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SYMBIOTIC CAREERS IN MOVIE MAKING:
PEDRO AND AGUSTIN ALMODOVAR

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Abstract

In this paper we focus on the paradox of unbinding creativity by binding up artistic and business tasks in a single symbiotic career carried out by two people. We argue that the uncertainty of the matching between film directors and producers in the artistic labour market, and the constraints production companies impose on creativity once the match is made, drive creative professionals to found their own production organisations, as well as forming their own art worlds. Self-production involves both artistic and business tasks, each of which requires a particular mind-set and abilities. The creative person alone cannot (in most cases) cover both the creative and the production side of his artwork. He needs a partner to take charge of deal making and production, somebody very close and deeply trusted who is capable of subordinating his own career to the trajectory of the artist. Thus, two people sustain a single career, that of the creative professional, embedding it in their own production company. The propositions we offer in this paper cast light on a largely unexplored topic in the literature, that of why and how two people sustain a single career. They are illustrated by the symbiotic career of the internationally acclaimed Spanish film director Pedro Almodóvar and his brother Agustín.

Key words: symbiotic career, role versatility, trust, control, art worlds.

SYMBIOTIC CAREERS IN MOVIE MAKING: PEDRO AND AGUSTIN ALMODOVAR

Introduction

“SYMBIOSIS means living together... There are three forms of symbiosis: parasitism, commensalism, and mutualism... In mutualism, both parties benefit... Mutualism occurs naturally when an alga and a fungus grow together to form a lichen which differs from either plant. Each organism benefits from this close association. The fungus, which cannot produce its own food, gets its food from the alga. The alga gets protection from the fungus”.

The World Book Encyclopedia, vol. 18, p. 849
World Book, Inc., 1986, U.S.A.

“I am extremely thankful to my brother Agustín for doing the dirty part of this business”.

Pedro Almodóvar,
receiving the 56th Annual Golden Globe Award,
Best Foreign Language Film for *All about my mother*,
Los Angeles, 23 January 2000

Within the sociology of art many studies have contributed to the account of creative careers. Painters (White and White, 1993; Greenfeld, 1989), writers (Anheier et al., 1995), and musicians (Hirsch, 1972; Abbott and Hrycak, 1990) have been subjects for the study of the peculiarities of creative careers, and of the way in which they unfold in institutional and cultural systems. The film industry has also been a regular field site for scholars interested in creative careers. A good deal of research so far has centred on career advancement and its sources, such as skills, knowledge, reputation, relationships, and roles (Faulkner & Anderson, 1987; Baker & Faulkner, 1991; Jones, 1996; DeFillippi & Arthur, 1998; Bielby & Bielby, 1999). Most of this research has assumed that individuals pursue tracks within single career types, or have one basic task. Hybrid or multi-type careers have not received enough attention, with a few exceptions (Abbott and Hrycak, 1990; Baker and Faulkner, 1991; Menger, 1999). Further, cases in which two people team up to form an indivisible career trajectory have been largely ignored.

In this paper we try to extend the work on creative careers by centring on a particular phenomenon: artistically and commercially successful film directors who, alone or in partnership with a close relative and/or close friend, own film production companies. We look at the paradox of how binding up two distinct and somehow contradictory career activities –art and business– can unbind creativity. We believe this is a fruitful phenomenon for investigating a topic in careers that deserves more attention: why and how individuals simultaneously perform tasks that could be considered part of separate or single careers. This topic is inscribed in the larger, long-standing sociological problem of the relationship between the economic and the cultural, and between the material and the artistic (Anheier et al., 1995), a problem which inhabits even such an “idealistic” activity as art.

In order to tackle the subjective rationale for espousing managerial and artistic activities in a single trajectory of two people, we work mostly at the micro level. Wherever necessary, however, we nest career trajectories in a hierarchy of increasingly broader institutional (macro-level) contexts, and travel back and forth across the nests.

We argue that the uncertainty of the matching between film directors and producers in the artistic labour market, and the constraints that production companies impose on creativity once the match is made, drive creative professionals to found their own production entities, as well as forming their own art worlds. Self-production is associated with both artistic and business tasks, which by nature require different and even conflicting mind-sets and abilities. In other words, the creative person alone cannot (in most cases) cover both the artistic and the production side of the artwork. He therefore needs a partner to take charge of deal making and production. In order to be able to manage the production structure without constraining creativity, this person has to be somebody very close and deeply trusted by the artist, somebody who is capable of subordinating his own career to that of the artist. Thus, two people sustain one career, that of the creative professional, embedding it in their own production organisation and their own art worlds.

The paper begins with a review of existing accounts of creative careers to help build the argument. Once we have framed our theoretical propositions, we present the methodological premises of the study. We then illustrate our propositions with the example of the internationally acclaimed Spanish film director Pedro Almodóvar, which is compared with other similar cases from the Spanish film industry.

In the search for creative freedom and control, Pedro Almodóvar, together with his younger brother Agustín, created a production company. Since then, Pedro has achieved both artistic and commercial success as a film maker, not only because of his unique gift but also thanks to his brother’s handling of “the dirty part of this business”, i.e. the deal making and production. This “symbiosis” of the trajectories of two people (the artist and his trustee) is subordinated to the expressive needs of the artist. In our view, the contribution of this paper lies precisely in shedding light on why and how two people sustain a single career.

