on workshops, behind-the-scenes tours, performances and parties. The Late Show is about encouraging people to do something cultural with their evening in celebration of the national event Museums at Night.” According to The Late Show's official website, “The Late Shows began in 2007. In the first year, 14 venues took part, rising to more than 70 in 2016. Venues at last year's Late Shows recorded over 40,000 visits across the weekend...The main objective of The Late Shows is to encourage people to visit a cultural venue that they may not have visited before. In particular, the aim of The Late Show is to attract a younger audience and share loyal audiences between venues.”

-- *About Us*. (2017). *Thelateshows.org.uk*. Retrieved 24 March 2017, from <http://thelateshows.org.uk/about-us>

Bamburgh House for this event. Breeze Creatives received a boost to its reputation by organizing The Block Party.

In comparison, in this year's 'The Late Show', through the whole night, there were only 907 people visited Bamburgh House. The building looked a little empty, despite it hosting a famous artist's exhibition: Julian Germain - Ashington District Star.

4. Promotional support for stakeholders: An issue between Breeze Creatives and a studio holder was discussed during the meeting: a studio holder<sup>115</sup> complained about a lack of promotional support from Breeze Creatives during The Late Show. The studio holder argued that the relatively few visitors to his studio opening event resulted from a lack of promotional support by Breeze Creatives.

However, Breeze Creatives responded that, in order to receive promotional support, the stakeholder "needed to be more involved with Breeze Creatives, so that his needs could be understood". Therefore, he would have to either actively communicate with Breeze Creatives or hold the studio longer to give Breeze Creatives opportunities to observe and understand what he needs.

5. Breeze Creatives was considering cooperating with universities and holding an international cultural conference in the coming year.

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<sup>115</sup> A renter of a studio in Bamburgh House.

## Stakeholder talk 5 June 2016

Location: Abject Gallery, 8<sup>th</sup> Floor, Bamburgh House, Newcastle

### 1. Misunderstanding: Organism or orgasm?

This conversation took place when two stakeholders (a director and an event organiser/artist in the building) were smoking on the top of the building under a sunlit sky. A spectacular view presented itself to me, and everybody was relaxed and happy.

I asked, “did you see Qi’s proposal?” “Yeah, it is cool, we think.” Then I asked them if they had an intermedia installation exhibition before, and they said yes. I then asked them why they like the proposal. Their response was surprising.

“It is about the orgasm, it is alternative and cool, nobody did this before, we think that it will be really bold.” “I know it should have been done a long time ago but just nobody did it, surprisingly.” “It is a natural thing, it is something that human beings share, I wonder why nobody did it.”

However, in Qi’s proposal, “orgasm” was never mentioned. The word used in the proposal was actually “organism”. I was confused, because I was sure that there was no “orgasm” mentioned in the proposal. I asked another director to make sure that I had not misremembered: “Is it orgasm or organism?” She replied that, from what she recalled, “It is orgasm”.

To establish which was correct – “orgasm” or “organism”— I phoned Qi (the artist) the following day. She was surprised and suspected that she had put the wrong word in the proposal: “ahhh...no, must be wrong, it should be ‘organism’, let me check, wait...” She then checked the document and confirmed, “yes, I put the correct word in, it is ‘organism’ not ‘orgasm’.”<sup>116</sup>

### 2. Why this artist was chosen?

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<sup>116</sup> The directors eventually realised that the word in the proposal was “organism” before the artist started to create the artwork.

A discussion took place concerning the decision to give Fang Qi this exhibition opportunity. One of the directors said that, “we planned to give an exhibition to a group of Turkish artists. We have done everything to support them but their Visas were rejected, so, we have to think about something else otherwise the gallery is going to be empty for too long, and people would start to forget us.” “I know Fang Qi through a friend, who showed Qi’s work to me, I think her work was good, and this is an emergency, so, Fang Qi is a good option.”

### **Crisis meeting 12 July 2016 9:00**

**Location: Abject Gallery, 8<sup>th</sup> Floor, Bamburgh House, Newcastle**

It was lately discovered that some of the studio holders (one of them is a community-based organisation) gave the password of the entrance to “the teenage kids who have issues”, of whom “some attended some activities” organised here. This is disallowed by the rental contract for safety and security reasons. It turned out that the teenagers distributed the password to their friends, which resulted in each of them could access the building using the password stored in their phones. “This is very dangerous” said the director, “[the community- based organisation] always thinks that the teenagers are good kids who just have some issues they need to work on, but actually it is not safe and it is not fair for other studio holders”.

The ideologies of individuals might differ greatly, and therefore, in one director’s expression, “It is difficult for us to make everybody understand how important it is to follow the rules!”<sup>117</sup>

In the end, the managers decided to spend £200 to change the password every month. “This money could have been saved if they had followed the rules.

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<sup>117</sup> Ironically, in the beginning of 2017, a studio holder was found frequently provided his key to a group of teenagers to sleep over in his studio. Again, Breeze Creative tried to stop him yet failed, this group of teenagers later broke into the building and stole a variety of equipment from studios, including the studios owned by the community-based organisation that used to give away the password to teenagers.

## **The Reversible Future: Fang Qi -- Intermedia installation art event 15 July 2016 18:00 ~ 21:00**

**Location: Abject Gallery, 8<sup>th</sup> Floor, Bamburgh House, Newcastle**

**Artist: Fang Qi, a contemporary visual artist from China**

I was offered the opportunity to work with a director of Breeze Creatives on this exhibition. My role was curator's assistant. I worked for a month, during which I mainly communicated with the artist, to gain an understanding of the concept and idea of what she wanted to express, and of what inspired her, so that I would be able to explain the ideas to the audience on the preview night and the days following the exhibition. I then helped the artist to access the gallery to measure the space, to transfer computer files, and to communicate with the gallery about amendments to the artwork. The director with whom I worked was responsible for checking the proposal and the realization of the display, installing the equipment, and ensuring that the installation would be displayed properly.

1. Two large pieces of visual artwork were presented through projectors, and several small installations were displayed on the other side of the gallery. Before the preview night started, the artworks received compliments from people who work in the art world: artists, managers, or those in marketing departments. Some offers were made to the artist (Fang Qi) for holding another exhibition in a larger gallery.
2. Only 17 people turned up, all of whom were either the artist's friends or from the manager's social network. Nine of these attendees were from an arts-related industry, while the other eight attendees were members of the public.
3. According to one of the directors (Daniel): "this is an unexpectedly poor turnout normally there would be about 80 to 100 people or more in each preview of the exhibition."
4. A marketing manager (Heather), who works in a contemporary visual arts organisation, suggested: "it may be because there are lots of events happening tonight at the same time, but in general, Friday is a good night to go out and turn up to a preview night in a gallery. [...] Or, maybe the audience instead visited the BALTIC last night, which held a preview night for an installation event, but, I think, very possibly, it is because the artist (Fang Qi) doesn't have local connections or a local social network. [...] Normally, the artist will bring

friends. Unless the artist is nationally known, networking is significant. If the artist doesn't have the local network, people just don't pay much attention to the work."

5. Another director (Alex) said, "it is important to build up the reputation of our gallery, as people would then trust us, and trust the show we hold".
6. Another director (Zoe) said: "She (Fang Qi) didn't send enough invitation [emails] out I think, she just sent them to a few people, but if she sent more email invitations, there might be more people turning up."
7. Heather found a new job as an online marketing manager working for a non-profit photography organisation. She spent most of the night teaching a director from Breeze Creatives how to use Instagram to share photos and images relating to Breeze Creatives, and the events it organises. At the end she said "we'd better type down 'Breeze Creatives' in the search bar often when we use Google, as it helps to lift the ranking of the company's website, and brings lots of other benefits."

## Strategic meeting / participant 19 September 2016 18:00

Location: Abject Gallery, 8th Floor, Bamburgh House, Newcastle

This meeting was held in the office and conducted formally, because I was in a hurry to attend another meeting. During the summer, I had been contacting galleries to enquire about the possibility of holding exhibitions for British artists in China, and I eventually received confirmation from a gallery.

1. The plan to hold exhibitions abroad was discussed because a gallery in China confirmed its intention to collaborate with Breeze Creatives. I was complimented for my helpfulness: “Jaisen has never had an exhibition in a place other than the North East. [...] So, he is just considered a ‘local’ artist, people basically wouldn’t accept his proposal for anything outside Newcastle, especially prestigious place like London. [...] People think that he would never leave the North East. [...] Jaisen was crying when I told him this news”, a stakeholder (event manager/studio holder) said.  
“That shows how London has centralised worldwide artworks.” According to a director, “the marketing director of BALTIC had said to me, ‘There is geographic discrimination in the art world. Although BALTIC had more than 300 exhibitions, and lots of the artists are internationally known, BALTIC never had a single chance to have a feature in *Frieze* magazine, unless it had a show in London, not the North East.’”<sup>118</sup>
2. Ideas about having more education programmes over the “quiet time” in summer were brought up. The opinions were split into two groups: some think that it is a good way to bring income; others think that too many education programmes may damage the reputation of Breeze Creatives – “If we do projects just to get more income, people [from the art world] will think we are not professional”. Although each of them considered themselves “poorly paid”, one director was very against this idea, thinking that this is “short-sighted” view.
3. Topics of personal interest are constantly brought up in the strategic meetings; personal preferences on music, movies, furniture styles, etc. were constantly blended with talks of strategies, missions, and planning.

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<sup>118</sup> “*Frieze* is the leading magazine for contemporary art and culture. Set up in 1991, published 8 times a year and with offices in London, New York and Berlin, *Frieze* includes essays, reviews and columns by today's most forward-thinking writers, artists and curators.”

- About Frieze. (2017). Frieze Magazine. Retrieved 24 March 2017, from <https://shopcc.frieze.com/>

## **Curating practice: Superior Animals – Mao Kai’s Show**

**Location: Abject Gallery, 8<sup>th</sup> Floor, Bamburgh House, Newcastle**

**Artist: Mao Kai, a contemporary visual artist from China**

The background of the artist: Mao Kai was my former colleague in JWT Advertising. He started his career as a graphic designer in Saatchi & Saatchi Advertising but later became a creative director in JWT Advertising and Bates Advertising. All of the companies he worked belong to international communication groups (e.g. WPP group). As he has been always interested in paintings, he started to focus on oil-painting and became a professional artist after he quit his job from the advertising agency.

### **a. The introduction of the participant observation**

This is a participant observation, as I co-curated this exhibition with another curator (a director from Breeze Creatives). At the beginning, I introduced Mao Kai, the artist, to the directors and suggested that his work may be worthy of an exhibition. The directors received the artworks sent through my email and then they spent about 5 minutes to check Mao Kai’s work together in front of a monitor before they granted him a solo exhibition opportunity.

During the following seven months, I was responsible for communicating with the artist and organizing the working process. The whole process lasted from March to October 2016. I worked with the artist during the creation of the paintings and explained the ideas to the audience during the preview night on October 7<sup>th</sup> 2016.

From the very beginning, the artist and I had conversations about what the painting should look like, and about what might be attractive to the audience in the UK and in China. Soon I realised that, in terms of the topic and the style of the paintings, there may not be much difference between what can be accepted by the UK audience and what can be accepted by the Chinese audience. However, there may be a big difference between the UK artists and the Chinese artists on how they prefer to communicate and how much media exposure they expect as a promotional method for the exhibition. Although, by the conversations we had through instant communication software (e.g. QQ, WeChat), the preference may be caused by the artist’s own

past experience, it seems that media exposure means much more for a Chinese artist than for an English artist (sometimes I felt it could be more important than the exhibition itself).<sup>119</sup>

During the curating process, 95 percent of communication was done through WeChat, a mobile app for exchanging text through Internet. Considering other communication I had with Chinese artists, WeChat is the preferred way for them to communicate, while for English artists, they prefer to talk in person or via emails. During the conversations we had regarding the exhibition, the topics mentioned the most frequently were “how much media coverage will you have for this exhibition?” “Which media will you use?” “Is it online media?” “Do you have online version of this publication (so that I can share it with my friends)?”

One of the issues I had was that Mao Kai decided to create a total new set of paintings for his solo exhibition in the UK, in which the style would be slightly different from his previous paintings. I had to send his previous paintings together with his current sample paintings to the directors in Breeze Creatives. The paintings received compliments for the skills involved and for the context in which they were created. However, there were some concerns about the direction Mao Kai wanted to take. I let Mao Kai work on what he wanted to do, because I thought that, once some of the paintings were done, they would be more convincing. If the other curator did not like the new style, we could always go back to the old style. However, several months passed, the paintings received more compliments than ever after they were sent to Breeze Creatives. Finally, we all agreed on what should be shown in the exhibition – the 16 new paintings. I realised that the styles and the ideas of a painting is very hard to deliver through verbal communication, it is better to put the visual work in front of the people.

Moreover, cultural differences may create misunderstandings between the two sides. Hence, it is essential to explain the idea with a cultural background before asking people to give opinions, because the understanding for one object could be totally opposite when people are from the east of the world. For example, in Chinese culture, pears relate to the people who are professional actors in traditional opera theatre, while in English culture, there is no such meaning.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Mao Kai’s advertising experiences may be one of the reasons why he was concerned about the media exposure so much. He knows how important the media coverage is for building a brand as he used to work with a variety of brands to increase the brand awareness and to maintain the brand loyalty before he became a professional artist.

<sup>120</sup> In Chinese context, Pear Garden is a nickname for the troupes of Beijing Opera, as such, ‘the family from the pear garden’ refers to the social circles to which the actors working in Beijing Opera belong. In modern Chinese

The cultural understanding and differences caused the other issue during the curating process, when the names of the paintings were to be decided. Although Mao Kai and I discussed the ideas of the paintings and how they should be named, we found out that, sometimes, it was very hard to find exactly the same word in English to convey the original Chinese meaning. Taking the pear as an example, the original Chinese name – ‘the pear and the dream’— is a metaphor that expresses the dream that the actor (the woman wearing a costume in the painting) has for her career and for her life. If the Chinese name had been literally translated into English, the name would have lost its context and emotional resonance with the audience. Yet if we had named the painting in another way for the English audience, the name would have lost its ‘Chinese taste’. At the end, I and the other curator decided to name most of the paintings ‘untitled’, in order not to mislead the audience in any way.

Mao Kai and I decided to name the exhibition ‘Superior Animals’. The title meant to be a metaphor for the pride, the self-righteousness and complacency of human beings. Mao Kai painted every person with an extremely long neck, so that the whole body looks weirdly distorted. Even for the animals he painted, he gave each of them a human body with clothes on. The reason why he did this was asked during the preview night on October 7<sup>th</sup> 2016.

An audience member asked: “could you explain why you gave these people such long necks, they are attractive in a weird way I mean, eye catching.” Mao Kai said “I think humans are animals, we don’t have much difference, I paint these long neck to show how proud we are (for being human beings), actually, it’s odd.”

In previous conversations, he had expressed similar opinions and ideas before he painted. He said “this is how the young generation sees itself, especially the generation born in 90s China, they always see themselves as superior to the others. However, no generation is better than the other ones.” “Self-righteousness, that is what I would call the new generation, no, not just the new generation, the entire human society.” “This is also the common mistake that human beings make.” “We always see ourselves as superior to other animals, yet, at the end, we are animals too.” “This long neck is a metaphor of human behaviour, the smugness and self-satisfaction, sometimes the selfishness. Especially in the modern society, people cannot care

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context, this meaning has been extended to the social circles to which actors working in a variety of traditional Chinese opera theatres belong.

less about others. It is all about satisfying human beings themselves, to become what we want to be in this society.”

The other curator (the director) with whom I was working was responsible for deciding whether or not to show the execution of the painting. His work also includes writing promotional articles for the media, arranging the budget for the exhibition, filling the transportation forms and the managing the time slot for the gallery.<sup>121</sup>

Mao Kai felt grateful that Breeze Creatives did not charge him for shipping the paintings to the UK and did not charge him fees for the exhibition, “I paid fees for the exhibition in Paris and in Italy.”<sup>122</sup> “Many organisations charge fees to show work for me, I was charged in the exhibition in Japan, and I will be charged for the show in France and in Italy.” However, for Mao Kai, the fact that he was not charged was considered as evidence that Breeze Creatives is “a professional organisation”.<sup>123</sup>

About 200 people in total attended the preview night, which was “remarkable” according to the directors. In the preview night, I was responsible for interpreting questions and answers for the audience, explaining the ideas of the artist to the audience who was interested. Compliments were received from the audience. The audience was highly interested in the meaning of the paintings. The details are stated in the summary below.

## **b. The summary of the curating process**

1. The artist was concerned about the uniqueness of his paintings, the consistency of the whole collection in the exhibition. Mao Kai has been trying to create a personal style, one that only belongs to him. He said, “I think that the long neck thing has never been shown in art history”. Giving the fact that Mao Kai has created a personal style for the whole collection in his solo exhibition, the messages and the metaphors delivered by the paintings are impressive for the audience, according to the conversation I had with them during the preview night.

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<sup>121</sup> The articles and the images involved can be checked through the media exposure documents about this event.

<sup>122</sup> In January 2017, Mao Kai told me how much he was charged for an exhibitions he attended in Paris in a conversation, yet asked me not to tell others.

<sup>123</sup> In April 2017, Mao Kai told me that he will have another solo exhibition in Venice, Italy, which is also a paid exhibition. After Breeze Creatives’ directors knew that he paid to have his solo exhibition, they briefly discussed about it and despised this action. One of the directors commented “I wouldn’t put this kind of exhibition in my CV if I were him” [...] “It is a scandal in the view of the art world in here”.

Questions were asked such as “Why the stag is beside this pregnant woman?”; “Why the pregnant woman is wearing this costume?”; “What do you want to deliver through this pregnant woman?”; “It is very interesting that you make these people’s neck so long, why?”; “Why the title of this exhibition is called Superior Animals?”

Because of the successfulness of his exhibition, Mao Kai has decided to create more paintings and sculpture in similar style and trying to promote them in other countries.