Defining careers in films

There are different ways of approaching creative careers – through their context, through their content, or through the roles that structures and agency play in their unfolding. In this section we shall try to mark out the field of creative careers using three indispensable markers. First, we situate creative careers in an artistic labour market where business and artistic segments constantly meet and achieve mutual matching for each project. Second, we

explore the paradoxical role of social and economic structures in both constraining and facilitating artwork. Third, we complement this structural view with an agency perspective, focusing on the personal characteristics of the artist (talent, motivation, etc.), or his decision to conform to, or break away from, the canons of traditional art worlds, becoming an integrated professional, in the first case, or a maverick, in the second. To complete the account of agency, we discuss the concept of role versatility.

Duality of matching and uncertainty in artistic labour markets

Faulkner and Anderson (1987) define careers in the film industry as an uncertain and erratic process of building successions of temporary film projects or lines of events through dual matching between producers and artists. They say that “a career is a two-sided affair, sustained by entrepreneurs making distinctions among qualified artists; on the other side of the market, directors, cinematographers, screenwriters, composers, and other artists are making distinctions among film productions (and their producers” (Faulkner and Anderson, 1987: 889).

The duality of matching can be traced back to Hirsch (1972), who places it among the two main subsystems of the cultural industry system – the managerial subsystem (the administrators) and the creative or technical subsystem (the professionals). The former discovers and selects cultural products for organisation sponsoring and promotion, while the latter offers such products. For us, the interesting point in Hirsch’s argument is his claim that “talent scouts” (film directors) act as a link between the technical and the managerial levels. This central role of film directors in film production serves to justify our focus on their careers.

The dual matching that Hirsch (1972) and Faulkner and Anderson (1987) use to define creative careers takes place in artistic labour markets marked by *uncertainty* as to the outcomes of artwork. The famous “hit-and-miss” and “nobody-knows-anything” rules of the film industry (Mickelthwait, 1989) reflect the difficulty of predicting the success or failure of a project before it has reached audiences.

According to Menger (1999), uncertainty has a twofold manifestation. First, it can be related to the chances that an individual has of succeeding in her undertaking. Second, it could mean uncertainty that the individual’s expectations with respect to other artists’ behaviour and the evaluations and preferences of gatekeepers and consumers will be fulfilled. Further, uncertainty can be seen as a substantive condition for innovation, a lure towards the constant self-actualisation and self-invention of the artist (Menger, 1999).

Unpredictability and constant dual matching with the production side of the artistic labour market expose the artist’s trajectory to a constant flux. To gain some ownership of his career, and a degree of stability, the artist may decide to anchor his career in social structures that he himself has created.

Duality of social and economic structures: constraint and means for artwork

While market uncertainty is an important marker in the career trajectory of an artist, it is far from being the only one. Social structure is another relevant driver whose duality impacts creative careers. The duality of structure, as White (1992) points out, lies in its ability to both constrain and enable creative action.

According to White, structure constrains in the sense that it blocks fresh action. In many accounts of creative careers, social forces are cited as being harmful to creativity, among other things because they intervene in the final outcome of artwork, diminishing the creator's degree of internal control over her work (Amabile, 1996). Focusing on cultural industry systems such as commercial publishing, movie making, and recording, Hirsch (1972) explains that in order for artists or writers to make contact with their intended audience, they have to be "discovered" by entrepreneurial organisations which serve as regulators of innovation and so have the power to decide the artist's fate. Extending the scope of Hirsch's concerns to the field of film making, we can say that production companies can constrain artistic freedom not only as gatekeepers (by deciding which creative ideas deserve to be produced and reach an audience), but also by imposing strict budgets and time frames, or particular themes and styles, or by ignoring the unique needs of artistic expression.

White (1992) suggests that, in order to "restart the social clock" and "buffer one chain of action from another", agents de-couple from such "straitjackets". In this sense, we can interpret the setting up of production companies by film directors as a reaction to the restrictions on creativity imposed by traditional production organisations. By creating their own production structures, directors manage to buffer the chain of activities for artistic expression from the uncertainty and constraints of the context.

However, social structures also enable artwork. As Becker (1982) points out, the production of art requires that artists embed their career in networks of collaboration. This author gives one of the seminal accounts of the social embeddedness of creativity, questioning the dominant tradition in the sociology of art of placing the artist and the artwork at the centre of any analysis of art as a social phenomenon. Instead, he uses the term "art worlds" to denote networks of people and the processes of their co-operative activities aimed at the production of art. For him, therefore, art worlds are process rather than structure. While artistic talent is a necessary condition, Becker claims that it is far from sufficient for the achievement of artistic outcomes. Talent has to be backed by a collaborative network that can push the artist's vision to a finished piece of art.

In reference to the way Impressionism was socially constructed, White and White (1993) argue that "any influence by an artist depends upon his or her being embedded in a group", with the degree of inbreeding in social networks determining the level of influence. They discuss the way cross-influence and collaboration among the group of painters known as Impressionists contributed to and was sustained by the new dealer-critic system.

To sum up, "artwork... is a social phenomenon" (Greenfeld, 1989), and if artists find certain social structures constraining, they cannot simply abandon them and work on their own. They need to create their own group, or "art world", through which to express their creativity. The way they do this will naturally influence the direction in which their careers develop.

Career "owners": features and actions

So far we have been talking about careers in terms of the duality of business and artistic matching in highly unstable labour markets, or the duality of social structures as both a constraint and a means for artwork. As Alvarez (forthcoming) argues, organisational actors operating in contexts of "softened" or more volatile structures (such as those in the film industry) are more capable of influencing their own positioning and careers, precisely by influencing the structures they operate in. Hence, careers are "owned" by individuals, and

individuals are able to shape their own trajectories through their personal characteristics and through purposive political actions for impacting structures. Below we look at the personal side of creative career development, concentrating on talent and the motivation for artwork, the artist's decision to conform to or to challenge the canons of traditional art worlds, and his role versatility.