2. During the entire organizing period for the exhibition, almost all of the communication was done through mobile application WeChat. The app helped me as a researcher to achieve the instant communication, which was essential for seeking ideas and responding instantly in case of emergency. Also, the app helped me to transfer instant images and photos sent from Mao Kai’s studio to the other curator, for example, the newly updated ideas or names he thought about for a painting. I could also know about what kind of new technologies or software he was using. WeChat provided an instant information-exchanging platform for us, so we could decide what to do with certain issues quickly.
3. Social media platforms: Facebook and Instagram helped me to know about the Mao Kai’s lifestyle and ideology, which helped me to understand his personal identity and collective identity. As a curator, it was very helpful for me to build up a close relationship with Mao Kai; as a researcher, the instant sharing of his personal and professional lifestyle helped me to find out his personal identity and his collective identity with Breeze Creatives.

In terms of the effectiveness of the data collecting, social media platform provided possibilities for me to make quotations or to write down summaries after the communication; in terms of the effectiveness of the communication, it helped me to maintain a casual style during the interaction, which was always preferred by the artists.

**Example:** An Instagram post provides a particular example about how the ideology of Breeze Creatives is exchanged with its stakeholders. It was posted on October 6<sup>th</sup> 2016, one day before the preview night. It is a picture of Mao Kai’s painting in which a long necked rabbit with long brown waving hair and dressed in fur clothes, standing in front of a view of countryside. The landscape in the background looked like Lake District and the hairstyle of the rabbit is elegant.



breezeCreatives

Following

32 likes

24w

breezeCreatives One of Mao Kai's Superior Animals #paintings looks rather like someone from a certain royal family.

Opening tomorrow at Abject Gallery, Newcastle as part of the #blockparty <http://creativequarter.org.uk/venues/abject-gallery>

#katemiddleton #katemiddletonstyle #royalfamily #princess #exhibition #art #surrealism #oilpainting #gallery

wwkd\_official Love this!

damien.the.matador 🗡️

entdaily Well done!

artbyjoelhultdin 😊

❤️ Add a comment...



**The descriptions beside the image:**

**Breeze Creatives**

One of Mao Kai's superior Animals #paintings looks rather like someone from a certain royal family.

Opening tomorrow at Abject Gallery, Newcastle as part of the #blockparty <http://creativequarter.org.uk/venues/abject-gallery>

#katemiddleton #katemiddletonstyle #royalfamily #princess #exhibition #art #surrealism #oilpainting #gallery

The comments include two emoji icons – one is 'victory', the other is 'loving eyes'; two texts – "Love this!" and "Well done!".

4. The artist was very much concerned about media exposure. He wondered if there would be enough media coverage for his solo exhibition and if there would be online versions of the published articles, news or images to spread through his personal social media accounts. He focused on the online media and was not very much interested in the

traditional print media, thinking that the online versions were much more useful for him to gain public awareness in a short period.

5. Printed catalogue may be an alternative way to promote paintings for the collectors. Mao Kai paid and printed out his own catalogue for the audience to take away from his exhibition. Most of the catalogue were collected by the audience as a guidance of the exhibition. Some people came back to the exhibition with the catalogue in hand passed by their friends. Some of them came up to ask the price of each painting.
6. The artist was very glad of the fact that this exhibition was “professional”, which means that the purpose of organizing this exhibition was NOT to bring income to the gallery. Mao Kai stated, “This gallery is really professional. They didn’t charge me for my exhibition and the audience come today is really interested in my work.” “Some galleries invite random people to come to my exhibition, the audience were not interested in arts at all. Bad.”
7. During the preview night, I worked as the interpreter for Mao Kai to explain the concepts, the ideas, the genre and the creating process to the audience. Therefore, I had chances to make conversations with the audience regarding the paintings. Comparing with Mao Kai’s thinking, the metaphor of each painting was interpreted more profoundly by some of the audience members. The audience reflected upon what metaphors the artist wanted to deliver and why. Yet the artist did not think too much about the metaphors when he painted. Rather, he created paintings from more of an aesthetic perspective, although he has had the initial thoughts about the overall idea and the style of this series.

For example, for the painting “The pregnant woman”, one audience member came to ask whether it was related to the psychology theory of Freud when he saw the painting in which a stag was standing beside the swollen belly of a pregnant woman. The audience member believes the stag and the belly have connections and relate to Freud’s psychoanalysis method. He also asked why the woman was wearing an ancient Chinese costume.

At the time, Mao Kai quietly told me that it was simply because he thought the painting would look better with something beside the woman, in order not to let her stand alone, and the costume was added for the same reason – to make her look more beautiful. However, Mao Kai said he could not decide which way would be better: to “give out some theories” to the audience “based on what you know about my thinking” or to “be

honest”. He was not sure which way was “a better way to communicate with the audience”, although he thinks the fine-art world may prefer a more profound interpretation.

8. The certificate requirement: the photo section and the speech section: following the Chinese tradition, Mao Kai required an exhibition certificate from Breeze Creatives as an evidence of having had his solo exhibition. This was unconventional for the British artists. One of the director of Breeze Creatives said, “I have never heard about this”. Breeze Creatives was surprised, yet they were not against it.

However, after the certificate was printed and signed by a director, two artists who had held exhibitions in the gallery stated that they wished they had received the certificate in their exhibitions. At the end, even one of the directors said, “I want it too”.

The group-photo section and the welcoming speech were considered as the other ‘Chinese standard procedures’ to follow, in order to show the sincere interest of the gallery to the artist.

9. Each painting was worth £10,000, so no painting was sold in the preview night. The directors said the paintings are out of the range of what can be afforded by the collectors here in the North East. However, two prints (signed and limited version) were sold for £200 pounds each.
10. Cultural collaboration may benefit the organisation. ‘Superior Animals’ may be benefited as a part of The Block Party 2016.<sup>124</sup> As a major mover, Breeze Creatives were benefited by the cultural collaboration. On the night, all the cultural organisations in the creative block were open for the public to join their cultural events. The public was engaged by the cultural collaboration. The Block Party welcomed about 200 people to the preview night. According to the directors, some people even came again to see the paintings after the preview night, which was rare for an artist who had no social connections in Newcastle.
11. “This is the most successful exhibition we have held so far”, one of the directors said. They have contacted Mao Kai for signing an UK exclusive representation contract after this exhibition.
12. Mao Kai has been contacting me for future collaborations ever since. In March 2017, he donated one of his signed-and-limited prints to Breeze Creatives for a social media

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<sup>124</sup> As a major mover for The Block Party, Breeze Creatives had organised it in 2015 and received significant compliment. In 2016, a variety of cultural organisations took part in The Block Party, making it a cultural crawl night. The detail can be checked through the website: <http://creativequarter.org.uk/venues/abject-gallery>

promotional campaign, which can be checked in the record of March 24<sup>th</sup> 2017. Moreover, he is offered a group exhibition chance in Paris, France in February 2017 and another group exhibition chance in Italy in March 2017.

\*\* Superior Animals – official promotional content on Breeze Creatives’ website:

<https://breezecreatives.com/object-gallery/mao-kai>

## MAO KAI

### Superior Animals

Preview: Friday, 7 October, 7:00pm - 11:00pm

Exhibition: 12 October - 5 November 2016

Opening Times: Wed - Sat, 12:00pm - 5:00pm

Location: Abject Gallery, 8th Floor, Bamburgh House

Mao Kai’s painting embodies classic traits of the modern society of China; idealism, formed by a dynamic conflict of the conceptual gap between planned economy and market economy. Coming out of a career in the advertising industry, Kai is well versed in the pull between these two poles.

Whilst advertising is said to be genetically related to art, as time goes by, the two have gone in opposite directions and Kai uses his reflections on this to inform the direction of his oil paintings. If the production of advertising is still connected to artistic skill, originality in advertising is the expression of art as concept.

Whilst firmly based in the realm of Surrealism, Mao Kai purposefully downplays the often intense conceptual voice present in such a painting, preferring to express the conceptual side more subtly over series of works, as was favoured in the high-concept print advertising of previous decades.

For his first UK exhibition, Mao Kai presents a series of new portraits entitled Superior Animals.

In this series of subtly surrealist depictions of dream like human/animal evolutions, Mao Kai pairs understated surrealism with a quite traditional language of technique to express the feelings of the common person under the current Chinese society. From this perspective, even though what or how he paints is often rooted in classicism, there still exists a strong sense of modernist temperament.

The preview for this exhibition takes place on Friday 7th October 7 – 11pm as part of the Newcastle Creative Quarter Block Party, with Mao Kai making the trip over from China especially for this event. The exhibition continuing to be open from 12th October – 5th November, Wednesday to Saturday, 12pm – 5pm. Entry is free.

## **Glasgow business trip 19-21 November 2016**

### **Location: 3 days in various places in Glasgow**

The purpose of this business trip was to observe what is happening in the contemporary art world in Glasgow. We took a train to Glasgow. Once the train left the platform, the directors started to drink the cocktails that were prepared in a giant bag, at 10 o'clock in the morning.

During the journey, we moved from one gallery to the other and had a strategic meeting in the B&B where we were living.

#### **a. Gallery of Modern Art**

<http://www.glasgowlife.org.uk/museums/goma/Pages/default.aspx>

1. The directors were amazed by the space that this historical building provided. They walked around the exhibitions and enjoyed them, although some of the exhibitions were considered as “not as exciting as what I thought it would be”. “I think the space helped a lot here”.
2. A display technique was taken as a “good reference for our exhibitions”. They found how to connect the video player, the monitor and the wires in a smart way to make “the whole set look neat and professional”.

After the observation in the Gallery of Modern Art, the directors commented that using a historical building made the contemporary artworks “look better and more professional”. Hence, they looked forward to having a historical building in the future. “I really hope that we can get the building in Sunderland, it is not big but it’s such a good space, high ceilings and it’s a historical building.”<sup>125</sup>

#### **b. Glasgow Sculpture Studios**

<http://www.glasgowsculpturestudios.org/>

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<sup>125</sup> In 2016, Breeze Creatives was pitching with other organisations and negotiating with the Sunderland City Council for the use of a historical building in Sunderland. This project was in collaboration with a stakeholder who had misunderstandings with Breeze Creatives. However, the collaboration was successful. Breeze Creatives was offered ten years for the usage of cultural projects in the building in Sunderland.

The Glasgow Sculpture Studios is located outside the city centre. Therefore, we walked quite a long time to find the building and spent a while to look for the entrance as it was hidden in a corner of the building.

1. The directors commented on the location chosen by Glasgow Sculpture Studios: “I am surprised that the studios can be found”, “how can people know there is a gallery in here”, “so it must be known by people already before they came here”.
2. Glasgow Sculpture Studios was recommended on the Google page searched by the key words – ‘the current exhibitions’. Yet, after searching, the directors checked the information of the organisation through its official website.
3. “Glasgow Sculpture Studios” has a gallery that is open to the public. The interior decoration of the gallery was an industrial style, with bare concrete at the entrance, on the ceilings and at the reception, which impressed the directors, although, they considered the style was not new. The industrial style of decoration provided “contemporary sense to this gallery, and it is cheap to make”.
4. When I asked why they chose this place, a director said, “I don’t know the artist, but I know the organisation, I checked their website, the exhibition looks good, so why not?” Another director said, “It is a long-standing organisation, they used to have a lot of money. Therefore, they have (can support) some good artists, good exhibitions”, “Some of them are very famous artists”.  
The artist’s work got compliments. I asked one of the directors “is the artist famous?” “Looks like it, yeah.” the director replied (he only knew this artist’s name after searching this gallery through Google).
5. It was a photographer’s show. However, the way in which the works were shown was inspirational. Instead of displaying photos separately on the wall, this artist decided to display a series of photos together to show the duration of certain moment. The series of the photos were organised by themes, each of the themes expressed what had happened to the subject shot in that particular moment. The stories about the subject were given by texts displayed beside the photos too.  
“It is great to see the whole thing”, a director commented, “this way is brilliant”, “The stories are told a lot more here, more than what can be told by a single photo.” “These are all related”.

6. Although the poster of this exhibition was well designed, it could only be found on the wall behind the reception of the gallery, in the corner. It was not easy for visitors to find at all.

### **c. Centre for Contemporary Arts (CCA)**

<http://www.cca-glasgow.com/programme>

Located in the city centre, it was very easy to find.

1. The founders of Breeze Creatives very much enjoyed the space and the light that came from by the glass ceiling.
2. Again, the way that the exhibition showed work was inspirational. The display of the artworks integrated several different methods. The paintings and the installations complemented to each other. The graphics were put on the wall, on the ceilings and on the ground, which helped the paintings, the sculptures and the installations to be integrated, and to create a coherent context for the visitors to understand.  
One of the directors commented “we can use this way to display Jaisen’s work (the artist for whom they want to make a solo exhibition in China).”
3. The directors were a little disappointed by the CCA, “I was expecting more, for what I heard about them”. Yet, the video works in it received compliments.

### **d. The strategic meeting: bring out the Geordie identity**

The strategic meeting was held in the living room of a B&B. For the whole night, the directors were trying to bring out an idea on which their next big event would be based. They wanted to make their next event phenomenal, and drive public attention in the whole North East.

The conversation started with the discussions about Geordie people’s identity. The Geordie people’s accent and the Geordie people’s “speciality” were discussed. “We Geordie never feel cold”, a director searched a video on YouTube showing a joke about how few clothes a Geordie would wear.

Then the topic of the most missed thing by Geordie people was brought up. “What is the most missed thing by the Geordie people?” The directors started to mention that many people were expressing how much they missed the iconic fashion retail brand – Geordie Jeans. “Do you

know how many people have said that they miss the Geordie Jeans so much that they wish a Geordie Jeans store would appear in Newcastle again?”

The directors started to check the images and the memories that people are bringing up through Internet. A lot of pictures and text about the memories of Geordie Jeans were found. I asked “what is the Geordie Jeans, why is it so important?” They answered me “the Geordie Jeans are the memory of Newcastle. I remember it was just on the road down Grainger street, it was so good, everybody knew it”. “It is fantastic, it is the brand that is purely made by Geordie, people are so proud”, “you don’t know how popular they were back in 80s”. “I still remember the sign of the shop, so big.”

They decided that it is a great idea to bring the Geordie Jeans back into Newcastle, “the title would be Geordie Jeans is back!” “Everybody would be talking about how great the Geordie Jeans’ back is”.

To bring out Newcastle people’s identity, they decided, strategically, to work on something connected to local people’s memories, as the next project. The document about this strategic meeting done by the directors themselves can be checked separately.

## **Crisis meeting 15 December 2016 22:00**

**Location: Abject Gallery, 8<sup>th</sup> Floor, Bamburgh House, Newcastle**

A solo exhibition chance was offered to the programme leader of F.A.D. foundation course. However, the programme leader stated that he would accept the offer only if the exhibition could be held together with his girlfriend. This decision was considered a crisis by the directors. Firstly, the artworks produced by his girlfriend were not good enough. The directors were worried that holding an exhibition for not-qualified person would damage the gallery's reputation. Secondly, "the network is essential for us", a director said, Breeze Creatives' reputation building partially relies on the relationship between Breeze Creatives and its collaborators (e.g. the programme leaders, the directors from other organisations). Thirdly, "F.A.D has done a good job this year." This issue might affect the future collaboration with F.A.D. Overall, a director commented, "it's complicated".

After a lot of thinking, the directors decided to turn down the programme leader's decision, in order to protect the gallery's reputation, which was considered "more essential".

## **The exhibition plan in China 6 January 2017**

**Location: A director's home, Newcastle**

Since the middle of last year, I have been communicating with galleries in China trying to organise a solo exhibition for a British artist – Jaisen Yates. Some galleries have shown interest and asked the exhibition schedule of Breeze Creatives in 2017.

1. The reason why Breeze Creatives wants to show Jaisen Yates's work in China is that China is a booming market for contemporary visual arts. The directors saw the possibilities of a large-scale collaboration in the future. Moreover, holding an exhibition abroad could build up the gallery's reputation quickly. A director said "it will be really helpful for us to show work abroad anywhere." "If we can help Jaisen to grow up (to become famous), we will be benefited."

2. However, after a six-month creating term, it seemed that Jaisen doesn't have enough confidence in himself and in his paintings.

A director commented, "Jaisen is not ready yet, last time I saw his paintings, he's been too conservative."

"He seems too scared as he knows this exhibition is so important for him. His style has set back too much, has become more and more 'classic'. This is not Jaisen, this is boring."

"He should go back to his own style, be more Jaisen, this is why we like him."

3. A decision was made: Jaisen's work was not iconic enough to be shown in China. In order to "give more time for Jaisen to sort himself out", I had to contact the galleries to change the exhibition plan and delay the show time. The original plan was to be in June 2017.
4. Jaisen's style was edging, dark and very personal, it was what the gallery liked about him as an artist. However, the solo exhibition caused his confidence issue, as he was concerned too much about "the authority" of the art world. This has prevented him from personal expression, being creative and being himself.

## **Crisis meeting: whether or not to credit the brand name**

**8 March 2017 9:00**

**Location: Abject Gallery, 8<sup>th</sup> Floor, Bamburgh House, Newcastle**

A television company wants to shoot a TV programme using the gallery as the location. The meeting is about whether or not the name of the gallery should be credited in the TV programme, as the TV programme is not considered a “good one”. I suggested to include the name in the credit list as this is a good chance to gain public awareness and as the gallery is still to gain more awareness as the essential objective to the establishing stage. Resistance can be felt through the air in the meeting, the decisions hasn’t been made yet.

P.S. after two days, I was informed that the TV programme was cancelled, hence whether the name should be credited was not a problem anymore.

## **Look at Me: Intermedia installation exhibition from Turkish artists**

**17 March 2017 19:00**

**Location: Abject Gallery, 8<sup>th</sup> Floor, Bamburgh House, Newcastle**

The artworks in this exhibition were created by a group of Turkish artists. The biography of each artist and the idea for each piece of work can be checked on Breeze Creatives’ official website: <https://breezecreatives.com/abject-gallery/look-at-me>

1. About 30 people attended the exhibition. The directors said, “it is a pretty poor turn up.” “but today is St. Patrick’s day.” Another person who works in arts organisation said, “this always happen when the artist doesn’t have a local social connection.”