Talent and motivation

It is a general belief among participants in artwork production and in society at large that “the making of art requires special talents, gifts, or abilities which few have” (Becker, 1982: 14). For a succinct expression of this idea, Becker quotes Stoppard (1975: 38): “An artist is someone who is gifted in some way that enables him to do something more or less well which can only be done badly or not at all by someone who is not thus gifted”. It is important to know who the gifted people are, Becker continues, because they enjoy special privileges and rights that allow them to violate rules and regulations.

We find that talent is a pre-condition for a successful trajectory in the arts, although in practice talent may or may not be developed and find expression for personal or contextual reasons. In our study we focus on highly talented film directors, taking talent as a necessary but not a sufficient condition for a successful film career. Talent has to be accompanied by strong motivation to accomplish things, and in particular to create. Understanding one's own motives and interest in pursuing a particular career is a competence that DeFillippi and Arthur (1994) call “knowing why”.

According to Menger (1999), the “labour of love” argument and the effect of “inner drive” as a foremost criterion of professionalism are part of the rationale for occupational choice. These arguments are in line with the intrinsic motivation principle (Amabile, 1997), which denotes the passion for the work itself and encompasses the motivation to work on something “because it is interesting, involving, exciting, satisfying, or personally challenging”. Film is a demanding career which requires commitment and passion (Jones, 1996). This can be illustrated with the words of the film director Sydney Lumet: “Every picture I did was an active, believable, passionate wish” (Jones and DeFillippi, 1996: 93).

DeFillippi and Arthur (1999) find that one of the drivers for nesting career trajectories in one's own film company is the autonomous entrepreneurial impulse in the owners of scarce and valuable human capital. Menger (1999) also sustains that parallels could be drawn between the careers of self-employed artists and those of entrepreneurs. Common attributes, he claims, are “the capacity to create valued output through the production of works for sale, ... a strong sense of personal achievement through the production of tangible outputs, the ability to set their own pace”.

Another impetus for self-employed careers could be the value people place on the “sense of control”, which is the basis for actors' inferences of generalised freedom and control (Lawler, 1992: 331). As DeFillippi and Arthur (1999) argue, “independent film companies arose in part because successful film actors... sought more creative freedom and ownership rights to the fruits of their artistic labour”. In a comparison between Hollywood and European film making, however, Estevez (1994) affirms that European directors are much more inclined, and much better able, to exercise tight control over the production process than their North American colleagues. Thus, while in the U.S. the producer assumes the whole responsibility for production, in Europe film directors have great autonomy and retain considerable control in each phase of film production.

Artistic choice: maverick or integrated professional

Creative people can act in a great variety of ways in order to gain control over their careers. They may choose to conform to the conventions of existing art worlds, or they may choose to create their own support nuclei through which to renew the canons of acceptable practice. In this sense, Becker (1982) proposes an illuminating distinction in the way artists relate to art worlds. Part of this distinction is between mavericks and integrated professionals. Integrated professionals are seen as competent but uninspired workers (Becker, 1982: 232), conforming to the conventions of existing art worlds, while mavericks find these conventional worlds, to which they once belonged, unacceptably constraining.

Mavericks usually propose innovations that are unacceptable to conventional art worlds. As Becker suggests, mavericks may have to create their own organisations to replace those that do not accept them and/or will not work with them. Hence, in reaction to the structural constraints we already mentioned, mavericks create their own groups of collaborators which are not restrained by conventions and which allow free expression of their creative vision. This is in line with the arguments of Alvarez (forthcoming), who portrays managers as being capable of shaping their own trajectories by influencing structures.

Our main case study concerns a maverick film director, Pedro Almodóvar, who owns a production company and has ego-centred art worlds of support which house and service his innovative ideas and artistic trajectory. In his comprehensive book *The Movie Game: The film business in Britain, Europe and America*, Martin Dale lists Pedro Almodóvar among “the few European film-makers who have succeeded in rising above the ‘subsidy trap’ mentality”, and who “are the human face of the industry and prove that however bureaucratic the world becomes, there will always be mavericks who stand out and make their voice heard” (Dale, 1997: xi). Further, Dale comments on the rupture with traditional artistic circles caused by Pedro’s distinctiveness and success, evident in the “considerable jealousy within the Spanish film community – where most film-makers have come up through the state system”. Pedro has been virtually ignored by the national Goya awards, an omission only recently made good with the 7 Goya awards given to his latest film, *All about my mother*.

Role versatility

Creative careers consist not only of purely artistic activities. They require the *role versatility* that Menger (1999) discusses in an insightful paper on artistic labour markets and careers. Menger borrows the term “role versatility” from Nash (1970 [1955]) in order to build his accounts of multiple job holding by creative individuals. The term captures the artist’s need to combine roles, simultaneously and/or successively, in order to preserve agility. It transforms “both the content of co-operative activities and the extent of control over new market resources” and blurs the frontier between individual and collective action (Menger, 1999). Hence, Menger argues that artists are better conceived as small firms drawing on resources and building careers from changing combinations of roles, income sources, work settings, and employment statuses.

Menger suggests a three-way division of the creative person’s working time and earnings, in which multiple jobholders put bids of efforts in response to market uncertainty: the creative activity itself, arts-related work, and non-arts work. The core of this “breakdown” is *the creative activity itself*, which encompasses tasks associated with preparing the artistic product (thinking, dreaming, searching for information, rehearsing and practising).

Basic creative activities may be complemented by *arts-related work* (e.g., teaching activities and management tasks in artistic organisations). Although this type of work lacks any direct or immediate contribution to the artistic output, it still relies on skills and qualifications possessed by professional artists. Although it is not explicitly mentioned by Menger (1999), we consider that creating and maintaining networks of contacts –i.e. the “knowing whom” career competence cited by DeFillippi and Arthur (1994)– would fit here. Through such activities, creative people draw inspiration, gain ideas for new projects, find resources they need for their projects, and promote their works of art and/or themselves (all of these being activities that are also found to be essential for the work of writers, fashion designers, painters, etc.).

Arts-related work is both important and very time-consuming. Further, in some of its expressions, such as business and production aspects, it may require cognitive maps and skills which the creative person does not possess. For example, a creative person is not methodological and systematic, and often seeks to bend or break the rules (Cummings and Oldham, 1997). Lack of systematic treatment and a willingness to break rules may cause problems in the repetitive and routine aspects of deal making and production. In an attempt to identify the qualities possessed by successful managers, Pedler et al. (1986) use terms, such as analytical, problem-solving, decision/judgement-making skills, balanced learning habits and skills, command of basic facts, proactivity (i.e. tendency to respond purposefully to events), which are not necessarily compatible with a creative personality. No doubt, there is also an area of overlap containing features that are relevant for both business and artistic tasks, such as emotional resilience, mental agility, and social skills and abilities (especially in the case of film directors, who create their films through people). Jones (1996), for example, argues that managerial skills are relevant to both the producer and the director roles, since both have to organise, control, and direct resources for the project. Still, this overlap is not sufficient to allow most artists to handle the business side of their artwork production successfully on their own.

However much time and energy these administrative and social activities consume, they are indispensable ingredients for the commercial and artistic success of the creative activity. As we will see further on, one way to reconcile the tension between the importance of these activities and the lack of time and/or cognitive aptitude for performing them is through the support of a partner.

Considering the peculiarities of art work, which demands intimate understanding or acceptance in order for creativity not to be constrained, this partner has to be a very close family member or friend with whom the creative person has a strong, trust-based relationship. In larger-scale artistic activities, one trusted partner may not be enough. Rather, a trust- and affection-based nucleus of collaborators may be required to manage the scope of the artist’s activities.

An additional extension of a creative career may be *non-arts work* (e.g., sales, clerical, or service jobs, or as Menger summarises them, jobs with a history of low pay and poor benefits), which may differ among individuals, among the different arts, and over the individual’s life cycle. The primary function of such non-arts work is to generate income.

Therefore, as we already mentioned, role versatility, in the sense of an interplay among the creative tasks as such and the arts-related work, describes the types of activities we shall focus on in this paper. The creative people we shall be studying are film directors who have their own production firms, and in most cases write the scripts of their films. Hence, for us, directing is “the creative activity itself”, while the absorption of script writing and the producer’s tasks is considered to fall into the category of arts-related work.

One example of a study on role versatility in the film industry is that of Baker and Faulkner (1991). In it the authors explore the benefits different combinatorial patterns of artistic (scriptwriter and director) and business (producer) roles bring to their performers. Thus, role is a resource through which one can bargain for and gain membership in a given social community, such as the community of writers, directors, or producers. Apart from the identity claim, the role may secure access to a variety of important cultural, social, or material resources for film making. The scriptwriter role may provide a guarantee of cultural capital (claim of authorship over the script, use and manipulation of artistic symbols) that is not available to the film producer. The producer role, if recognised by the professional community, may provide social capital in the form of access to the social networks associated with deal making, film production, and distribution, which are inaccessible to the artistic subsystem.

By in one way or another combining artistic and business roles, professionals secure the resources they find indispensable for performing their creative and/or production tasks. These combinations may be prompted by the need to solve technical and organisational problems (i.e., through adaptation), or they may be considered to have brought box-office success to other projects and so become sources of legitimacy and influence in the creative communities (i.e., through imitation).

Hyphenated titles such as “director-scriptwriter” are becoming increasingly common in Hollywood, reflecting a wish to safeguard artistic independence and intellectual property. Combining the roles of director and producer in a single person on a permanent basis, however, is in decline, due to the impossibility of one person coping with these tasks in big budget films (Baker & Faulkner, 1991). In European film industries, in contrast, in which film budgets are much more modest, there are many examples of artistic-business role mergers that can be instructive for research into careers.

The singular feature of such mergers, however, is that in most cases it is not a question of one person performing both creative and production tasks. Rather, the creative person binds her trajectory to that of a very close relative or friend who knows, understands, and is ready to attend to her need for expression and her talent. For instance, both of Spain’s most successful, internationally acclaimed film directors, Pedro Almodóvar and Fernando Trueba, work along these lines. For Pedro, it is his younger brother, Agustín, who takes charge of production, while for Fernando Trueba it is his wife, Cristina Huete, who performs the role of executive producer. In this paper we wish to highlight the artistic and commercial benefits of an unusual type of career which we call a “symbiotic career”. Symbiosis means living together, and is often restricted to the idea of mutual benefit. At the beginning of this paper we illustrated the concept with the mutualism of an alga and a fungus: the alga provides *food* for the fungus, and “in return” receives *protection*, while together they grow to form a lichen.

In our case the symbiosis is between the career of the artist and that of his trusted partner, who together follow a joint trajectory (with an identity of its own), which is nested in their own production company. The trusted person gets creative inputs (“*food*”) from the artist, which he then produces, while the artist gains complete support for his creative expression (“*protection*”). Thus, a symbiotic career is a compound of the creative career trajectory and the trajectory of the close family member or friend who fully supports the business and production side of the art creation.