2. The works received a lot of compliments from the audience who came to the gallery. The audience said, “It is extraordinary. I didn’t imagine it would be this good.” Among other artworks, two pieces of work received the most compliment: The Bed and The Spider, “I like The Spider and The Bed the most! They are simply and effective, they are direct.”

The artist herself said, “I sometimes don’t like to sit in a place for a long time to figure out what the work is trying to say. It depends. I prefer the work is simple and direct so that I can get it quickly.”

A director said, “it is hard to read a big chunk of words, actually. Even I try to read it, I don’t understand it at all, because I am worrying about blocking other people’s view”.

3. A Turkish artist complained about the lack of preparation for the introduction of the work that one director gave. “The works are good, you know, we spent a lot of energy to create these good things, I hope next time you can spend more time to read the documents before explaining it to the audience, not like 15 minutes.” The director was embarrassed, explaining that they had too much installation work to do and didn’t have much time to prepare the introduction for the work.

However, the artist was very glad that there were audience coming from general public, not from the art world. “I am really surprised that he (an audience member) came here, and he said, ah ‘I really like this, it is so interesting’, you know he said it genuinely, not like fake compliment.” The director said, “I talked to those guys over there, then came here just to see the show, it is really rare. I have never met them before, they are not from the art world.”

4. There is more than one concept expressed through the artworks in the exhibition. About the idea of the artwork – ‘The Bed’, the artist said: “I am pretty open to any thinking that the audience think, really. People always ask me what I think, I would like to know what they think, it shouldn’t be only me to explain it, everybody can have their own ideas, this is art.”

## **Final selection of the artist residency 2017 6 April 2017**

**Location: Abject Gallery, 8<sup>th</sup> Floor, Bamburgh House, Newcastle**

The selection had been going on for two weeks. Yet the first one and half week were spent by the directors to read the applications individually. Only the final selecting procedure was operated in a meeting to exchange the ideas among the directors and to make decisions.

The residency artist application was opened on 28 February 2017. Until 31 March 2017, which is the deadline, Breeze Creatives received 143 applications from 19 countries including UK, USA, Italy, Germany, Netherland, Romania, Slovenia, Poland, Turkey, Japan, South Korea, Thailand, India, Egypt, Iraq, Brazil and so forth. Only one application would win out of this fierce competition. The winner would receive a thousand-pound fund as the support for a three-week artistic creation for being a residency artist of Breeze Creatives. A studio would be provided to the winner followed by a solo exhibition held in Abject Gallery.

As a part of the Experimental Studio project, Breeze Creative introduced the Residency Artist programme in 2014 for the first time. In 2014, the number of submitted applications were only 12. However, in 2014, each of the application was charged for £30, while in 2017, it was free.

A director explained, “Back in then, we thought we could follow the tradition of VARC, which is the organisation that does very well in its Residency Artist project. They got hundreds of artists to apply every year and the residency slots are booked two years in advance. They charge each of the application for £40, so we thought we could charge each application for £30”. “But at the end, we only got 12 applications in that year. There were not many options for us to select. Because of lacking applications, we had to work really hard to get to know artists to select works for the galleries to avoid the gallery to be empty. Now we think that we just let them apply it for free, so, at least we can get some good ideas in hand, get to know some good artists, even some of the ideas are not suitable this time, we could still collaborate with the artists later. It saves our effort and time.”

### What happened in the short list:

The applications in the short lists were selected carefully through discussions. 12 artists were selected according to the criteria: whether the idea is new, whether the writing of the application is clear, whether the plan of the creation may fit the gallery-space appropriately, and whether

it is an idea that suits for a three-week-long residency artist programme, rather than a short-termed exhibition idea. Apart from these criteria, some extra thoughts attracted my attention.

Artist Erin Dickson's application was discussed and she was finally put into the shortlist for the selection. The directors said, "(This application has) good concepts and ideas, it can be used for the gallery in Sunderland." "Yeah, it may not be the one for the residency this time but in the future, for the scale of the exhibition, it will fit perfect for Sunderland (gallery)." "I know who she is, she has the crowd, and she will bring the network in Sunderland (gallery). We need to build up the reputation for the new gallery so she is a good option." "Sure, I put it into the pile of future-collaboration."

The directors complained about how many people did not read the criteria carefully or did not spend time to understand what Residency Artist would be required to do.

"So many applications are talking about ideas of exhibitions. An exhibition is not supposed to be the only thing that a residency artist should do. It is a three-week work, so they are going to install the works for three weeks?"

For example: "Lauran Drummond's concept and scale will fit with the space very well, so, again, put it into the Sunderland future-collaboration pile for future exhibitions, not for the residency artist."

The artists who are based in countries outside the UK have merit over the local artists, however, this still depends on the quality of the applications. For example, the artist YoonJung Kim, who is from South Korea, drove more attention from the directors. One reason is that the application is good, the other reason is that he is an expat, which fit the position of Abject Gallery – an international gallery. "This is an international gallery, it needs artists who is from other countries. Also, his idea is brilliant, it will be amazing to fit here." "Put him into the pile of future-collaboration."

At the end, artist Tim Croft is the winner, although he is an artist who is from Newcastle. Apart from his identity of being a local artist, Tim is known by the directors previously. "He is a nice guy." "They will be surprised that we chose him, but his application is brilliant, very innovative very new."

I asked the directors why he was chosen, they answered me:

“we found this one is ground-breaking, very bold, very funny and interesting.” “Look at his application, it is so different, he has already started his performance in his application, start from the first line.” “He is a performance artist, his application is telling us that he is going to pretend to be a well-known novel character who constantly perform in here for three weeks, and at the end, everybody would find out, well, if they are clever, the person is not a real person, it was a long-period performance.”

“And this will fit with our project of the Geordie Jeans launch. At the end of the launch event, people would find out it is not real Geordie Jeans.”

## A summary of the Sunderland 10×10 project

Breeze Creatives took part in the pitch of the “Sunderland 10×10 project” in the beginning of 2016 in order to have another gallery space to use. This project has been going on for more than a year since it started.

The building that Breeze Creatives has been pitching is a historical building. The picture of the building can be found in the Sunderland 10×10 project brochure. A director said she told the journalist who interviewed her that Breeze Creatives took part in the 10×10 project because it wanted be offered the historical building to use. “It is such a nice historical building with high ceilings, a good space to show artwork.”

A pitch presentation took place in July 2016, for which a video was produced by Breeze Creatives.<sup>126</sup> Restricted by the form of this summary, the video will be provided upon requests if necessary. This video showed some strategic thoughts and ideological perspectives of Breeze Creatives relating to the Sunderland project, and the perspectives were presented by its stakeholders.

Although in 2016 Breeze Creatives was granted a commission as a cultural organisation in collaboration with a business development company working for Sunderland 10×10 project, the directors have been constantly working with Sunderland Council on the negotiation and application for this project.<sup>127</sup>

Until the end of this observation, in April 2017, the negotiation of the contract and application for the funding have not been finished. However, there is no conflict between the council and Breeze Creatives. The long-term process is considered as a “standard” collaborating term with the council.

As it was mentioned previously, Sarah Wilkinson, one of the stakeholders, who used to have misunderstandings with Breeze Creatives is working with the directors on this project. Their collaboration goes smoothly.

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<sup>126</sup> The video was produced in collaboration with Breeze Creatives’ stakeholders over a night. The link: <https://vimeo.com/170391266>.

<sup>127</sup> The details can be checked through the Sunderland 10×10 Brochure.

Breeze Creative will be operating one more gallery in Sunderland if the contract of Sunderland 10×10 Project is successfully signed.

**The details can be found in three individual documents:**

1. Breeze Creatives CIC: Business Case – Athenaeum Buildings: Pilgrim Pub
2. Sunderland 10×10 Project brochure
3. Breeze Creatives BID presentation video: <https://vimeo.com/170391266>

## **Interview Extract**

Note that, due to space constraints, this appendix contains only the material directly relevant to the content of this thesis.<sup>128</sup>

### **Interview with Alex Breeze**

#### **How do you describe your company?**

I am one of the 3 founders in Breeze Creatives. A creative driven organisation, that focuses on facilitating, creative, peoples, whilst also organizing events, showcase, the best creativity, and the region and beyond, trying to bring the links into the area, which I think it might be worthwhile to the area. We are also interested in education, how education can be reformed, well, at least in the creative sector. Starting with a foundation course, [to understand] whatever it means to have the basic art training, and [To understand] how that is approached by universities and colleges, how can it be more accessible. That brings all that standard to Barlow Series, which is our first project is around education, free education, most what we do is, with a hope to be free, so it is always accessible.

#### **Which category does it sit in?**

Cultural? Creative industries? We trying to keep it as broad as possible, contemporary visual arts organisations? Contemporary visual arts organisations to me means any organisation either exhibiting or producing work in the current visual art world. It is to me a very broad umbrella of describing an

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<sup>128</sup> JW in the Interview Extract section is the abbreviation of Jin Wang, the interviewer.

organisation. And definition of "artist-led organisations"? Artist led organisation to me again is a broad umbrella to describe any organisation that is run by artists, not necessarily working with in the arts.

**What kind of services does your company provide?**

Space and networking facilities, the idea is if you are a painter in the building, you can work with graphic designers and game developers, it brings diversity to the building, more exiting ingredients to the building, we trying to facilitate every aspect to creativity to this space, or to multiple roofs.

We have 3 galleries, focusing on 2 but the lobby is a space too, they are all visual arts [space]. We try to be contemporary, I think everybody is trying to be contemporary but it is really hard to do something that is really new, that hasn't been done before. But, yeah I think we categorise ourselves as contemporary.

**Are there any similar organisations? Why they are similar to yours?**

I think there are similar organisations if you break it down into different sections... I don't know if there are anyone that replicates Breeze Creatives. There are studio buildings in Manchester and London offering an art course, [but] I don't know if they offer an art course that is certified in the same way of ours is, recognised by universities? I know there are studios out there who offer lecture series, but maybe they are not running as long as us, not being every week or every other week. There are lots of other studios kind of angle themselves towards criteria such as "Fine Art graduates", their first criterion of them. Some of them just only have craft-based artworks. I think we are trying to have a complete level of diversity, in the sense that you can have a floor of studios [including] computer games makers, suit makers, knife makers, fine artists, graphic designers, in the idea that they all tagged to each other. Other studios want to focus so much, so they end up not looking out the outside world and only in their area and not really giving the creative diversity that the studio practice needs

**What is the most unique thing (experience /service) that your company wants to give / to be known about? Why it can give this unique experience/ service?**

I think there are similar organisations if you break it down into different sections. Once you put over different sections you have. I don't know if there are anyone that replicates Breeze Creatives. There are studio buildings in Manchester and London offering an art course, [but] I don't know if they offer an art course that is certified in the same way of ours is, recognised by universities? I know there are studios out there who offer lecture series, but maybe they are not running as long as us, not being every week or every other week. There lots of other studios kind of angle themselves towards criteria such as "fine art graduates", their first criteria of them. Some of them just only have craft-based artworks, I think we are trying to have a complete level of diversity in the sense that you can have a floor of studios, computer games makers, suit makers, knife makers, fine artists, graphic designers, in the idea that they

all tagged to each other, while in some other studios want to focus so much, so they end up not looking out the outside world, and only in their area, and not really giving the creative diversity that the studio practice needs.

JW: So do you think the unique thing that you can provide is the “diversity”? Bring diversity of doing creative works with a broader range of audience?

Ummm yes, yes. As broad as we can get, with many cross-overs and many practices as well.

**What is the difference between your company and the similar organisations? 1**

We are trying to bridge a gap at the moment, certainly with the building of Bamburgh House. There are studios like us, but they are not as polished as we are. They are more kind of DIY. The studios are built with spaces but not linked to different elements of construction. On the other end of aspects, you’ve got spaces like Baltic 39, top end artist studios, they are very well polished but they are very expensive – the cost compared with us. We are trying to go in the middle somewhere, so, offer the space at a fraction of the price of the Baltic 39, but also offer something more than the kind of shantytown of traditional artist studios, somewhere artists are practising in painting and sculpture in it. The graphic designers would share a corridor with fine-art professionals around them.

**What is the similarity or difference with your project, like galleries?**

We got the international focused one on the top floor, the Abject 1, which is really important for us to bring the elements from outside of the region, or outside of the country into Newcastle which will be beneficial to the studios, it is beneficial to the region as well. Then Abject 2, has got far broader criteria, we really open to everything, as long as we think it is a good show, so the criteria is very simplistic but it can be because it is not funding based. So we have a level of control to cut out of the bullshit really, so the things that make us different and similar are that: one we don’t have much criteria for our shows, we are not answering to the arts council about what kinds of show we are putting on and the kinds of people exhibit. We only answer to three of ourselves, what we think is the best. And I don’t know whether there are necessarily, especially in this region, international galleries that are unfunded? I don’t think there are people with a nicer gallery space as we’ve got at Abject 2, that don’t have a very high level of criteria for the shows beyond, kind of dictatorship of running the shows.

**If I ask who you are, how do you define yourself? And how do you describe yourself as a XXX ?**

I’d say I am an arts facilitator, facilitating ideas for creative people, that’s what we have always done really. Taking space, turning space into commodity for artists to use, the platform and showcase what they do.

JW: Do you mean you are helping?

I think it is but it works both ways. We enjoy working with interesting peoples, because it is interesting to work with them, but also it's good to have showcase of what Breeze Creatives is able to achieve by working with good people.

JW: how do you define good people?

People that all three of us get excited about, when we see their work initially, when we see they are in this space we are amazed by this space. We know exactly they are kind of person who should do something in here. That's what excites us I think. Or even meeting with the peoples and knowing there is another person that we don't know about, which they have to be because we can work together and do things amazing. Bridging those gaps between artists, between spaces and artists, between local government and spaces, all those things, bringing all together.

JW: As a director of this company, what do you stand for? What do you value the most?

I think I am very passionate about the region. I like the idea that there will be really good facilities out here for the creative world. I like the idea that people will be attracted to the region. I think, at the same time, I am excited about working in the region that in many ways is a blank canvas. I am going through many changes at the moment, with the economy and with the arts funding. It's kind of a tipping point, I think, my kind of ideology for what I perceive to be good rules for future is to make the best for the really shitty situation for this region, in terms of finance and things, you can make it possible now.

JW: what do you value the most?

Independence for an arts organisation I think. I think being of our own bosses, I don't think to answer to art funders, local councils, government, whoever, just be able to make decisions within three of us and to take it forward. I think it's really important this.

JW: What is your principle for running your company?

It's not worthy it unless, all three of us excited, by whatever, project it is has come about. There are such a small number of us, that even the majority to be excited about something, still wouldn't be worthwhile to carry on doing it. It always gonna be all three of us, got to recognise that kind of buzz about a project, otherwise the project just loses its ground. This is one of the specialist kind of you know criteria.

JW: What kind of things will make you excited?

I am really excited about, it sounds awful but, you get to a sense when you almost feel like you are playing god little bit, with the orchestration of people coming into the building and be able to say yes or no to people moving into the building. It is quite a powerful position that we take for granted. I really

like the idea that someone can come to the building as a print worker, that have just graduated, and you can put them on the floor with the print workers that have been doing this for 30 years. You know what matters so you just introduce them and it's gonna help this younger person to practice, and that is happening all around in this building. People benefit from other people. And it's kind of nice to be able to initiate that, and then sit back and see what happens.

I think that probably the most exciting part of what we are doing, but it is also very exciting to be able to work with big organisations on big events. The events are exciting but also are the ones that we get the most stressed about, that we feel worries about. There are a lot of times that things are happening in the building behind the closed doors. When it happens in a big venue, in front of new audience, it's probably the most exciting but stressful moments.

**What is your company's plan at the moment?**

Get Sunderland [gallery] open up, we all set a point where, in order for us to grow, we need to start looking at employing someone to do things like the buildings, the actual building managers, there are lots of jobs [of that]. The biggest problems we have is that the organisations we work with all think that we are a team of twenty people, kind of working around the clock, what they don't realise is that we are three, and we all have multiple jobs, we work with some organisations that just employ people to look after the lightings of their building and stuff like that. So we are constantly trying to get to that point asking what is the creative vision that we had at the beginning. It can't be maintained because we spent too long putting pad locks on the studio doors and make sure all the toilets are safe and clean, whereas at the beginning, Breeze Creatives was pretty much three people at around the desk firing ideas with each other and planning events. Now Breeze Creatives has been focusing, for the last year, on the provision of studio practice, we kind of got hands down with that, so now we are in the stage where we can go up a level and basically bringing someone to these building so you can fulfil all the tasks, we can get back to the original ideas.

## **Interview with Daniel Gibson**

### **How do you describe your company?**

I am a director of Breeze Creatives. We do arts and cultural projects in the North East of England, mainly visual arts. It is a community interest company, which is art set locked, sort of half way between a normally limited company and a charity.

### **Which category does it sit in?**

Non-profit and arts sector, creative industries. Contemporary visual arts organisations? An organisation that specialises in visual arts by currently practicing artists. These can also be artist-led, but see below for additional definition. Artist-led organisations? An arts organisation (not necessarily visual arts) that is lead by practicing artists whose own work forms part of the organisation's outputs.

### **What kind of services does your company provide?**

We do projects and events, we provide artist studios, and art galleries, and we have residency artist which find out the way so that we can work with and try to guide and elevate their career.

### **Are there any similar organisations? Why they are similar to yours?**

Locally? Yes, there are, well, there is not really one, that does exactly the same in the same way with us, there are other ones that are galleries, they are commercial they are not non-profit....there are funded organisations, but we are sort of hybrid of commercial arm which provides income stream for the non-profit side rather than profit side, which doesn't generate income relying on public funding.

JW: There are 3 galleries in your building? Are they contemporary visual art galleries?

If you include the one on the ground floor, yeah, but that is just a temporary space for the Late Shows. It is generally just a lobby area. But, the rest of the two are both contemporary visual arts galleries, there are 2 permanent galleries.