Since such symbiotic careers usually unfold through the identity of a production company formed by the artist and his trustee, it may be useful to take a closer look at such organisations and the way they become a means for enhancing creativity.

Production companies as self-created opportunity structures for creativity

As Menger (1999) affirms, “creative artists operating as independent freelancing workers may themselves be seen as small firms building subcontractual relations with artistic organisations”. In this paper we not only see film directors this way, but also focus specifically on those who actually create such organizations. We follow Becker (1982) in affirming that creative professionals create their own structures to serve the singular demands of their highly distinctive artistic vision and to buffer their creativity from the conventions of traditional art worlds.

In the previous section we focused on factors that impact on creative careers. Each factor forms part of the rationale for film directors to set up their own production companies. We highlighted the impact of labour market uncertainty, the restrictive influence that traditional social and economic formations (e.g., production companies) exercise on creative action. We also argued that de-coupling from these constraining structures should be followed by embedding the creative activity in a self-created structure, founded on strong affective and trust-based relations.

In the following section we explore how these self-created organisations protect and boost creativity, combining the advantages of de-coupling (securing continuously “fresh action”) with those of embeddedness (continuity and control of the artistic identity). We concentrate on two crucial and interwoven mechanisms that improve the artistic and commercial performance of works of art: first, role versatility and control through trust-based ties, and second, the creation of art worlds. Both mechanisms rely on expressive ties that are at the same time instrumental. That is, the trust-based relations are used both for the performance of the business and production tasks necessary for the artwork, and for the assembly and renewal of artist-centred art worlds across nested levels. Below we consider each of these mechanisms separately and, where appropriate, their interrelations.

Role versatility and control through trust-based ties

Creators resist external attempts to control their behaviour, claims Amabile (1996), and she illustrates the claim with comments by Woody Allen. Allen reports that he gets more enjoyment from being a writer or stand-up comedian than from being a filmmaker, where he is not in complete control of the outcome. In this sense, we can see the creation of production entities by film directors as an attempt to reduce the external influence on the artistic outcome by internalising an important part of the control over the output.

However, artistic work requires complete dedication or, in the words of Charles Dickens, “[W]ho ever is devoted to art must be content to deliver himself wholly up to it” (Amabile, 1996: 8). To reconcile this tension between the drive for internal control over the artistic outcome by owning the production entity, and the need to devote oneself full-time to the task of creation, the artist needs the support of a trusted partner to carry out business-related activities.

If we look at the production undertakings of successful film directors, in many cases they rely heavily on close, stable, affective, and binding relationships. These are expressive network relationships, in which the strength of the tie is a function of “the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and reciprocal service that characterize the tie” (Ibarra, 1993). Such relationships, as Ibarra affirms, are both instrumental and expressive, and serve as “systems for making decisions, mobilising

resources, concealing or transmitting information, and performing other functions closely allied with work behavior and interaction”.

As we already argued, a trustee (expressive tie) performs the business and production activities in film making (instrumental tie). Thus, he provides support in the role versatility set the film director needs for the successful unbinding of his creativity. The film director can devote all his energy to the core artistic activity of directing, and to art-related activities such as scriptwriting and/or music writing and art directing, among others, because he has “outsourced” other indispensable chunks of the role versatility set to his partner(s). The partner takes care of the deal making and production activities as well as building and maintaining networks of ties which do not require the personal involvement of the film director.

To sum up, expressive ties that are at the same time instrumental allow the film director to internalise a greater part of the control of the artistic outcome. Further, they help him to reduce his exposure to the uncertainty of the dual matching in the artistic labour markets, and to broaden the scope of art-related activities in his role versatility set.

Cutting art worlds across nested levels

We already argued for the embeddedness of creative careers in networks of collaboration – what Becker (1982) called art worlds. In discussing the network perspective on the study of organisations, Perrow (1986) affirms that each network can be placed (nested) in a larger and more complex one, and that in order to improve understanding we should look at levels above and below the one chosen for a study. Thus, actors can be seen as members of nested collectivities, one encompassed within the other, which constitute differential comparisons and identities for these individuals (Lawler, 1992).