## **2) What kind of audiences are you trying to engage with?**

### **Apart from them, are there any other people your company wants to attract?**

A lot of times these kind of visual arts just place their own audience, like the artists, the people working in the arts community, that does build up a lot of audiences, but we trying to expand that, not just in a commercial sense, but making a gallery less of an intimidating space for somebody not feeling comfortable in such a space, which is one of the reasons why we have the bar area in the upstairs gallery,

which is sort of flowing into the gallery space trying to make less of the white cube intimidations that a lot of galleries have.

JW: Are you trying to bridge the critical fine art with commercial sense?

No, not commercial sense, more the academic view and audience of critical fine arts and trying to merge that with a wider audience I suppose. Like you walk into a lot of galleries and you get a sheet of paper or it's written on the wall, and it's written in academic language that only Fine Art academics can really understand. Most of people just get lots of bollocks, and that is an initial intimidating factor. Even they step forward into the gallery, they think "oh I don't understand this", so they get intimidated by it. We are trying to break down the barriers – the normal academic styled discourse within Fine Arts, so [what we are doing] puts lots of people off. But at the same time [we do] not devalue and diminishing the quality, or the intellectual side of the work.

JW: if you can depict your audience, how they would look like or feel like as a person?

they will probably be someone similar to us I think. But that is what we trying to fight against really, make it more accessible, without diminishing the quality of it, without diminishing the content of it. You don't want to dull down the content but you still want it to be accessible to the audience who aren't that familiar or comfortable [with the content].

**3) What is the most unique thing (experience /service) that your company wants to give / to be known about? Why it can give this unique experience/ service?**

We trying to do things that is more of a fun way, more accessible to people. Like opening we trying to make it more into an event, rather than just open the door and serve a few drinks, we have background music play and other things going on, and trying create more comfortable and less stiff-upper-lip type of environment.

JW: what do want your company to be known about by the audience and the public?

We want them to form a perception of good, high quality of art exhibitions and experiences.

JW: why you think you can give it them compare with somebody else?

Well, one of the reasons why we set this company up was because we looked around, and we all just have similar opinions on seeing and agreeing on the way that we didn't like the things that were done and presented in other places. We thought, yeah, we can have a crack at that and do it better, in the way that we thought is better. The audience might not but, that is for everybody to judge.

**If I ask who you are, how do you define yourself? And how do you describe yourself as a XXX ?**

In the sense of the role in this organisation, we all in the equal position within the organisation, the three of us, but we all have very different skill sets. But very complimentary ones, we all do a bit of everything but then we all have our strong points and weak points which the other ones make up for.

**Why you start this company?**

Like I said before that we realised that we work well together, with our different skills, so we thought we will form a good company together, then be able to do a lot of stuffs. In the end we wanted to move into something that we have more control of and not relying on other people. Well, I mean, not working for other people or have to go by the decisions of other people you may disagree with. We all thought we would agree on pretty much everything. So it's like our own ship, beyond somebody else'.

**As a director of this company, what do you stand for? What do you value the most?**

What this company stands for, in terms of ideology? I think, independent arts and culture is the highest calibre. That's sort of self-driven and self-motivated, and quite punk in some ways, because we are totally independent, we don't have to tick anybody else's boxes, so we are not doing things for the sake of fitting somebody else's criteria of what we should be doing and what this money is for.

JW: What do you mean your criteria instead of somebody else's?

The way most of arts organisations' money comes from a public funding body, like the art council or something, to fill those, often no matter how good quality the individual arts is you have to tick certain boxes of engagement and access, and community work, often you will find yourself compromising the project to fit the funding, whereas because we don't have fit those funding streams, we don't have to compromise the projects at all, we can keep it more pure to the visions of it rather than have to fit in with somebody else vision, like the vision of the government policy or a funding programme, or an external body. And also we are caught on the red tape in the same way, if have do evaluations, reporting etc.

JW: So what is your vision?

To deliver high quality of contemporary arts and events in the region that we think there is a gap for and needs to prevision for, and do that in an uncompromising way.

JW: How do you define "high quality"?

More sort of art for art's sake, rather than art for any sort of political or whatever sake. Just pay attention to the content of it rather than the structure that is used to be fit in to make things happen. We can make our own structure to fit into, not to fit into somebody else's structure.

## **Interviews with Zoe Anderson**

Z: Do you want to come out on the roof? You know there are lot of motives, our decision making has to go to the majority votes. It is the only way to be fair. We are good at different things, but that is a good thing, if we are all the same, we don't challenge each other in different ways, and never get out of your comfort zone.

Z: When we started Breeze Creatives, it was an instant decision to ask D (another director) to come in, because D was so different to what we were thinking, A has the skill set that I don't have and I have the skill set that they don't have, all three skill set could build something, but D will always keep our opinion grounded, A and me we are always fanciful, like yeah let's do this, no logic and understanding of how to make it happen, then D will say no that is not possible we can't do that [Laugh]. He keeps bringing everything back down.

JW: What do you have in mind for brand in arts? I feel resistance when I mentioned "brand" as a concept to the people from art world.

Z: I wish there was a different word for brand, because if you said just a different word, still means the same with "brand", it would be better. It is the word "brand" [which causes problems], because artists will go "oh, that is related to advertising! I am not a product, so you don't have to advertise me as a product". Even if you call us [artists] "consumer", it is awful.

Z: I would be interested to know if more people will go to a gallery that is curator-led, because they would appreciate what the curator did more than just what the gallery picked on their own content. For example, we choose what goes into our gallery, which very much depend on our opinions of what we think is good, it an elevate to our level where we have some right to choose, or we are saying we are qualified to choose, or we know what to choose, above or beyond everyone else. I think it is all just subjective, I wonder if a curator who comes into the space would take the responsibility, and you go away to see shows because you believe in his/her opinions, I wonder if that makes difference. There are very few curator-led galleries, the BALTIC is the only real curator-led gallery.

### **How do you describe your company?**

We are an art spaced organisation that looks at alternative structures or survival in current age of economics. Alternative is by looking at outside of the norm, for example, instead of relying solely on arts council's funding, we trying to look at the integration of arts and businesses for that financial support.

### **Which category does your company sit in?**

I genuinely think it fits alongside with other organisations, I don't think our objectives are any different from other organisations in terms of what we hoped to produce for the arts, I just think our approach is different, not a new approach, not a ground breaking one in the sense that other people don't do it. But within this region it is a less used approach, but I do think that despite how I get from A to B, how they get from A to B, we all end up at B, so we sit alongside with other organisation within this city, slightly larger than some others.

**What kind of services does your company provide?**

The alternative business structure means that we have to have a space. We only need a space to fulfil what we are and what we do, but we can't afford to pay for the space, therefore, the studio and the members play like a juror role. They create the income that we need to sustain, and then secondly, they become the impetus and the catalyst for the events in the building, then they allow us access to them, and from that access, from that understanding of who they are, we can look for ways across to collaborate with other people, and kind of come up with events that use the members as strengthening tools for these events , that's the hope, but I do think it does work, even on the micro level that we have tried it on.

**Could you give an example for what kind of audience you have?**

The audience is beyond the people of our membership, they have the experiences of being able to another cultural harbour or vibrant environment, have great exposure to the arts, and our members have the benefits of becoming a part of the small community, a place to work and a place where they can pitch idea and network with other people.

**Is it a contemporary visual arts organisation?**

Yeah. Absolutely. Only contemporary as well. Even though I think it allows some traditional forms or stuff like that to come in, but I think, our "brand" is to allow the steams of thoughts to come and represent them in a contemporary way.

**What is the most unique thing (experience /service) that your company wants to give / to be known about? Why it can give this unique experience/ service?**

**What's the unique thing of Breeze Creatives?**

I think the unique thing about Breeze Creatives is that we are attempting to say that, actually there is validity in the approach of doing, we are attempting to say that we don't need a stamp of approval, a stamp of somebody else' approval in order to do what we want to do. Our voice is as valid as any other's voice, we can do the things that we want to do, using an alternative structure, we couldn't exist as an arts organisation if we had to rely on arts council's funding, because they wouldn't fund us. But that

doesn't mean what we do is not good, it just means we just don't have the favour of one arm. But it's the biggest arm and the only arm. Unfortunate, for us, it is used as a sample approved across everywhere. For example, as an university lecture,

had to make my own work in order to be allowed to maintain the job, I have to be fully functioning-in-practice artist exhibits both nationally and internationally, or have publications, but the only way that the university can measure, whether the artwork is good, is to get approval by the art council, because the university itself doesn't know, so it fully relies on the government body to tell them it's good. So for every project that I have to do, I have to use some kinds of art council funding, in order to carry the stamp, if it didn't, it wouldn't be able to put forward to the REF (an evaluation form by the government body), as part of the research for the university. So the idea is that, there is only one single standard to measure an organisation's value, whether an organisation create value to the art world or not entirely depends on the stamps of the government body. But what I want to say is that, this standard doesn't really exist, the government stamp is just a structure that is formed, and it is governing us, but there is no reason why you should continue to do so.

### **How do you feel of being branded?**

As I said before, I wish there is a different word for brand, because if you said just a different word, still means the same with "brand", it would be better. It's the word "brand" [causes problems], because artists will go "oh, that is related to advertising! I am not a product, so you don't have to advertise me as a product". Even if you call us [artists] "consumer" is awful.

[referencing to the casual talk] as I said before, I would be interested to know if more people will go to a gallery that is curator-led, because they would appreciate what the curator did more than just what the gallery picked on their own content. For example, we choose what goes into our gallery, which very much depend on our opinions of what we think is good, it an elevate to our level where we have some right to choose, or we are saying we are qualified to choose, or we know what to choose, above or beyond everyone else. I think it is all just subjective, I wonder if a curator who comes into the space would take the responsibility, and you go away to see shows because you believe in his/her opinions, I wonder if that makes difference. There are very few curator-led galleries, the BALTIC is the only real curator-led gallery.

### **If I ask who you are, how do you define yourself? And how do you describe yourself as a XXX?**

On a personal level, I am overly ambitious, overly politicised, and overly adamant, I am overly confident on the idea that enough work will produce the results. On a professional level, event I want to come away from the idea of the arts council, I still think that I am governed and led by those structures that inform that. I understand that, as an arts organisational or as an artist working an arts organisation,

there is a need of ancestry for research to be evaluated with the structures (government body). Although shouldn't be forced to do so, but the questions that are asked in the assessment form is still very valid for the company to reassess itself. So professionally, I am a person who wants to maintain a very high level of research and everything that we do, and present ourselves at the top and shine away, to continue that solid research behind what we do.

### **Why you start this company?**

I grew up in Newcastle but I didn't practise in here as an artist, I went London straight away, and I found that being in those big cities, especially somewhere down south, the amount of opportunities is much greater. And because the opportunity is much greater, people won't be so afraid of losing space, people weren't be so adamant that they had to have this opportunity and this was theirs, not so insular. But when I moved back to Newcastle, this is the most shocking thing I have ever seen, I just could not penetrate the art world [in here]. I could show in London or Manchester working individually as a professional artist. But Newcastle is just like a closed book. Also, if you haven't been in the university structure, there wasn't really a place for you in the arts.

I wanted to create a place that I felt it wasn't governed or dictated by the university and it wasn't governed and dictated by the Arts Council. I just thought Newcastle needed an alternative, just one thing that wasn't such hierarchy, wasn't so patriarchal. The idea shouldn't be like this: unless the University is leading it, or the Council is leading it, it cannot exist. I think artists need to be cleverer than that, artists have the ability to create the world that they want to live in. I think we should be more ambitious and say, if the structure is not working, as an artist we haven't informed anybody's voice, while we should be, and we should say that, instead of saying I accept this status, I accept that this is to be a people in the North East.

I think we are positioned within a country, we are here on the east coast of England, we are so disfranchised from anyone who makes any government rules. Actually, we are facing the whole of Europe, why aren't we being more ambitious? Why aren't we saying, if we can't work internally, let's work externally. Let's work with the rest of the world. If we can't work with London, if we can't get the money streams, if we can't get support, why don't we get other opportunities? Why don't we restructure ourselves? Just because I am living in a place, which is rather depressing economically, in terms of opportunities, it is completely forgotten about, why don't we change that? If it is not working, change it. We have ability to do it.

I think it is important to remain in academia, because if you want to change something you need to present yourself at the right level. It is so easy to be criticised by the institutions that you are standing against, it is so easy for them to say: "you know, they just don't know enough", or "they are just not clever enough", or "they just don't have all this kind of wisdom". So it is important to go "yes, we

absolutely do have that level of training”. We feel that there is absolutely an alternative way. We are not saying the traditional way is no good, we just think there can be an alternative way. You know, I am not saying to get rid of Arts Council, to get rid of those funded organisations or anything like that, we believe that we can sit alongside of them. We don’t have to be dependent or relying on the bodies, while within a city we should have the same level of exposure and the same platform. We try to keep that balance to run the organisation, and be happy that they are there, and we can work with them. Yet we are not necessarily following the same pattern.

**As a director of this company, what do you stand for? What do you value the most?**

I think in terms of our working relationship, my interest may be different from D’s an A’s, because I think we should strike to present ourselves at the highest level. Our voice should be the clearest voice, it should be the most informed voice. We need clarity of voice in the direction of where we would to go, collectively. A collective voice from inside of this organisation to represent this organisation.

JW: What do you stand for personally as a director?

The most valuable thing for me is that everyone should have access to the arts, everyone, equally. Arts should be inspiring for every child.

**What is your principle for running your company? Anything you would hold regardless?**

There is a thing that will always be my principle, beyond anything. We create an environment, which is through its language, through its discourse, doesn’t present itself that is inaccessible to other people. They shouldn’t feel stupid when they come into this space, they should not feel they can’t own that space and the space can’t be part of their lives. A lot of times, you know I have work in the arts all my life, and I still hate going into galleries, because I feel stupid. I feel a line of the text or the thing of the text on the wall which is pitched at this awful academic level that only artists understand. And then you come into this weird white room and everyone looks at you, you have this horrific experience of viewing art and all you think about is “actually, I will just go for a cigarette” then be outside of the room because that is much more comfortable.

I don’t think it is necessarily implied and I don’t it is the artists go out of the way to make people think like this. I think all artists would like to believe that they are as inclusive as anyone else. But I think the core of the problem, and this is why I should never be allowed to run our company [Laugh], it sounds awful but I do mean it, the core of the problem is that the majority of the people who access the arts come from middle classes and upper classes, they are not coming from working classes. I come from the working class so I will always be cautious around other people. I think that we create an environment by which a man on the street who knows nothing cannot [emphased] access this [the arts]. And mainly this is because if he comes in, he will hear that nobody else will sound like him. Everybody sounds

intellectual, everyone has this BBC accent, and nobody has regional accent. It is not like I present this in a totalitarian sense, it is definitely like this. I think, in the arts, what we don't accept is that there is an embarrassment about our entitlement and we can't talk about it. We can't talk about the fact that 90% of all graduates do not come from the working classes, they don't come from the cultural classes that make up other parts of our society. For example, you very rarely ever see Middle East women in fine art degree courses. As artists, we supposed to be presenting voice that effects everybody, but we don't, you know, we present the voice of those people who can afford to stay in the arts, and then those people speak to themselves, so we go "oh but we want to access the community" then we will take huge proportions of tax pay as money, even from the food banks, and we will run these condescending projects in those poor areas, because A: we will get paid for it, and B: that's what artists really need to do to access the arts.

They (the people from poor areas) don't need that, they need arts education to be in school for children, they don't need people who come from their lofty amazing lives to work with the community making plastic bag trees. Children need to access the arts on fair level, as everybody else, not because they are poorer but because they need this help and this intervention, they have the rights to be taught in the arts from day one in school, they have the right to access the arts all the way up through their education. That's where the money should go. It shouldn't go to individual artists, shouldn't go to artists communities, it should go out to a core structure that our society can use.

## Interview with Jon Bewley

**Could you briefly introduce your organisation (audience/type)? Describe the management (key elements/structure/ ethos)?**

Locus+ is an office based organisation, meaning it doesn't have a public space but it has remit to commission new works by visual artists in the public domain, mainly temporary public art works with or associated to publications and archive responsibilities. We publish books and we also have the largest archive of temporary public arts, or time-based artwork in Europe.

Time-based means the artworks that are not permanent, such as performance art, film, events, the artworks that are initiated and presented with a fix time, and, in our case, are very much related to the place in which they are presented, so they are sights and context imbedded.

JW: How many people are there in your organisation?

Two. We work in a very collective way, we decide on the project where we are going to do. We have a number of projects running simultaneously, but we have different tasks within each project. For one person it will be editing a book, for the other it will be fundraising, so we change and share the tasks. If we need skills, we buy them by hiring people to work for us.

(Then Jon Bewley asked me to turn off the recorder and showed me the whole office which is located on the top floor of Commercial Union House, an entire floor. Plenty of archives were stored in parts of this office in some small rooms that are used for storage. Some rooms are used to display the artworks done by artists commissioned by Locus+ previously. For those important time-based artworks, they are framed and hanged on the wall so that I can see when and how the artworks were done. It can be seen that Locus+ do not just do publications but also films and talks).

We don't just do publication but also art film and art talks. Well, we don't make films in the sense of documentaries, but we have done art films. In the last 2 or 3 years in the projects we have had 5 minutes short films that are on the YouTube channel and they are basically short artist interviews a little bit of them either working on the project or are talking about it, and then maybe somebody who is involved with the project explaining the aspect , they go on the website.

That's one form of making films but the other way, is that we produce films as artworks and we've done films as artworks with Pat Aldi, Wendy Coco, Douglas Gordon, they are the mains. The Douglas Gordon's film is made and shown in New York, and he is the person we are going to make films within Korea next year.