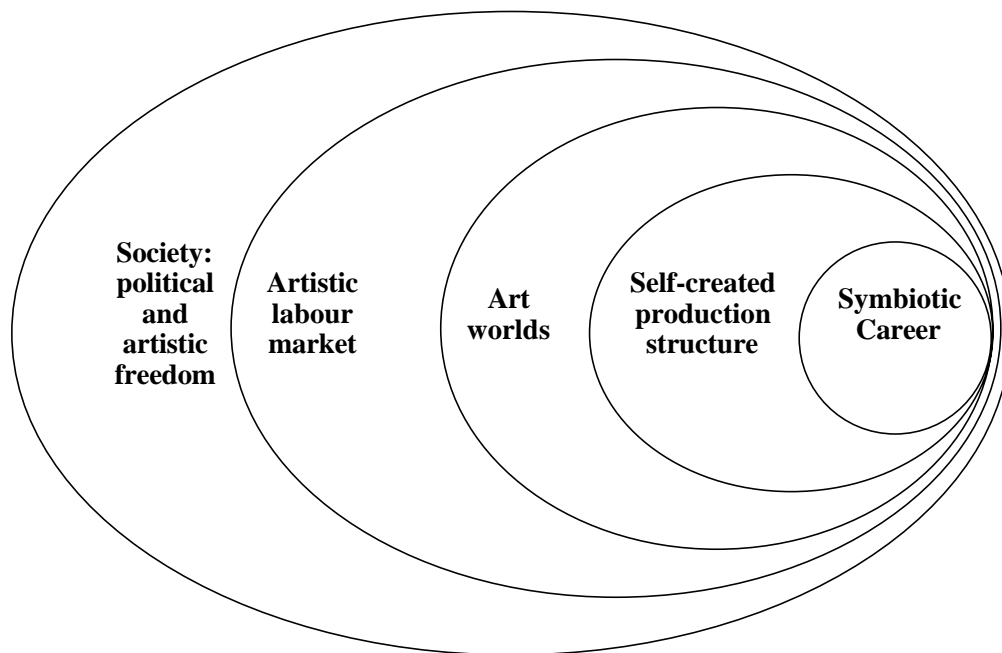
White (1992) also sustains that careers induce multiple possible identities, each of which is identifiable through roles embedded in distinct networks. We will try to translate the complex language of White into terms that are appropriate for the case we are studying. Thus, each role a film director performs induces a different identity and draws from a different network. The role of directing the film presupposes the creation and maintenance of art worlds of actors, cinematographers, composers, decorators, etc. A scriptwriter needs a large network of non-redundant contacts in order to collect novel ideas and experiences. And deal-making and production, which in our case is a role performed by the other, non-creative half of the symbiotic career, calls for a completely different group of collaborators, and a different mindset.

By creating their own production companies, film directors bring the control over all these art worlds under one roof and subordinate them to their creativity either through personal involvement or through the efforts of the trusted person or nucleus.

These networks that in turn induce different identities are cut across nested levels, in which the career trajectories are inscribed. The nested sequence of creative careers in the case of film directors with their own production companies is shown in Figure 1. According to this figure, the career trajectory is “cushioned” in the self-created production firm to avoid the uncertainty of the artistic labour markets. This buffer zone is embedded in art worlds, in Becker’s sense, which represent networks of collaborative efforts for the completion of a given art project. The artistic choice to be a maverick or an integrated professional will largely determine which art worlds the director moves in and works with: purposefully assembled, in the first case, or traditionally present, in the second. While the buffer is made

of strong ties and is maintained largely through trust-based relations, the art world is rather loosely coupled and is responsible for generating and realising creative ideas. The multiplicity of art worlds that a film director may assemble is then nested in the artistic labour market, which exposes all its players to uncertainty. Further, in order for these actors to produce artistic output, the market must be part of a societal layer in which political and artistic freedoms are dominant values.

Figure 1 Social nesting of a creative career trajectory



The nesting argument allows us to fine-grain levels of contextualisation of careers and to travel back and forth among them in order to conceptualise creative trajectories. On the one hand, it allows us to visualise the film director’s need to insulate himself from market uncertainty through self-created structures. On the other hand, however, through the blurred boundaries of the art worlds, the director may generate novel ideas, develop them into a finished product, and even fulfil information and service needs by “extending” a hand to the artistic labour market. Hence, we subscribe to Becker’s (1982) view that the creative person alone (the film director in our case) cannot bring his vision to life without the co-operation of a network that understands and shares this vision. Setting up one’s own production company may be seen as a means to create and maintain such art worlds.

Hence, the paradox is that, on the one hand, the artist has to protect his creativity from the constraints of social structures, and on the other, he has to have his own network of collaborators in order to produce his artwork. The move from a single to a symbiotic career, placed in the context of the director’s own production organisation, can be seen as a way to reconcile this paradox.

Propositions

Focusing on the puzzle of binding creative and business tasks in a single symbiotic career carried out by two people for the purpose of unbinding creativity, and building on inputs from the literature on careers, we make the following propositions:

Proposition 1:

The artist may set up his own production organisation to have more control over his artwork and to reduce social constraints on creativity, and to be able to assemble and renew his own art worlds.

Proposition 2:

Since the production organisation encompasses both artistic and business activities, which require different cognitive maps and abilities, the artist is unlikely to be able to perform all these activities on his own.

Proposition 3:

To handle the business and production aspects of artwork in a creativity-enhancing way, the artist needs a trusted person who will subordinate his own trajectory to that of the artist.

Proposition 4:

The artist unbinds his creativity by binding the career of the trusted person to his own creative trajectory in a symbiotic way.

Methodological issues

Our purpose in this paper is to deepen the account of creative careers by exploring an underdeveloped topic in the literature. We look at how the creative person may substitute an entrepreneurial undertaking for the dual –business and art– matching of the artistic labour markets. This entrepreneurial undertaking works by binding together two careers –that of the artist and that of a person he trusts – into a single symbiotic trajectory for the purpose of performing two essentially different tasks, that of art and that of business.

It is beyond the scope of this paper, however, to look at the whole population of such cases. Leveraging on DeFillippi and Arthur's (1999) assertion that the genesis of independent film companies is based on the autonomous entrepreneurial impulse of the owners of scarce and valuable human capital, we concentrate our study on renowned Spanish film directors. Hence, in terms of Bourdieu's social space, we move in the zone of overlap between the commercial and non-commercial segments, concentrating on the core, rather than on the periphery, of that zone (Anheier et al., 1995).

Our decision to limit the phenomenon under study to highly reputed film directors with their own production companies is motivated by the fact that such directors encompass both artistic and commercial merits in Spain and abroad, unlike the entire film making industry in Spain in which they are contextually bound. Such directors, who are successful in both creative and business domains simultaneously, are more likely to provide clues about the successful interface between art and business, at least in the first stage of the research project to which this paper belongs.