**In contemporary visual arts, how do you define artist-led organisations?**

Well for us, we try to allow the decisions been made by the artists who is in the production of new works to have final say. We don't usually say that "oh we would like to do a project with you but only want to show that bag", we say that "would you like to do a project, that you would say that yeah I would like to make a bag, that is green, it's small etc. etc. So, for us, artists have as much control as possible is reasonable. They don't manage projects on the financial basis, on the day-to-day basis but they have a lot of say to how it develops with the emphasis

**In your mind, what an artist-led organisation should stand for? How to achieve it, for example?**

It should stand for allowing artists to control the means of production, and its dissemination. (JW: How to achieve that?) You decide from the very beginning, that is what we do, when we started, that is what we said we would do. Obviously, you can't do it all the time. The circumstances and situations may require compromise, negotiation, give-and-take. In essence, we are trying to give artists the main say over what and how they represented (JW: What about the moneywise?) Okay what we do is, we only have enough money to pay for the rent and the rights. So we have to go out to find money, when the project comes to us, or we start talking, we had to think "can we raise the money to do it? where we get the money from?" once we start, once we agree, we then start to sit down with scrap the project, then we take it to people who might give us money.

**JW: How does the book publishing benefit the artist and your organisation?**

Well, for the artist, they can send it out to galleries, collectors, dealers, if they want to be in an exhibition, they can say, this is what I do. And In the book, it shows everything they have done, it explains why it is important why it's interesting. It basically shows the value. There is also a Logo of an organisation on the book, it shows, this organisation believes in me. In terms of how it benefits us [as an organisation], we are providing opportunities for artists to do what they have never done before, which is sitting down and thinking about what they do, and imagine how it would be in the book. [Artists would think] "If I give this book to a complete stranger, would they understand what I do and do they understand why it is important? Why what I do as an artist is important enough for other people to spend money and a part of their lives to commit to me?" The process through which to build up trust with the artists helps us to build up trust with the art world.

Funding takes years to find, if it isn't worthy I have wasted my life. It is worthy because the role of artists in society is absolutely crucial for understanding who we are. The books give attention and it also gives attraction, momentum.

The North East is complicated because it has a huge rural area, and a very small pocket, very small build up area. It is not the same as Manchester, or Liverpool or Bristol, all of which have studio

prevision, but they also have exhibition infrastructure, which are the gear for the artists in different levels of their careers. But the exhibition infrastructure here is slowly... not been dismantled, but there is a need of reemphasizing of it. A lot of the provisions have been allowed to fall away.

**How do you think (feel) about seeing an art organisation having a “brand”/being branded?**

I think that we made a mistake, in the early days we avoided branding, with our books with everything. What happens is that, if back in then we were branded in the beginning, it will be easier for us to get money now, because there would be a quality signature to each project, but, we didn't do it, so if you put all of our books in the book shelf, they all look different, some of them thick, some of them small, fat, like humans in different shapes, a bit like the crowd of humans. If we decided from the beginning that every book should look the same, then now we have 40 books, then people would go, “oh yeah this is a Locus+ book”. But now people ask Jonty “oh have you seen this book” and we go, “yeah, that is our book”, that is what is about [Laugh]. It's a false regret, because I would never change anything, but I think it would be nice if we branded everything from the beginning. But we made the decisions for the reasons. The other thing is that artists like their own books, artists don't like their books look like the other person, they want to be different. So there is not very much we can do with it. (JW: Why artist don't like to be branded?) Because they are different, they narcissists, they are ego maniacs. (JW: If you are a branded organisation, would they [artists] have issues with you)? No, because branded organisation are much bigger and more powerful, they go marketing, and they also bring with the acceptance of the state, while we are tinier and funkier. We can work with anybody we want within the artist community, if we ring people up we can get anybody who we want to work with. But we are interested in the development of artists' career, the younger artists. We are interested in new project as well, the older artists tend to be very conservative, because they have to make money.

## **Industry Interview Samantha Ewen**

### **Could you briefly introduce your organisation? Describe the management?**

The Newbridge Project is an artist-led community, in corporate with the N book shops, The Newbridge Project space which is our main gallery space, studio space, which offers about 80 artist spaces, we also have workshop space, rehearsal space, project co-work space, we support artists to develop their practice, providing space for artists to work, to have the ideas and experiments, supporting them through exhibition and commission opportunities, and let them to have a place to show it, also through professional development provision, workshops, creates, talks, that would help them through training to develop functional professional in art world.

### **JW: How is the management structure? How many people are involved?**

we are community interest company, and we have a director, four members as part-time staffs, and other freelancers that we work with, by project bases, so we can join in different skills, and knowledge, we are led by the community artists in the building here, so we are responsible to what is the artists' needs and their requirements, through the way that we create the gallery we have a programme committee. We work with studio members to curate the space, so it remains as the space that is reflective of our organisation, and representative of membership, we have a group artist that shapes what is a professional development offer is.

It is our belief, that we are artist organisation so it has to be determined and shaped by the artist themselves. It is not a top down management, it is a grass root approach. (JW: Is it a different way of management?) We have an artist committee, It steels the direction of our organisation, we have paid members of staffs who are skilled for delivering, and perhaps thinking more strategically, so they work with these artist communities to find out what the artists want and then think how to develop that way in a long term strategically. Because sometimes you got artist initiatives, artist organisations that they run exclusively by artists, maybe in a voluntary basis quite often, there is no payment as staff, in my opinion, sometimes that can be detrimental to the strategic development of the organisation, because they have a short ten years that they say, perhaps one or two years, they want to come in an individual agenda rather than a collective agenda or something that they develop for the good of the organisation, so I think having the staffs that can support the artists to deliver what they want to is very important for us.

We do have a management structure, but that management structure is led by artists ...it is like a circle.... It is more like a collaborative process, not about artist dictating, and we gather the ideas, it is all about collaboration, what is the best way to do something, what do we want to do and why. It is a

constant conversation, is this really what we want to do? Artists might want to do, but it might not be something that we can get funding for, so we have to think other ways so that we might be able to get funding, so there are number of various factors that affect the decisions and directions that we take.

### **How do you define contemporary visual arts organisations?**

I think it is very difficult, because I think they are all quite different are they? The aspect of contemporary visual arts organisations is vastly different, I mean visual art is... well, we would call ourselves a visual arts organisation, we support visual artists primarily, but that is probably more of a philosophical question than itself, what is visual arts organisation... that is kind of fluid isn't it, what that is now, and you get kind of dance, performance, sound that is now classified within visual arts depending on how it is presented and is dispersed, till even on defining what kind of media on visual arts is probably a quite difficult task. I guess we would look at supporting visual artist that have umm...look at what they do as contemporary practice? And...look at whether they are critical as well, I am not sure whether I can define a contemporary visual arts organisation, I guess it is the organisation that is promoting and supporting visual arts. But then you look at the organisations within the city, there are lots of organisations do that, but they do it very differently.

For example, Isis Arts, they would call themselves as a visual arts organisation, their focus is international, they also work with artist internationally, bringing artists into community settings, they do a lot of stuffs that are not based on the galleries, nothing to do with the galleries. Then you got Vane, they are very gallery based, you have Workplace, they have commercial aspects to what they do. That comes kind of selling, commercial sales in visual arts. I think it is just too expansive, really, to put one description on.

### **How do you describe artist-led organisations?**

Artist-led is the organisation that is a shape that led by artists, so what happen in the organisation is shaped by an artist community. What is interesting is "led", so it is not necessarily be delivered by artists, but as long as it is led by artists. (JW: How do you define led?) We look at lots of artist-led organisations or the delivery, but which way do we want to go?

(JW: Are there something else?) Artist-led is interesting. We look at lots of artist-led organisations, Everyone is slightly different, different models to the way they function. Going back to what we say earlier, lots of artist organisations they maybe have artists that are working for the organisation on a voluntary basis, for an entrepreneurship for a number of years, they can't sustain themselves, because they are working for free, they can't pay themselves.

So in my opinion, you can remain artist-led, as long as you are responsible to the artists that are within the community, and you can still have paid members of staff, most of our staff are professional artists

anyway. The staff have studios here, some of them are professional artists, photographers etc. So, even the people who get paid to deliver the managerial or administrative roles, they tend to be artists, but I don't think that is a constituted case. To remain artist-led, you don't have to have an artist coming to do your accounts that is not the best way of using them

(JW: What is the best way?) That is a very difficult question. What we do is we are kind of learning, so it is not about this is the way we do it so, this should be the way that everyone should do it, but, it changes depending on what group of artists as well. It also depends on which group of artists we work with, it always changes. So for example, our programme committee working on last programme, they decide to work in a different way. But this time, this committee works with a new group of artists. They want to change again. So it is not just one size fit to every one really it has to be approach malleable, depending on people, on needs and on situations. Really depends on what they want to achieve, what they need, it is really different in different contexts. Within the artists committee, they have different interests, different kind of practice so they want to represent that within a gallery. They might want to be very international, because that's what they are interested in; they might want to be very socially, community, because that's what they are interested in. So there is not just one way for artist-led organisations because they are always led by different artists.

We do have set structures in place to work with, but there are lots of freedom and flexibility. We do have to consider the budget, the safety, the appropriateness, the reputation of the organisation, so there are considerations to work within. There are considerations to work within, The Newbridge Project has its ethos, and it is down to certain things. It has to be remain within in certain kind of framework.

**In your mind, for a non-profit and artist-led organisation, what should it stand for? What should they do to achieve it?**

It should benefit the community it serves, should have public benefit, should put money back in to deliver the objectives that is set by the organisation. For example, one of our objectives are to support artists, to support artists to develop artists' career. So we will put the income back in to deliver the objectives. (JW: So it still depends on the purpose of the organisations?) I will say so, yeah. (JW: is it important for an organisation to have a purpose? Or would you think it is better for them to change from time to time?) I guess any organisation will have a purpose because it will be set up before it was established. Even if it is "I want to make as much money as I can". There are always some reasons, whether it is community-based, financial etc.

## **Interview with Alexander Porter**

### **Interview: Could you introduce yourself?**

I have been here for 25 years, Newcastle is nice city and the cultural sectors are lively growing, it has changed a lot but I quite like the way the things are going. Although there are spending cut in public sectors which has caused difficulties, the cultural sector in Newcastle has found a way of flourishing despite all of that. Before this job I used to run theatres, so my background is not for the visual arts, but I have responsibility for the visual arts in my job for the council.

I am the cultural and tourism manager for Newcastle Council. My job covers all the art forms, I'm responsible for the interface between the cultural sector and the local authority. We are responsible for trying to create conditions where cultural activity can flourish. Although we might not deliver a huge amount of programmes, what we try to do is to create an environment where cultural is recognised as a vital part of the city of praise. Newcastle Gateshead has a very good reputation for the quality of cultural sector although it has 2 or 3 years difficulties. Most of the big cities in England have the same experience in the process of reinventing itself. I suppose it [the reinvention] changes the way the city operates economically.

There are a lot less public money available to invest the cultural activity, so cultural organisations have to become much better on generating income to support the cultural activities or the artworks that they want to create. So some of them have become commercial, some of them become entrepreneurial, some of them have become much better in fundraising. There are a whole variety of different models being adopted by different organisations depending on what they do, what access they have got to, for example, land or building or resources, what the missions are.

### **JW: What about other contemporary visual arts organisations?**

Yes there are, they come and go a little bit, which is always the way. In terms of gallery spaces, there use to be XXX gallery but now closed, the workplace gallery, based on the Gateshead in the old post office, there is an Gallery of Northumbria University, there is Hatten Gallery of Newcastle University, there is Baltic 39 in high bridge;

Then there are organisations that are more about making visual arts than exhibitions. Northern print for example, is the place for making and exhibiting; then there are artist studio complexes, including ones in this block. They are more about artists' workspace than about exhibition, such as The Newbridge Project, they are more about artists' work places, they do have a book shop and a gallery, but their principle value is providing cheap working space to emerging artists, providing a focal point to the

development of the community of artists in the city. The Commercial Union House has got more varied range of occupants, they are not all visual arts, or they are not all arts actually, because there are adult educational organisations and disability organisations based there, so there are variations on each of the buildings, the profiles of the occupants are all different. And what they do are so different.

**JW: What an arts organisation should stand for in your opinion?**

Different arts organisations stand for different things. They have different missions, and I don't think there is a single definition about what an arts organisation is. I think it is partly down to the differences between them, the change involved and developed. If everybody has to be the same, you get a form of stasis. There wouldn't be this kind of evolving developing and changing of organisations. I am comfortable with the variety of them. There are some very traditional, and some innovative organisations. All of them are valid and valuable.

**In contemporary visual arts, how do you describe artist-run organisations?**

In my mind, they are organisations whose mission and modus operandi are determined by the people who make the work. In other words, it is not a board of directors who determine what will happen and then provide a framework within which the artists then make the work, it is the artists (or their chosen representatives) who decide what they want to do and then make a resolution about when it can be done and how. Effectively, in traditional economic terms, the workers (i.e. the artists) are empowered to decide how they will deploy their skills and then to work out how to do it and how to make it economically viable.

**(In contemporary visual art) Do you think artists influence art organisations? How?**

Yes. In the best relationships there is an active dialogue between artists and arts organisations, and each takes notice and account of the observations or direction of travel of the other. In most contemporary visual art organisations, there is an interest in reflecting contemporary artistic pre-occupations and practice. 'Good' organisations will identify and recognise 'the new' early and will have the knowledge and skill to determine how it will influence what they do and how they do it.

**(In contemporary visual art) Do you think the audiences influence art organisations? How?**

Yes. All arts organisations have target audience[s] and want to attract 'customers'. If those people stay away, the organisations will fail; if they attend (repeatedly) the organisations will flourish. Audiences can influence organisations in many ways – with their money, their patronage, their comments, their advocacy, their criticism etc. etc.

## **Interview with Heather Purser**

**Could you briefly introduce your organisation (audience/type)? Describe the management (key elements/structure/ ethos)?**

Ok I work for NEPN, that stands for north east photographer network, and I work as the communications and programme for another project, so 3 of us that work there, small team, I work there part time, 2 days a week, I also work for Tyne and Wear Archive Museums, again two days a week, as a digital officer within the documentation department. The name is TWAM for short. That roll is working with online collection with objects and artefacts, across the various venues, the museums, so I am based on the discovery museum, covers historical and cultural significance, so that is like the south shields, and kind of the previous evidence of roman empire, like in walls end, art galleries and museums. It is the online digital marketing I do for NEPN, whereas with TWAM I am kind of working behind the scenes mostly, with in corporate, digitise, working with imagery with objects off our collection, digital forms, scans, or photographs.

**Can you describe the differences of these organisations?**

They are very different, but eventually it comes from the ownership of the organisations, the stakeholders and the set up. The Biscuit Factory is a private owned company, owned by the business man and his wife, that is very different, I was a gallery supervisor there, and I reported into the gallery operation manager, but the gallery's owner has lots to say about how the gallery runs and everything as well, so, there as sometimes push pull with that, they want something to happen that maybe wasn't planed for the management, so it come to renegotiate with what was going to happened, for example, we were planning the show, but the owner came to say that which artist has to be in , so that is obviously has to happened because that is their business. They have total say of anything.

Is it not an artist-led organisation? They are art-collectors, their main business is in exporting plastics, noting to do with art, completely separate business. They are renovating the Biscuit Factory and renovating it into an art gallery is essentially a side thing. but they basically want to bring art to other people, so it very much reflect their taste, they sometimes find the things when they travel if they like it.

The essential aim of biscuit factory is to sell fine art. The commercial side of it makes it very different business from say, the Laning art gallery, the motivations are different. The aim of Biscuit Factory is to make money, The Laning art gallery is a gift to the people in Newcastle, it exists to let the public to see the collections. It is a part of Tyne and wear archive museum, together with Hatten Gallery, Discovery Museum etc., you can find the list on their website. there are a group people involve within the TWAM

organisations and buildings, for example, Hatten Gallery, owned Newcastle University, university work with us, we look after the collections on their behalf. The Laning Art Gallery belongs to the Newcastle city council, so there are a board of trustees, a lot of relationship going.

There is public funding for them, because they are national important, so there is specific money for looking after the collections. The money comes from the arts council and councils, because TWAM look after the council's collection, includes Newcastle, South shields, North Tyneside, Gateshead.

### **How do you define contemporary visual arts organisation?**

Contemporary means that it should be current, and the artwork potentially made by living artists, whether they are emerging or established, they are creating works that response to contemporary modern-day issues, happening right now, and also they are critically engaged with their practice. That's a really important point, a lot of people say they are artists, but if it is just a photo that looks nice, it isn't critically engaged, they are not contemporary visual artists. The organisations don't have to be just one particular type, essentially, it can be any kind of set up that you go for, and if it is available, these boundaries really need to be defined, If it is an art organisation. If it is critically engaged with visual arts, and then they working with the artists that prove that they are contemporary, and they are critically engaged, then they are contemporary visual arts organisations, that's the definition. is not necessarily delivered by artists, not necessarily run by artists It could be a collective, set up by artists entirely, with no one in charge. It could be a charity, that only works with critically engaged artists and puts on a tour and exhibition and doesn't have a space. It could be an arts festival organisation, they might not have a public face and base all the time but do when there is a festival; it could be a contemporary art gallery, that does have a space to open to the public, they might charge for coming in and they might not, but that doesn't matter, if they have critically engaged contemporary artwork to show.

### **In contemporary visual arts, how do you define artist-led organisations?**

Is the organisation's activities that entirely decided by the artists that in having the space, or the artists that set up the organisation? Critically engaged artist set up the network in which they operate. They decide the exhibitions, they get the funding, so it is defined by them.

### **In your mind, what artist-led organisation should stand for? How to achieve it, for example?**

It is entirely up to them, it depends upon where they get the funding from, the money they need to be able to operate, or how they combine it, if they get arts council money they have to meet the regulations and expectations of the art council, to let the public to engage with, whereas if they raise the money themselves, if they have a rich benefactor, they can play with the money, it is all up to them. If it is set for the public money, the intention has to be for public, they have to follow the regulations and deliver the promises. These boundaries really need to be defined.

## **Interview with William Peterson**

### **What have you been doing recently?**

I have been curating exhibitions. When I want to see a show that hasn't been on or I had seen but it was long time ago, I will go to find museums or galleries who interested in the idea, then I would work with 3 or 4 of them to make it happen. I have been doing that for about 20 years. Also, I search for exhibitions; sometimes the idea doesn't get grounded, sometimes other people or venue steal the idea and do it themselves. Other times it goes smoothly, and the exhibition take place. At the moment I have two exhibitions, I organise the venues. I collaborated with Telehouse Museum in Carlisle- the local authority venue, York City art gallery, a gallery in London University, different art schools, part of the university of the arts , Hatten Gallery in Newcastle, the Barbican art Centre in London, a gallery of university of the East Anglia, and one in Spain. I have done two of exhibition locally, one is a Chinese artist in Newcastle University, then it went to the art centre in Washington. The gallery of Newcastle College.

### **How do you define arts organisation?**

Visual art? (JW: Contemporary visual arts) Ok contemporary visual arts.. I would say the organisation whose principal objective is to present the work of contemporary art and gather artists. also encourage and organise educational activities and events, link to the exhibition generally. It could be a gallery which collects work, the collection of contemporary work. It could be a gallery which particularly concerns with selling the work. Or maybe an organisation whose principal objective, say for instance Newbridge Project, is providing studios to for artists, but also has exhibition space, and shows works not just the work by the studio members but also other artists. It could be an organisation, who doesn't show work, but it is creating works, like Locus+, their principal objectives is not to show works but creating works. In the old genres, sound works, visual works, digital works. Or it could be the organisations who support artists, studio provider is one example, but something like A·N, which you would probably come across, they provide newsletters, do you know the artist newsletter? It is probably just digital now, it used to be public papers, that is information and ideas and pieces about artists, by artists and for artists. Also, it could be the organisations whose principal objectives is part of a broader area of activities, specifically, the encouragement to the public to get them involved in arts themselves physically, and perhaps, specialise in young people, children or the general population or, older people, or, the people who are with disabilities.

All of those are all arts organisations, they can be anybody whose principal function is to involve the creation, funding, and programming of arts organisations from a brick and mortar point of view, so,

local authorities are arts organisations, because they tend to have galleries and they have education programmes, they have museums and art galleries, so that one remove from running art galleries and museums itself, the local authority is the organisation that wants to ensure that there is an exhibition there, or choose not to, so that makes it an arts organisation as well, as well as funding organisations, and the funding organisations can be public funds, or charitable funds, and there are funding charities their principal is to fund visual arts, and there are organisations, which are voluntarily run rather than professional, it might do all of those things, but they are not in the way as professionally run and staffed organisations are. And there are some others there, and also arts media in this sector, by the digital or printed arts publications, such as magazines, books publications, they are arts organisations as well.

### **In contemporary visual arts, how do you describe artist-led organisations?**

An organisation whose objectives are the artists themselves should be involved in the group, possibly but not necessarily responsible for running an organisation, intending to, on the one hand supporting the artists in their artistic activities, and on the other hand, in able artists, in the sense of their potential activities but perhaps in a wider basis, encourage and assist artist in promoting their work to the public locally or internationally.

## **Interview with Sarah Wilkinson**

### **Extract of her story:**

...I have been always very interested in doing public events, to generate a broader impact and to learn individuals while they are working on a daily basis, to know about their issues, which provides space for peoples, engaging conversations and bring up ideas and see what kind of strategies people are bringing into the sector. I think it is just a very practical way of evolving in and provoking the sector, in a proactive way, that is one of the most important reason of why I make big effort to try to do these public events...

...For the arts to understand branding is down to the language as well, the language of the commercial world has implicit meaning that creates difficulties for the arts. Sometimes it is exploitative, such as cultural goods, consuming, and consumer. There is still a bit of resistance to that although I feel it is changing, but I also think that within branding, certainly in the digital world. There are lots of examples

of advertising agencies found commercial sites, the branding sites, who have just behaved quite badly in relation to the arts, by appropriating artistic works, using things to appropriate attribution. I think that come from the ignorance of working and practising in the arts. There is an educational issue...

...Another aspect I see is from the idea of the messages. When you look at an artist working with a brand, there are tensions between artistic intent and where the intent sits within art history. That brand messaging doesn't necessarily either consider or is aware of it. That is an issue because the brand message could really become quite visualised, and that would be just very detrimental for the artist and for the art sector in general...

## **Interview with David Turnbull**

### **Extract of his story:**

...I always liked words when I was kids. I liked studying English Literature, I liked ideas, studies a lot. I was very studious, I wanted to do well, I studied English, History and Religious Studies at A Level, I did a degree in English literature at Durham University and post university. I missed out an important little anecdote, I liked the idea of Journalism, and both these are important in terms of, one as a teenager I read a book by Ian Banks who sadly died several years ago, the book was called "complicity" which depicted a certain kind of heavy drinking kind of journalist, and that appealed to me, I liked the idea that it was an outsider profession, a hard-dinking profession and a cynical profession and a joke really a real job. I liked the hard-driven aspect of journalism that required a very strong focus in the daily basis, it introduced me to the stereotype of a journalist and then which countered that. I had work experience in a weekly newspaper near my house and it was a very unpleasant experience, I didn't learn anything about journalism, they put me in a corner, and I did my homework and they took me to a court. I remember being completely stunned that they had the court journalist doing shorthand I thought to myself that I could never be responsible for taking down word for word what people were saying and it put me off journalism but on reflection I now think that if I was recommending journalism to a young person that with regard to shorthand that it was not beyond their capabilities to learn it, it was a simple matter of practice...To run a business from this place would be just heavenly for me to feel that sense of independence and creativity, a supportive, honest environment where your friends are genuinely your friends, your friends around you genuinely want to help you, and you genuinely want to help them, that

is very big thing about this place in general, and the idea of having an office here . I can work just as productively here, I don't need a corporate environment and as far as my capacity to earn money is concerned I don't need to be restricted by what ceiling they are prepared to put on my salary. I can work on my own here honestly with honest people who are not obsessed with corporate bullshit. That is a big thing, I can't be bothered anymore, I feel, in many ways, in a great deal of my life, I have been carrying around that shit. Falling into a place, being a machine and building up a CV, it is just disgusting me really. I just want to thrive with creativity and offer what I can offer...

...The personalities of Alex and Zoe and Dan – the Breeze Creatives as a whole – are really important. In here, people bump into each other on the corridor and suddenly we are looking at each other's work. Everyone is blown away by the power which has drawn us together, everyone is so supportive and on the same wavelength. I was going to say I don't know if I was going to feel the same way about it in here if I hadn't known Breeze Creatives on a personal level, but from what I've seen of how people have started to fit in, how we got on, I think there is something on that level, that just filters through. Again, I think that is about honesty as well. We're just not corporate people, we are just ourselves. I think one of the things I've learned over the years is the capacity to smell bullshit. Sometimes I can see it's pretty serious bullshit, it is pretty sinister and I want no part of it. Other times it's just the usual day-to-day bullshit by which most people live their lives, but I just want something beyond that. I sense it whether they are an honest or dishonest personality, I can sense it quite quickly. I say personality rather than person, whether what they are projecting is an honest projection of them as a human being or whether it's a concocted, sculpted, egocentric vision of themselves. There's not much of the latter in Bamburgh House, that's why my friends here are my friends, that is how much it is valuable in here, searching enquiring minds, and don't accept the commonplace mentalities or moralities...

## Interview with Jaisen Yates

### Extract of his story:

...I was building up story-telling that was going on in my head, information, I just had all of this beautiful strange stuff going on, scenarios, kind of invented words appeared in my head...It was paid by weight...

..I was kind of living in that way for a few years. There is a lot more to it than that, but that's it, my initial school was drifted through ended up not being a part of anything, not interested in anything but music, kind of tried to live in my home town, where everybody was kind of following suit, when I had no interest, it was against the great of the standard regular popular culture in the way that people don't understand, I was on the more underground stuff. I had a hell a lot going on in my head. I had all of the strand stuff going around me and I had all the weird teaching thing and all the phonetic experiment, all associations and scenarios and people I invented terminologies for, ahh, words for pictures, pictures for words...Think about the time when I got to 25, I had some sort of calling, to do art, I done enough party and punk rock and things like that, I was kind of looking for something to building on to, so I sit on the forest one day, with this very beautiful girl who I really liked, I just thought I'm going to go back England, I'm gonna do art, and somehow I am gonna do something to do with art, I remember telling her that, and about a month after that I left, I went back and stayed with my parents, I got a quite big house, which was in the countryside. A bit a like a small mansion, I started buying clay and art material, started making stuff, trying to make sense of something anyway, trying to make sense of my interests...

...One of my friends was living with me who was doing A levels in the Northumberland College, art. He came back and saying that I am doing this course it's great. So, I went there and has an appointment with this guy called David, he said bring some art work with you. I said oh alright. I didn't know, I just wanted to get on the course. I went along and I took some paintings some sculpture, it was just regular stuff when people in that age, like science fictions and stuff, you know aliens, kind of replications. And some paintings, some of them just replications of images and stuffs, but I started to get a bit better, I started to get a bit of my own ground. David sat on the chair and looked at the paintings. He looked at me and he looked at the paintings and said can you tell me a bit of your background, so I told him my back ground, which is exactly what I told you. He said painting are quite good, I said really? He said I didn't really want to say that. You know because I thought those people who went to college are geniuses, they did fantastic stuff, so I don't really know that. But when I went there and I looked around, I saw that they are not really brilliant, but just this image is built up in my head...

## Interview with Chris Stones

### Extract of his story:

...Start to do photography in 2009, in Newcastle College, since then I continued working in photography just for the pleasure rather than anything else. Start to do film production and interested in the moving image. I did photography practice in Northumbria, I did a three-channel projection in my final show, I think that is what the photography is towards...

...What I am interested in photography is the social and political aspects, the catch of the moment. Then I found it hard to document so much under current environment, to travel more, to be involved in the social and political environment, it is difficult to get in-depth. I took picture of Durham, where the Brass Band social club used to use, to show people what it used to look like...

...I really enjoy it, it's a hobby as well as a practice, I am doing it for fun. There are some photographs I won't show, because there is no need. But I still spend two or three hours to edit them to just make sure that they are perfect, just for my own pleasure. [03:45]

I feel like it is harder and harder for photographers nowadays, because of the Instagram and other social media platforms, everybody becomes a part-time photographer, I don't know if I am an fine-art photographer anymore because trying to make living out of being an fine-art photographer is quite difficult...

...I wonder where I stand, whether creating work commercially or conceptually. Photographers are quite similar in some points but in other points, for the people who are untrained, they maybe just look for a nice picture. For example, that the Tyne Bridge has been done a million times. [05:27] Normal people may enjoy that kind of picture, but for me, I am not. I used to travel a lot to get something done that people won't even realise. For them it is just an image, and immediately assume that it is for advertising. [06:25]

Photograph your imagination is not quite possible, you can photo anything you see, but photograph imagination is a different concept. Capturing an image requires you to be in the right place in the right time. For example the Julian Germain's image downstairs. When an issue happened, there may always be two people there, but...(he was thinking) I think I am having an internal conversation with myself about what a photographer should stand for. (People are laugh loudly around) Do you want to go down to the studio...

...I work in a shop and they tried to promote me and I rejected the offer, I have my priorities, I have to work to manage money, but it is not my purpose of life, so if I sank into this side too much I wouldn't

be able to come out of it. I would rather remain in a lower level. Well, my parents think that I am absolutely crazy. They are like “take the money, take the money”, I am like “no I am not doing it” [laugh]. It is the way I am. I am very set in my own way. I don’t like to think that I have missed the opportunity. I have the potential, I am very self-conscious about the work I created, for my work and practice, I am very confident about the way I work, about what I can achieve, what I want to achieve, just because I have that kind of mind-set, I won’t give up. My parents have been like “what would happen when you are 35 and you have kids”, but for me it’s about not to be in this kind of situation, it’s about being successful. Some people I am working with have been in that shop for 30 years, and that would kill me. This is what I told you that when I stayed in a place for too long, I will want to change. It is not like the other side the grass will be greener, it is all about experience and lifestyle that you can have. The idea is not to be rich but not to be regret...

...I used to be wanting to be rich, but now I am more realistic. If I don’t start to show work, I would never be able to use that skills that I learned from university, I would never have a chance to win a Turner Prize. That is where I should go. I haven’t shown anything for about three years. The art is beautiful when I think about it but when I got outside of the door, I am like “holly shit this brutal” ...

The photo that is hanging behind you are on display in Durham cathedral. It is to involve people in the project, showing the community around. (the he described where the picture was in the cathedral and how it was displayed and was involved with the community) ...

...Why do I like Breeze Creatives? Firstly it is affordable, that’s the main thing, it is absolutely difficult to find a place in town that doesn’t cost an arm or a leg. I am paying a cheapest, a smallest space, but this is what I need, I don’t need a big canvas on the wall or anything like that, I do everything digital. Also, I chose Breeze is because of the collect of the people. It is not just a single environment of one group of people, it is multi-disciplined, crossed all different people. This floor is fantastic as well, when you come in you see musicians, visual artists, and other artists. I quite like the meet and greet...

## Interview with Amy Carr

### Extract of her story:

...I like art since I was a kid, when I was young... London, (here she talked about the sensation show, her dream, didn't go to London to study). The outcome wasn't the same as I thought. I found myself in arts in place like Bamburgh House, opening its door to artists and studios. Coming to places like this I feel more positive about the art world. I was aspiring to go to Goldsmith University 10 years ago, with other people, but to be fair the reality there wasn't quite the same. But now I feel I have found the place again, where I feel happy, and I am really falling in love with Fine Art again and that is because of the place like this, because it is accessible and it is full of not just everyday people, they make Fine Arts.

As a fine art technician, I pay attention to new technic and young people. They encouraged me to really get out there do artwork and illustration, because I see how hard they work which makes me think I should be doing this. So it's really good I found myself in a good position in the minute...

...I think my university got me a little bit intimidated by the fine art world, now I have met some really interesting people, I found this community within Newcastle which is so warm and exciting. It's all about having some fun really, I don't know why I made it so serious when I was younger, now I found it is a really fun and exciting world to a part of and to be around by this sort of people. So yeah, I think fine art was taken too seriously for too long and it was scary and now I found it is a fascinating world. I am annoyed of being scared in my 20s, it has wasted all my best time. Fine art shouldn't have been scary. Now it is not scary for me, but I do appreciate that young people, university students find it scary, although some students haven't got the same fears anymore, I don't know if it is social media made it [fine art] not that scary anymore, social media has opened the world a lot more...

...When I was in university, to get yourself into a certain groups and communities, it is like a proper world-of-mouth, you have to find them yourself and when you found them how can you penetrate them? But now ever since there was social media, you can introduce yourself to communities and you can invite yourself to arts organisations every day, so it is not that scary, I don't see that much fear anymore, I feel a bit more confident. In my 20s there wasn't social media, so to get myself into this small art world I really had to try my best to know the right people, had to go to the right place, which I could but sometimes it is by chance. But now it is so open, when I was in art event, it literally invited every artist in Newcastle, I sometimes met people I have never met before, so it is like people have got their arms and eyes open and say "come in"! Social media has put the arts out there so much, so it is definitely more inviting now. It [Fine Art] doesn't feel so exclusive anymore. I do think social media has helped so much in this way. I know there are other ways which the art world hasn't helped so much but just in

terms of finding art communities, then I think social media is a massively beneficial tool and it can only get better.

(JW: how to make it better?) I think it could have done more discussion, groups of people start to get discussions, they are trying to get different communities involved and get different directions of artwork. That's how I think it can grow better and moving forward. Social media will continue to be a bigger and better platform for artists.

I see the opening here and there and it is brilliant, but the discussions are normally closed, I think artists, when it comes to the discussions and ideas it can become a bit exclusive. But ideas come from all sort of life even the people who don't understand arts. You've got to understand everyone's outlook on life. Different outlook on life can create diverse audience, you need different audience not just one type of audience... (JW: you have talked about exclusive things?) I have go back to when It is hard to get into the communities, I felt it was hard because there is exclusivity about it. And then, it is like the art world, generally, it has its term "the outsiders", which refers to the artists who didn't go to art colleges and universities, but they make a name for themselves. Some people still have that mentality that "I am art trained; I am better than you on artworks and I am more important". But I think it is dying down, because the place like Bamburgh House, Commercial Union House, they are exclusively fine art of what people perceived to be fine art, they are a mixture of illustrators, designers, jewellery makers and painters. This makes people realise that it doesn't have to be this distinction between art and design, it can be one thing, it can be merged to make fresh ideas. So again, the term "Fine Art" has always been a funny one, it tells itself if should be exclusive because it is "fine", it is posh, it is exclusive. But I don't find there should be a boundary, and the boundaries are getting more blurred, which is what I am trying to say.

Breeze Creatives' foundation course, what fascinated my was that they are not taking students down one path, like "you must choose fine art" or "you must choose photography", in here all the answer is "no, it's all gonna cross over" it's all linked so it's all become a visual communication, and I found out it is so fascinating. This is why in the last two years I have been helping to get students to come here, to look what is going on and to understand that there is a choice other than the traditional methods of learning. This is more integrated in learning with the professional world, and I think to get it that young is very important. So they don't have to waste their 20s to worry about how to get into the exclusive world of fine art. Instead, they will think that "I am doing it, I don't need an institution to tell me that I am accepted in the art world, I am already in it". That makes the power will be in the students' hands not the establishments. That's why I love this place, it is a very important new approach to art teaching. I am very excited, I have got a few of new students in this course now in September. I am gonna come and see them and get the feedback of how they get on with the course, I think they are going to love it. We will see.

(JW: you just said you have wasted your 20s to find the exclusive world, how did you feel in that journey?) I felt lost and I felt I wasn't good enough to be a Fine Art artist. I felt I needed validation that you are good enough, but now I just realise that is just bullshit, I don't know if I am resentful but I am so angry about how I felt in my early 20s because I wasted a decade. If I wouldn't got into fashion design industry if I didn't have such a mad fine-art experience. It is the fashion design made me realise that fashion, design and fine art should be able to link together. You should feel free. I can't say my 20s are totally wasted because it is the fashion design made me understand that how ridiculous the art world is. Maybe I just chose a wrong university. I just think the younger people don't need to have this because they can be introduced to the art world in a very different way. Well, that's what I am hoping anyway, so I am going to see how the foundation course like this changes the way that students see the art world. For me I personally don't like to sit in a white studio to produce work, and I found young people as well, the ideas don't come out when they sit in a white studio...