While, for the directors we are studying, the pursuit of economic success is secondary to the drive for continuous artistic expression (which means they belong to Bourdieu's restricted cultural production segment), they do also bring their artwork to the market in search of financial returns and long-term survival (which means they also fit in the large-scale cultural production segment). This is another peculiarity of the cases we are focusing on – commercial success is not an end in itself but an outgrowth of a singular style and artistic approach.

The data for our arguments come from several sources. First, interviews were conducted with highly regarded Spanish film directors and/or the trusted collaborators with whom they have founded their own production companies (see Appendix 1 for a list of interviews). Second, open-ended interviews were conducted with representatives of relevant institutions, such as the ICAA (Cinematographic Institute for Audio-Visual Arts, a body supervised by the Ministry of Culture), in order to obtain their view on the phenomenon and gain access to secondary data in public archives. We supplemented these interviews with industry analyses and institutional policy documents.

We also used secondary data such as professional biographies of Spanish film directors and interviews in the media with film directors and members of their art worlds. Interviews with film critics and historians, and film reviews in the press, also helped us to understand the peculiarities of the contexts in which the creative trajectories were situated.

In this paper we zero in on a single case, that of the symbiotic career of the Almodóvar brothers. Wherever possible, we make comparisons with other similar cases. We examine the Almodóvar case in depth through our theoretical lenses in order to test the soundness of our propositions. We then proceed to mark the limitations of the study and point out avenues for future research.

Symbiotic careers in movie making: Pedro and Agustín Almodóvar

We shall illustrate the theoretical framework and propositions presented above with the case of the highly acclaimed Spanish film director Pedro Almodóvar, who together with his brother Agustín has a production company, El Deseo. In this company Pedro devotes all his energy to the creative side of film making, while his brother Agustín is entirely committed to production-related activities.

Setting up an own production company

The brothers Pedro and Agustín have worked as a team since the 1970s – Pedro as the public face, Agustín as the man behind the scenes (Dale, 1997: 283). They registered their production company on June 14, 1985, under the name El Deseo (“Desire”), taken from the

working title of the movie Pedro was already planning, *La Ley del Deseo* (“The Law of Desire”). The brothers registered the company during a break in the filming of *Matador*, which was produced by a company owned by a very famous and influential Spanish producer, Andrés Vicente Gómez, “one of the leading forces in Spanish cinema” (Dale, 1997: 278). By that time Pedro had already demonstrated his gift for “telling stories” and his enormous inner drive to express his internal and external world in a string of five feature films.

Agustín Almodóvar commented that one of the factors that induced them to set up their company at that time was the inappropriate treatment of artistic professionals (namely, the scriptwriter and director) by the production companies (Interviews, 24.11.1999; 01.12.1999). This demonstrates what Baker and Faulkner (1991) call the intrinsic dilemma of commercial versus artistic interests. Interested mainly in cost savings and strong financial discipline and aware that they can easily “go to the market” for new ideas, producers are far from receptive to the peculiarities of creative work and the expressive needs of film directors. As Paz Sufategui, PR officer of El Deseo, explained:

“Pedro had already worked with different producers. And, in practice, these producers are remote from the artist. They produce other films at the same time with other directors... I think that Pedro started from the idea of working with complete freedom, with somebody who was going to understand him intimately, from the essence, from the first idea of a film, and, quite simply, that was why he founded El Deseo – to be able to work with the absolute freedom he needs” (Interview, 24.11.1999).

Similarly, Ventura Pons, another internationally recognised Spanish film director with his own production company, acknowledged in an interview that setting up his own production company was a way of gaining independence. He founded his production company almost at the same time as Pedro Almodóvar, in the mid-1980s. He commented that “[t]he production companies were not much help. So, I preferred to do it more slowly but on my own than to have it done badly by others” (Interview, 22.12.1999).

The dissatisfaction with the production companies is not only due to their constraining effect on creativity. Institutional context plays a critical role in Spain. Some legislative measures reduce value creating potential in a key area of producers’ competence, that of securing film financing. In the words of Agustín, “[w]e saw that all producers did to raise finance was ask for subsidies and TV money, so we decided to strike out on our own” (Dale, 1997: 283). The subsidy policy of the Socialist party governing Spain in the early 1980s promoted independent creative projects, advancing money for film production on submission of script and budget. Since scriptwriting is beyond the scope of the production companies and belongs to the creative subsystem, the subsidies gave directors –who are closer to the scriptwriting function, and in some cases write the scripts themselves– an incentive to set up their own production companies. The wave of new production companies set up by film directors contributed to the atomisation and weakening of the production sector. However, the mortality rate among these new firms was high. Most of them died once the subsidised project, i.e. a particular movie, was completed.

We focus on the film production company of the Almodóvar brothers not only because it has produced a steady succession of films, but also because most of its productions have achieved artistic and commercial success, both in Spain and all over the world.

Trusted partner for a symbiotic career

The activities of a production company are associated with both artistic and business tasks. As Paz explained, “Pedro is definitely not a businessman. He does not perform any kind of business tasks, neither is he interested in such issues” (Interview, 24.11.1999). And yet deal making and production issues are indispensable if a director is to produce his own films and express his artistic vision. Having no interest in business issues but wanting to control them in the interests of his creativity, Pedro Almodóvar relies on his younger brother Agustín, who abandoned his career in chemistry to devote all his time and energy to their production company.

In the terms of our theoretical framework, Pedro found the other half of his “symbiotic career”. Agustín made this symbiosis very clear:

“The company is a common project in which there is no hierarchy but a division of tasks, with Pedro performing 100% of the creative tasks. I protect him and he protects me” (Interview, 01.12.1999).