## **Interview with Rebecca Gardiner**

### **Extract of her story:**

...I know Breeze Creatives through a friend who know that there is studio spaces here. They has studio talks and my friend suggested me to have an artist talk in the building. So I gave a talk about visual artist which was my PhD research, about female characters in films. The talk led to a performance art in Rome. There were about 10 people attended but had some very good feedbacks and positive comments. I am a visual artist but most of my work is text-based, sometimes video work. At the moment I am trying to see the text concerns from a female view, a feminist view, and an anti-feminist view...

...I was a social worker working for homeless people when I had my second daughter, my twin sister was doing a fine-art degree and I thought that was amazing so I went to do is as well. I became a mature student, I did my college, part-time and I did my degree, part-time, then I went straight to MA course in Northumbria then I am studying a PhD in Leeds. I started my PhD in Teesside University then my supervisor went to Leeds, so now I am in Leeds. I really enjoy studying and age isn't a particular difficulty...

...I had the talk with Breeze Creatives about 2 years ago. It was in January maybe earlier or later. Apart from that I don't know them very well, I do get emails about their events. I am part of artist community

in Darlington, it is a totally different community compare with Breeze Creatives or anything in Newcastle, there is nothing permanent, no studio spaces, no exhibition space, table and chair space, I think this generates a different outcome for artist for arts and for people to talk about stuffs, critical engagement. Social events are crucial for people to get to know each other to bring out sparks. It is more nature for people to work together and to talk with each other. From my experience, working on your own in a vacuum, it suits me, but I don't often get other people's opinions, sometimes simplest thing may help you get out of something that stuck you. Working in a vacuum sometimes you can't see the woods on a tree, I think studios spaces can be a social aspect and it is helpful. Studio space can give a space to show the work, to see it, to reflect on it, to think about it...

...I really liked the event I went in the miner's society space, it was in a very odd space but the most amazing space, atmosphere. I personally don't like going to spaces that are quite cliquey. You know, in the arts, sometimes you went to some space you felt you don't belong to that clique, that crowd, because you are not. I don't find them very welcoming. I don't know what the word is, I just don't find them welcoming. I am not talking about a particular space, just sometimes in the arts, the spaces can make you feel, well, not intimidated, but not particularly welcomed. I think a lot of art spaces need to work on their welcoming a bit more. For example, sometimes in The Newbridge Project, you can feel a bit uncomfortable in some art spaces. They make you feel a bit different, walking in a gallery and walking into a museum, you can feel a bit uncomfortable, intimidated. For example, if you go to BALTIC, you are quite anonymising, but again it is not such an intimate space. Also, for The Newbridge's space, it can be quite intimate for the member of the space but may not be quite welcoming for people from outside. It is not that bad, but it is a bit cliquey, that's what I mean. Sometimes it can make you feel you are not in the club sort of thing. It made me feel I am not from their social circle. Well, but then it depends on what the space is for isn't it? Are the spaces for all the people or the spaces are for only the studio holders? But they have exhibitions, and they invite people, so, I don't know, maybe the spaces have got an identity crisis? [Laugh]...

## **Interview with the director of Dance City**

### **Could you briefly introduce your organisation, describe the management?**

We are art council funded organisation, mainly focus on theatre, theatre company, we co-op with other organisations, women groups and communities, as well as universities ( academic partnership) too. We

originally are from Scotland, in 2007, 2008, we moved to England. We are micro organisation, charity, and artist-run organisations, we only have under 5 employees. We engage with culture organisations, museums, we make conversations with lots of different organisation and trying to make changes crossing borders. I am the executive director, There three other people are in management roles running business in different aspects (a person for stage, a choreographer, a sounds engineer etc), we have internship and replacement every year, in 2012 there are 20 students in here, and most of them found jobs afterwards.

**In your mind, what an arts organisation should stand for? What should they do to achieve it?**

Basic human right, engaging cultural works, eventually, it is for the freedom of expressions, understanding and explore the exchange associated with it. How to achieve the goal? Making conversation with artists, to understand their taste, thinking, and why this not that etc. we have three essential: creativity, diversity, quality. What kind of conversation? 1. One to one face to face is preferred, 2, video chat, skype, FaceTime is very often, 3. Facebook, twitter, Pinterest also normally used. Overall, the conversation is to maintain the relationship, updating the status, as we know each other in person from the start. Any artist-led organisation really is, in term of the finest detail is that the autonomy of particular artist, so I would never speak prescriptive about what that is, but again to speak from our own position, there is this responsibility I guess, around civic duty, there is a responsibility of develop the art form that there is a responsibility to keep doors open behind you for other people to come through. And I guess, knowing who the arts is for, who it's made, it is also about communicating 21 century Britain.

**Interview with Anna Campbell**

...I am an artist to believe in working with other people, so social engagement is really important to me, practice is really important to me, it is very much about interactions with others, and participation and having a dialog...

...Artist newsletter, that is online... that is an organisation that supports artists. Do you mean the ones that have a space for particular things? (JW: yeah, you can talk about the ones have spaces.) So... Gallery spaces?... I think the question is quite ambiguous, what do you mean by organisation, because in Newcastle and in Gateshead, there are lots of organisations that deal with contemporary arts. So we

have artist studios, which are organisations for artists, but they might not have galleries that open to the public? There is Baltic, which is obviously an international venue, which I think it is amazing and we are very lucky to have it. or...like... the first things when you said an arts organisation, I thought about the things like Access or the Artists newsletter, which is kind of memberships to artists, which is virtual, they are online, but they offer support and promotions for artists. (JW: what about an artist-run organisation which has spaces for exhibitions?), so ok, so maybe you need to be very specific and say that. So you what is your question again? (JW: what do you think about a contemporary visual arts organisation from an artist perspective?) So, you need to be really specific if it is about artist-led organisations. Because the artist-led organisations like Newbridge Project completely different from something like BALTIC, which is not artist-led, that is a publicly funded organisation...

... (JW: how do you think about the idea that sees an organisation as a brand?) ...I think that is really important, it distinguishes its place, its identity. Baltic is very good example, it is clear, it is bold... but that is not all Baltic is, it is not just about brands. But I think it is really important to support that organisation. I think Newbridge has got a very good brand, when the email popped up there is a logo, so you know that it is The Newbridge, and Breeze Creatives similar thing. Clever name, it stands out. (JW: Apart from the logo, what other parts are important?) I don't really understand. I think branding is important, for example, Tyneside Cinema, it is a very specific brand, it carries through the whole building it is on the literature, it is on the email, it is on the website, it has a very clear identity, I think it is the same thing as having an identity, so that , I know that breeze creative has a particular way of writing things so does The Newbridge, so it distinguishes what that is, although there are lots of cross over and similarities within the visual arts, but I think that is because people see good things then they borough from other people. Tate has a very clear branding; I think it is about identity...

## Proposal for China Exhibition of Jaisen Yates

### 杰森·叶茨展览策划

Artist : Jaisen Yates

Exhibition Title : Monochrome Coloured Autophobia

Dates: Beginning 2018

Medium : Oil on canvas plus mixed media

Number of works: 19 paintings & 6 sculptures

艺术家：杰森·叶茨

主题：单色的孤独恐惧症

媒介：布面油画及混合媒介

作品数量：19幅油画，6座雕塑（小型）

### About Breeze Creatives

Breeze Creatives is one of the largest art's organisation based in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK; we curate two contemporary gallery spaces: Object Gallery, which has an international focus, recently showcasing artists from China, Japan, Turkey, Iceland, Canada, Spain and North Korea, while Object 2 focuses on contemporary emerging national and local artists. To support emerging artists and recent graduates we also curate The Experimental Studios, an open call in-house residency and exhibition opportunity.

Alongside this our organisation works in partnership with Northumberland College to deliver the regions only independent art school, F.A.D (Foundation Art & Design) offering foundation level students collaborative, international projects, live projects and a nationally recognised qualification.

These projects are currently housed in Bamburgh House, a 9-storey arts centre founded and managed by Breeze Creatives.

Recently Breeze Creatives won Sunderland 10x10; a collaborative venture with Sunderland Business Improvement District, acknowledging our continued research into sustainable business models in the arts.

[www.breezecreatives.com](http://www.breezecreatives.com)

机构简介:

Breeze Creatives 是位于英国纽卡斯尔的一所非盈利性当代艺术机构，是当地最大的艺术机构之一。其目前运作两个当代艺术画廊，分别为 Abject 及 Abject 2。Abject 画廊聚焦国际当代艺术家，目前已展出包括中国、日本、西班牙、加拿大、冰岛、土耳其、朝鲜等多个具国际影响力的新锐艺术家的艺术作品，作品形式涵盖从油画、摄影、雕塑到装置艺术、多媒体影像、行为艺术等多种艺术形式。Abject 2 画廊聚焦英国新锐艺术思潮，支持和展出了英国本土的众多新锐艺术家的独特创作实践作品。Breeze Creatives 还每年定期资助/展出驻场艺术家的创作，以鼓励更多的国际新锐艺术家的艺术创作。

此外，Breeze Creatives 还与诺桑伯兰学院合作运作英国北部首所独立艺术学院 F.A.D, 面向国际，独创性地教授预科类的艺术课程与实践项目，其毕业生授予国家认可的学历证书。2016 年，F.A.D 艺术类预科的毕业生们相继被伦敦/切尔西学院，皇家艺术学院，格拉斯哥大学等多个顶尖艺术院校录取。

目前，Breeze Creatives 的艺术项目均位于英国英格兰纽卡斯尔市市中心的班堡大厦，一栋 9 层的大楼中，其位于桑德兰市的新艺术项目现已获政府批准支持，业务扩展中。

网址：[www.BreezeCreatives.com](http://www.BreezeCreatives.com)

## Curatorial Statement

Although Breeze Creatives have only formally worked with artist Jaisen Yates since 2015 we have closely followed his work as it has been exhibited throughout the region, over the past five years. Our fascination with what at first appeared to be beautifully executed yet slightly obscure paintings, or even macabre paintings hidden behind and between layers of resins, ornately framed and sometimes framed twice; developed into a fascination with the artist himself.

Yates remained an outsider to the art scene in a social capacity while attracting growing attention from galleries and curators across the region wishing to showcase his work. Yates could be considered somewhat of an 'outsider artist' and it is important to understand that both Yates and his work are truly interconnected.

Over the years, this seemingly disorganised approach to painting has developed into a clearer more sophisticated presentation of ideas. A narrative has developed through the image but it is the subject of Yates artwork that reveals a part of the artist himself; like an ingredient, each image produces a new insight into the artist.

Entitled Monochrome Coloured Autophobia this exhibition explores the dislocation that is felt by those of us who are (as Yates refers to as) 'pedestrians' of the modern world.

For Yates, these photographs depict unique occurrences in time, semi-cultural affiliations and historical relevance, a transition of transcendental information. These works are an echo of surrealism, a search for context - historical, emotional and aesthetic - they form a personal lexicon that gives Yates an ownership and understanding of the world he explores.

策展人陈述:

Breeze Creatives 与艺术家 杰森·叶茨 (Jaisen Yates) 的合作始于 2015 年, 而在此之前, 我们已关注了他的展出和创作至少五年的时间。叶茨的作品呈现出一种独具魅力的艺术家特质。在层层树脂之间, 在这些乍看下有些晦涩的, 充斥着隐晦的、甚至有些令人毛骨悚然的画面背后, 却透出完美的执行魅力。这从那有着华丽装裱, 甚至双层装裱的画面中也能窥见一二。

叶茨是个艺术界的“局外人”, 不爱社交, 但他的作品却越来越受到画廊和策展人的关注。要了解叶茨, 最重要的便是了解他作为一个“局外艺术家”的个体特质。其个性和他的作品是紧密相关、不可分隔的。

经过多年的探索, 叶茨已经发展出一套自己的执行风格, 这种看似散漫的风格却逐渐带领着观众, 呈现给他们一个更清晰、更复杂的理念。作品故事性地以一种叶茨式的叙述方式, 通过图像, 层层深入地剖析艺术家本人, 这仿佛将所有成分摊开在眼前, 展现给受众一个全新的视角和洞察。

本展览题为“单色的孤独恐惧症”, 旨在探索一种(叶茨所谓的)“摩登行人”的错位感。

对叶茨而言, 这些画面描绘了独特的文化背景和历史事件, 有着文化意义上的半关联性和先验信息的过渡性。这些作品都是超现实主义的回声, 情境搜索的历史索引, 个人情感和审美的语汇。所有这些都给了叶茨“他世界”的探索权、所有权、和理解权。

Artist statement:

Yates' work epitomises a lifelong obsession with the unique; his accumulations of objects and images share strong senses of meaning and hold intrinsic essence of their times. The meaning extracted from these sources is both the personal and the subjective endeavour of the viewer, an arrangement of artefacts that spiral off, illustrative of an evolving memory.

Found objects become connected to others by an esoteric relationship dependent on their occurrences in time, semi-cultural affiliations and historical relevance; a transition of transcendental information.

These works are an echo of surrealism, a search for context - historical, emotional and aesthetic - they form a personal lexicon that gives Yates a sense of ownership of the world he explores.

Painting is often a struggle between the planned and the accidental, a place of freedom where imagination cannot be stopped. Whilst painting, the direction of Yates' work can unexpectedly begin to change, in this transition, something else manifests, thus forming a new vocabulary. Mixing form and content, a carnivorous approach reflects Yates' life's worth of looking and listening; Yates' is a creator of objects and images.

艺术家陈述:

我的作品浓缩了一种对独特的终身迷恋, 对物体和画面的累积强烈地表达着一种对时代与内在本质的意义上的追寻。从素材中抽离出的意义既是观者个人的主观努力, 又是一种螺旋上升式的艺术演绎, 是一种记忆进化的例证。

这些作品都是超现实主义的回声, 情境的历史索引, 个人情感和审美的语汇。所有这些都表达了我对世界的探索权、所有权、和理解权。

绘画往往是计划与偶然之间的一种斗争, 是一片无法停止想象的自由之地。作画之时, 我的方向往往会出乎意料地偏离。在这种偏离中, 其他的东西彰显出来, 新的话语继而形成。为了让形式与内容融合,

我观察和聆听的方式就好像一只肉食动物。我既是物体和图像的创造者，也希望这些创造出的形体能够获得成为自己的自由。

媒体访谈：

**How you define your art? Do you try to define your art? If you did, what would spring to mind instantly?**

*“It’s not always the same thing. It works on many different levels, there’s an undercurrent on many things that are happening in my art. There’s an element of surrealism, dadaism, there’s pop art mixed in there, as well as my own intrinsic play on things, social comment... What I’m interested in, I suppose, is what I often call ‘the dislocation of the pedestrian soul’. In the modern world, we never really understand, we get a general idea of who’s saying what... But I never have a pure kind of opinion or idea of how the world really works and what it’s about. I’m just giving suggestions of things that sometimes stick out or maybe interest me, things like that...”*

**请问您如何定义您自己的艺术作品？尝试过定义自己的作品吗？如果是，您是怎样想的？**

不是总一样。在不同的层面上很多东西都不同。我的作品中反映了很多我生活中经历过的暗流。有些有点超现实主义、达达主义的元素，有些混合了波普艺术的元素，作品里还混合了一些我内在的、本质的东西，一些公众观点……我想，我感兴趣的是我通常所说的行人的灵魂错位。在现代世界，我们从未真正理解彼此。我们大致知道谁在说什么……但我们对这个世界是如何运作的，是关于什么的从来没有一个纯粹的观点或看法。我只是对那些引起我注意的东西给出一些建议，那些引起我的兴趣……

**Explain more about the dislocation of the pedestrian soul. Is this something that’s particularly relevant to our current culture?**

*“Yeah, I think people are just generally lost in this world. They have an idea of what the world is about, but what it is really about is something completely different to their idea. They hope to just kind of exist within that world and get on with it.”*

**能进一步解释一下行人的灵魂错位吗？这和我们现在的文化特别相关吗？**

是的，我认为人们往往都迷失在这个世界上。他们对世界有自己的认知，但实际上它究竟是什么样子往往和人们的认知完全不同。人们只是希望能在这个世界上生存下去，继续下去。

**Are you trying to capture that world in your art?**

*“I don’t necessarily think I’m trying to capture it, I just sometimes kind of comment on it in my own intrinsic manner. I’m not attempting to give an answer. I’m often just trying to make paintings that work on many different levels. I’m trying to make work that the academic can feed off and get plenty out of, but also appeals your general person who reads the Sunday paper and maybe has an interest in art, to just the general public who might enter an art gallery because they’re curious about art and painting itself.”*

**你是想在你的艺术中突显出那个世界吗？**

我并不认为我想突显它。我只是有时用我内在的方式来评论它。我没想过要给你答案。我经常尝试创作表现不同层面的作品。我正努力创作能引起学术界关注并取得巨大成果的作品，但那些作品也得是那些普通人感兴趣的。比如那些读星期日报纸的人，他们进入画廊可能仅仅源于对绘画的好奇和对艺术本身的兴趣

## **You want to combine intellectual depth with accessibility?**

*“Yes, I’d like to give that kind of thing... Sometimes I’m quite ignorant to things myself but... the visual make-up... I’m also very interested in words and associations with words, and sometimes it’s a matter of putting words together to make a picture with quite a literal interpretation. Paintings as words and words as pictures – this is particularly relevant to the titles”.*

**你是想把思维的深度和理解上的易懂结合起来？**

是的，我是想这样做……有时我自己一无所知，但是视觉上的构成……我对文字和词语的联想也很感兴趣，有时把文字放在一起，用非常字面的解释来画一幅画。图如文、文如图。这与这次展览的主题特别相关。

## **Can you give me some examples?**

*“It’s about the symbolism of the words and the imagery. I can give you an example of how I can translate words to pictures and to symbolism. For instance, this painting is Pussy Pop Death Mobile. Within this painting, the central image of the car and the driver is taken from the film ‘Faster Pussycat! Kill! Kill!’ with Tura Satana - it was in the 1960s. That’s the basic overall image. But this flower on the left is taken from a female artist who died. Before she gives my girlfriend and I this painting, and I used to always think ‘I really like that painting’ - there’s something about it that’s somehow going to come into transition and I’m going to use it, so because of the car, the symbolism of the car relating to a B-movie kind of relating to pop art and it being a female image, this theme of taking ‘pussy’ from ‘Faster Pussycat! Kill! Kill!’ pussy also translates to the female. ‘Pussy pop’ because it’s from a pop art-related movie. Death mobile... The image of the flowers came in because I was always fascinated by roadside memorials with flowers. I didn’t know all this at the time. I just thought those flowers go with the car and came up with titles. Because the artist who painted the flowers passed on, she’s dead... that’s reflected too. It’s pussy and it’s pop and it’s a mobile... They flow quite nicely but they’re quite literal - but at the same time it’s quite surreal and Dadaist. These parts of things all come together to form a visual representation of some stories”.*

**能举些例子吗？**

就是关于词汇和意象的象征意义。我可以给你举个例子，说明如何将文字翻译成图片再变成象征符号。比如，这幅画是“猫·波谱·死亡汽车”。这幅画的中心意象——汽车和司机，是从上世纪60年代Tura Satana演的电影“更快的小猫！杀！杀！”里取材的。这是画作的大致印象。但左边的这朵花是从一个死去的女艺术家身上取下来的。之前她给我和我的女朋友一幅画，我总在想“我真的很喜欢那幅画”。有些元素我想用，但不知怎么用。是这辆车的出现令波谱艺术象征性地与女性形象联系在了一起。同样地，猫也是女性符号的一种形式，由“更快的小猫！杀！杀！”而来。猫和波谱也来自一部与波谱艺术相关的电影。死亡汽车……我一直为路边那些用于祭奠的花着迷，而我的朋友，那位画花的女艺术家也去世了，她死了……这些也反映在了画中。猫，波谱和死亡汽车三者有着很好的叙事性，但也相当字面。与此同时，也很超现实主义和达达主义。所有这些聚集在一起，正用视觉叙述着某些故事。

## **Is the idea of story important to the art?**

*“It’s not necessarily literal, but it has become important in the make-up because at the same time I’m very interested in music. When I was younger I was into punk-rock and all that, and that informed me about things... But I have to tell you about my school before that. It explains why words and pictures and associations have become very relevant in my art at this point.*

*This number 9... I was given it. It was off one of those old telegraph posts, but with Pussy Pop Death Mobile it's a reference to the fact that she's a cat with nine lives. Then the theme of the post... I remember James Dean, I think he crashed his car into a telegraph pole, so there are other aspects and you think, 'oh, yeah', it seems to come from somewhere - maybe in an esoteric sense with spirits..."*

**故事的理念对艺术很重要吗？**

在这幅画里，是的。不一定是字面上，但它的意义在画面的构成中变得很重要。我对音乐也很感兴趣。年轻时，我迷上了朋克摇滚之类的，之后这些成了我的一部分……不过我得告诉你我的学生时代，它可以解释为什么文字、图片和联想在我的艺术中是紧密关联的。

（画中）这个数字9……是我从那些老式电线杆上的海报上拿到的。但是在这幅画里，这个数字首先暗示着她（那个死去的女艺术家）是只有九条命的猫，然后才轮到那个海报的主题。我记得詹姆斯迪恩把车撞上了电线杆，还有其他的東西，你会想“哦，是的”，这似乎来自某个具有深奥灵性感知的地方……

**You seem to intuitively draw connections and move on that?**

*"Yes. I don't always know that I'm doing that, but it's amazing because sometimes I've painted stuff and I never kind of really knew why. And it might be two months on and I've got it. It's amazing when that happens. It's that subconscious thing. It's going on but you don't know it's going on. When it does reveal itself, it's incredible."*

**你似乎总是被直觉吸引前行？**

对。我并不总是知道我在做什么。但这很神奇，因为有时候我画了一些东西，但我从来都不知道为什么。结果两个月后，我一下就明白了。发生这种情况时感觉很神奇。那是潜意识的东西。潜意识在驱使你，但你并不知道，然后当它显现出来时，真是难以置信。

**Do overthinking concepts in a rigidly intellectual way ruin the creative process? Do you need to trust what's coming to you as you produce?**

*"It's not always an obvious thing. Sometimes I just get that caught up in the composition of the painting, its structure, basically the balance, the build-up, a bit of pink there, a bit of green there, and that can take a long time. I'm going through all those channels and things, but the end product is something that is there to make sense within itself. It might not be the initial idea, but it's there to make its own sense. It's gone beyond that"*

**在僵化的思维方式中过度思考会毁掉创意吗？在你创作的过程中，你信任脑子里冒出的那些想法吗？**

不总是很明显。创作中，有时我会被一些想法缠住，那些结构，总是想找一种平衡、建构。这里一点粉红，那里一点绿，这些很花时间。我得把所有这些渠道和元素都考虑进去，然后最终让成品自己说话。也可能最终的成品不代表我最初的理念，但作品完成后就有了自己的意识，超越了那些（理念）。

**There's a lot a referencing of culture. Is that a paradox? How much does the viewer also require this prior background? How does that change the experience?**

*"It's out of my hands. They can take whatever they like from it. Whatever you can gain from it in your own mind hopefully works in your favour. I'm not giving a direct visual result"*

**有很多关于文化的参照，是自相矛盾的吗？在参观前观众需要了解多少背景？这些对观展经历有影响吗？**

这不在我的控制范围之内。他们怎么想都行。不管你能从中得到什么都是好的，希望都对你有利。我不想给一个直接了当的视觉结论。

### **So it's a reference point for yourself?**

*"The end product is truly mine. As long it is balanced for me, and it's working visually as a painting, and that use of symbolism is there... It might have gone past that stage where the symbolism is not as necessary. It has become the finished item, which is truly from the subconscious. There was never really an end decision. The decisions have been made within putting together the end imagery, but the outcome is something different. It's like the painting has been revealed and there is no more to be done."*

所以这是你自己的一个参考点？

最终的作品是我的。只要它对我来说是平衡的，它看上去是一幅画，而它的符号意义也在那儿就行了……也可能符号化也不那么重要了。作品已成为完整的主体，是潜意识驱使的结果。没有最终的判定。我只决定把什么样的意象放在一起，但是其结果是不同的。这就好像那幅画已被揭示出来，我没有更多的事可做了。

### **You regard the unconscious as a major contributor? So long as you trust yourself?**

*"I would agree with that. It's really weird. There's a lot of spirits and things that are going around and I always think that my work in a way is a kind of voodoo. Certain elements have come together and they end up revealing themselves. I think it's only truly worked when the end result has surpassed your initial expectations of what you thought you were doing. If I was just to do a visual representation of a figure, then I would have no interest in it. It could be a really tight figurative painting, but there would be something niggling at me. It needs to be attacked. It needs to be marked. It needs to be splattered. It's like poetic interaction and interplay which is something that takes over after the initial idea. You have the initial idea - then you have the start of the painting, which is terrifying. Then you're five weeks in and you just can't be bothered - but you have to do it. You have to put three layers of paint on before you can get to the next stage. Then it gets so the visual imagery is nearly completed... [Yates points out an example] This is the voodoo coming in, where it becomes more interesting to the eye, where I start balancing it up and it gets to a point where I've overcome the fear of the painting and then it's like literally I could just get a tin of green paint, stick a brush in and hurl it across the canvas. I wouldn't care anymore. But I'd know I could sort that out. If that green went across their faces, there would be bits I would know how to get rid of and reconstruct it."*

所以你觉得无意识作了主要贡献者吗？只要相信自己就行了？

我同意这个说法。真奇怪，我周围一直有很多灵异事件发生，我总觉得我的创作在某种程度上是一种巫术。某些元素聚集在一起，最终他们会自我暴露。作品只有在最终成品超过了你最初对你所做的期望时才会是好的。如果我只是做一个数据式的可视化表示，就会没了兴趣。这是一个很紧张的具象化绘画过程，但总有些琐碎在干扰我。那些是需要被攻击、被标明、被喷溅的。这就像一种诗性的互动和相互作用，是建立在最初的理念之上的东西。你开始画，最初有些令人畏惧。之后有五个星期，你都不知怎么动手。但你知道你必须着手。你得先画上三层，才能再有些进展。然后视觉意象就会慢慢接近完成……（指着一个例子）这就是一个巫术的例子，在眼里它越来越有趣，我开始给它找到平衡感，直到我克服了绘画的恐惧，就象真的拿着一罐绿色颜料一样，我就这样把画笔戳进去然后在画布挥洒开，再也不在乎了，但我知道我可以作到。如果那绿色划过他们的脸，我知道该如何祛除和改造。

### **How do you view your relationship with social comment?**

It used to happen more in my earlier work. They were very different.

你如何看待你与社会评论的关系？

我早期的作品经常受影响，那时的作品非常不一样。

## Is there any reason your art has moved in a different direction?

*I am older. I was painting all the time, but I was a set designer for 10 years after I finished my Masters Degree at Newcastle. I was still showing every year, but the paintings weren't what I wanted them to be because I didn't have the time. And I realised that time is the most important thing when it comes to making a painting. I can't make paintings in a day. And that's it. These paintings take a lot of time. It might just be painting over white ten times so it becomes a certain white, but I understand and can use imagery better now and my choice of imagery has become more selective. Lately, I've been buying a lot of old photographs - 1950s photographs, stuff like that because they're more interesting and I often think with that imagery that I'm painting ghosts. A lot of these people are dead. These are ghosts. I'm painting ghosts, but often I'm sending them on holiday. I'm giving them a life on this earth because somebody in a drawer in America found some old photos and thought 'I'll put these on eBay'. They might not necessarily have been in the person's house. But there is some interest to someone in absolutely everything. So I've taken up this imagery of things from an older time because I always think that things from previous years - cars and the way people used hold themselves is a lot more interesting than modern imagery. For example, a painting of a phone as a symbol of technology, that phone would be representing how we live today, because that world is ruled by mobile phones. But to paint a mobile phone would be quite boring because there's literally nothing to it. But if I found a phone like that [points to an old phone], if you painted that, that would be interesting. Again, it's the importance of symbolism - because you're going to reflect on what it is - but that's got pigeon shit on it, that's got chemicals on it, that's been in an industrial factory for 30 years. That phone is a bombproof phone. That phone is worth 350 quid. You paint that and people are going to say, 'What's that?' So that's why the selective use of imagery is different now - because I've moved on and developed, I'm really beginning to realise that older imagery is more interesting than modern imagery.*

*I started to realise what I was doing. I was taking somebody's life - maybe after they've passed on - and now giving it new life - and these people and their families are never going to know what's gone on. But there's now a transition in somebody's afterlife that appears somewhere in Newcastle, England, that stemmed from Kentucky that nobody knows of. I often wonder if the spirits realise that I have painted them and think, 'Oh, somebody's thinking about me somewhere in the world. Where's that? Newcastle, England?'"*

## 有什么特别的原因令你改变艺术创作的方向吗？

我更成熟了。我一直在画画，但当我从纽卡斯尔完成硕士学位后，我做了 10 年的布景设计师。那时我每年仍在出展，但因为我没有时间，这些画并不是我想要的。我意识到时间才是绘画中最重要的东西。一天是不够完成一幅画的，就是这样。画画需要很多时间。你可能涂了十次的白色，才找到你想要的那种白色。现在我把握意象的能力好些了，我所用的意象也变得更有选择性。最近，我买了许多旧照片——1950 年代的照片，诸如此类。它们更有趣，我经常想像我是在画“鬼”。照片里的很多人已经死了，成了鬼魂。我在画“鬼”，用我的方式送他们去度假。我在重新赋予他们一个在地球上的生命，这全都因为有人在美国的某个抽屉里发现了一些旧照片，然后想“我要把这些在易趣上卖掉”。他们可能不在这个人的家里，但绝对有个人对某个人的所有东西都感兴趣。我就是这样从以前的东西上寻找灵感——汽车和过去人们拍照的方式比摩登图片有趣得多。例如，如果一部手机是现代科技的符号，那手机就可以代表我们今天的生活方式，因为是手机统治着这个世界。但是画手机会很无聊，没什么可画的。可如果我发现一部像那样的电话（指向一部旧电话），画那个会有点意思。这一样是运用象征符号——你得想想它到底是什么——那上面有鸽子粪，也有化学物质，它在一个工业工厂待了 30 年。那个电话是个防爆电话。那个电话值 350 英镑。如果你画它，人们会问“那是什么？”这就是为什么我现在使用意象的选择性不一样了，因为我提升了，而且我真的明白老图片比新图片更有趣。

我后来开始意识到自己在做什么。我正掌控着某个人的生命——在他们去世后——再赋予他们一个全新的生命。这些人和他们的家人永远也不会知道发生了什么。但现在，在英格兰纽卡斯尔的某个地方，一

个没人认识的，来自美国肯塔基州的人，被赋予了一个“来世”。当我在潜意识中思考这个问题的时候，我常常想，那个灵魂会不会在想，“哦，有人在世界的某个地方在想我。那是哪儿？纽卡斯尔，英格兰？”

**Humour and poignancy always stand out in your work. They are melded together. What are your views about that?**

*“I have a terminology for this kind of thing. I call it sugar-coated death. There are a lot of serious aspects in the work but I’m balancing them with humour. There’s a great deal of darkness, but somehow I’m lightening it up.*

*This is intrinsic to my personality, my spirit. But I’m very sensitive to the human elements.”*

**幽默和心酸永远占据着工作，他们合二为一。你对此有何看法？**

我有一个术语解释这个。我称之为糖衣死亡。工作中有很多严肃的问题，但我用幽默来平衡它们。有巨大黑暗面，但不知怎的，我总试图点亮它们。

这是我的天性，我的精神。我对与人类有关的元素非常敏感。

**You mentioned your education?**

*“I’m 48 now, but when I went to school and I learned to read and write. At the end of that year, after the summer, I went back to the same school for a couple of weeks. Then six of us taken out of the class and we were put into another school that was joined on to ours. This was in Blyth. So I was put in this new school with whole lot of other kids the same age. The kids in the new school were being taught this thing called ITA - Initial Teaching Alphabet - ITA was an American teaching experiment done on phonetics and it was to encourage learning, to speed it up, and it was introduced in England in the 70s, maybe a bit earlier than that, so I would have been getting it around about 76 maybe. Perfect example of ITA spelling is that they kind of change the formula of words, so the number one would become ‘won’. It’s the way that words are said - that’s how you spell them. So I was put in this class for a year and taught ITA and then for some reason the six of us were taken back out and put back in the initial class where we started out. So these kids haven’t been over there. So we’d get spelling tests, and things that I could do before, I now can’t because my vowels are all mixed up. I still have problems when I’m writing. I just couldn’t figure it out. I was embarrassed. But nobody had explained a single thing to me. Nothing had been explained to my parents, but nobody questioned stuff back then. What I’m saying is that they kind of made me dyslexic. I was thinking: What’s happened? I’m I a fool? So as things went on, I sort of played the fool, I played the joker because I was totally, absolutely confused. So I started kind relating words with imagery in my head, started playing about with words and their meanings. I didn’t know, but I was building terminologies. Words for pictures; pictures for words. It took a while after that to sort the ITA out. I began developing a sense of humour for escapism, to get me out of situations. And I had to learn spelling again.*

*I got very much into music. I was very much into The Clash and The Specials, I was learning about history and politics through the lyrics. The other thing that got me by was that I could draw, seven-inch single covers. I was really into design, I used to paint people’s rucksacks, I used the word ‘wonky’ a lot because everything had become wonky as fuck. I learned welding and spray painting.”*

*I’m interested in objects and how they relate to people. And I’ve always had a strange fascination with religion; I did once have this idea of being a de-programmer for those who’ve been scientologists etc.”*

## 提到了你的教育背景？

我现在 48 岁了，我从上学时开始阅读和写作。学校的第一年是非常重要的时刻。我一直是个聪明的孩子。我去上学，学会了阅读和写作。那年夏天结束后，我回到学校，学习了两周后，他们把连同我在内的六个孩子从班上带走，安排进了另一所学校，其他一些孩子也在那里加入了我们。那是在布莱思。我被安置进一个新学校，和其他同龄的孩子一起。在那里，孩子们被教了一种叫做 ITA —— “初始字母表教学”的东西，有些孩子从第一天起就在那儿。ITA 是一个美国的语音教学实验，它是为了鼓励学习，加快速度。它在 70 年代引入英国，也许更早一点，所以我可能会在大约 76 岁左右学会。ITA 举例来说就是改变了单词的拼写法则。所以，数字一（英文 one）会变成“赢”（英文 won）。就是这样，你就得这样拼。我在这门课上上了一年，被教了 ITA，然后由于某种原因，我们六个又被退回去了，回到我们原来上课的课堂上。其他的孩子没去过那里（ITA）。然后我们参加了拼写测试。我发现以前我能做的，现在不行了，因为我把元音都混淆了。我到现在写作时还有些问题。我搞不懂到底怎么回事，很尴尬。但没有人给我解释过什么，也没人给我父母解释过什么，也没有人问过我什么。我想说，是他们把我变成了诵读困难症患者。我当时在想：“发生了什么？我傻了吗？”到后来，我就干脆装傻，扮小丑，因为我特别困惑。于是乎，我开始把文字和脑海中的意象联系起来，开始玩文字和意义的关联游戏。我自己不知道，其实我是在玩创造术语的游戏。图片解释文字，文字解释图片。过了好一阵子，ITA 的影响才算是过去了。我却开始发展出一种逃避现实的幽默感，而且我不得不从头开始学习拼写。

我特别喜欢音乐。我特别喜欢 The Clash 和 The Specials 那些乐队。我通过歌词学习历史和政治。另一件帮我渡过难关的事是我能画画。那种七寸的黑胶唱片封面，我真的很喜欢设计。我曾经帮别人画背包。我经常用“忽悠”这个词，因为什么都他妈的靠不住。我还学会了焊接和喷漆。

我对物体以及物体与人的关系感兴趣。我对宗教总是有一种奇怪的迷恋。我以前还想过作个反布道者，去帮助那些被“科学教”洗脑的信徒们。