The symbiosis of these two career paths gives Pedro the freedom he needs to carry out the projects he wants without restrictions. To Agustín, as he himself acknowledged, it offers a much more exciting and rewarding trajectory than that of a chemistry teacher (Interview, 01.12.1999). He became the executive producer and director of the company and took charge of deal making and production, initially on his own and later with the support of a loyal and dedicated team. On receiving the 56th Annual Golden Globe Award for Best Foreign Language Film for his latest film *All about my mother*, Pedro expressed his gratitude to his brother Agustín, the producer of his films, for “doing the dirty part of this business” (Xaxás, 2000: 31).

According to Agustín, his reason for “subordinating” his career to that of his brother is the satisfaction of seeing “how an artist develops his personal trajectory; the happiness and coherence of the career of a gifted person” (Interview, 01.12.1999). An indispensable condition for such complete dedication, he added, is his relationship with Pedro, based on fidelity, affection, and fraternity, and ultimately his “love for Pedro”. Agustín followed Pedro to Madrid, and Pedro introduced him to the cultural and social worlds of the Spanish capital. This strengthens their relationship and allows Agustín to observe more closely and even participate in the creative worlds his brother moves in.

As Agustín remarked (Interview, 01.12.1999), another ingredient for his successful immersion in the producer role was the fact of having been involved in earlier projects of his brother as a “runner”, i.e. as the person who delivers coffee or work materials to the crew members. However low in the production hierarchy, this role was an excellent opportunity to learn by watching the “complex, chaotic interconnections among specialised film crew activities” (DeFillippi and Arthur, 1998: 132). And the analytical abilities he had developed as a graduate in chemistry helped him to quickly capture the intricacies of film production.

However strong Pedro’s relationship with his brother, an artist has to look further afield to assemble and maintain his own art worlds. A recent article in the newspaper *La Vanguardia* explains that “Almodóvar has his own family groups, his nuclei of affection and communication. One such nucleus consists precisely of the people who work with him on a daily basis. They are the ones known as ‘The Almodóvar Factory’, the members of his production company *El Deseo*” (Francia, 2000: 33). The article continues with Pedro’s own reflections on the importance of this team for his work:

“They’re my second family, or they’ve already become my natural family, combined with the biological one. I have to admit that in this respect my brother and I have been lucky. It’s a small team but one that has really made the company its own family. It may sound very conventional, but I believe we’ve been very lucky in that respect, and we’re happy to have Paz, Lola, Esther, Michel...because *El Deseo* is part of them”. (Francia, 2000: 33)

As these words indicate, the strong affective and trust-based relationship between the two brothers stretches out beyond the biological family to include the members of the production team. The way the two brothers select the members of their team is critical to an understanding of how *El Deseo* sets itself apart. Initially, the company consisted of the two brothers and had no internal infrastructure to support the projects. In Agustín’s words (Interview, 01.12.1999), their office was the sports bag in which they carried the company’s paperwork and their film projects, and if necessary even film-making equipment. All the necessary professionals were “brought in” for each project and let go on project completion, since at that time the company could not afford to have them as permanent employees.

Through interaction in several consecutive projects, however, the two brothers established close affective and increasingly trust-based personal relations with some of these people. Step-by-step, or rather project-by-project, they got to know them really well and so drew them into the company when the financial situation allowed for the creation of a support team. Agustín summed up his organisation building strategy as follows:

“I find a person and then I create the position for her” (Interview, 01.12.1999).

This is how Esther García, the production director, entered the orbit of the Almodóvar brothers. The brothers first met her in the mid-eighties during work on the movie *Matador*. At that time, she was an assistant producer, an “agent” of the “principal”, the film producer Andrés Vicente Gómez. Despite her role as a member of this “external” production team, Agustín recollected (Interview, 01.12.1999) that she voiced dissatisfaction with the way the producers ignored Pedro’s creative needs. When the Almodóvar brothers started their own production company, Esther was employed in several of the films on a project basis, because at that time the company’s finances and scope of activities made it impossible for her to be taken on permanently. Eventually, she became a member of the core team and Agustín’s “right hand woman”.

The story of how Paz Sufategui, the press director, came to join the company is very similar. The Almodóvar brothers met and got to know her through Lauren Films, the largest Spanish-owned distributor of independent movies (it distributes Woody Allen’s films among others), where she was employed at that time. Lauren Films co-produced and distributed two of Almodóvar’s projects –*La ley del deseo* (“*The Law of Desire*”) and *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios* (“*Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*”). Pedro and Agustín discovered that Paz had the right personality to handle the complicated issues of promotion and PR. Even when turning down requests for Pedro’s time, she can make people feel good, and that is a highly valued ability in the business. As Agustín put it, “She’s well liked by even the harshest critics from the press, even when she’s denying them access to certain information or to Pedro” (Interview, 01.12.1999).

Thus, following the principle of “finding the right job for the right person”, Agustín and Pedro gradually built up their core team in the form of a tightly-knit “family”. The team was united by love and respect for Pedro’s talent, and was eager to do whatever had to be done to create the conditions for success in his personal trajectory. Or, in Agustín’s words, to

do whatever had to be done “to secure happiness and coherence in the career of a genius, Pedro” (Interview, 01.12.1999).

Role versatility and control

The film directors we interviewed claimed to be driven by enjoyment of their work (Menger’s “labour of love” argument). Ventura Pons assured us that “happiness is in the work” and that “making films... gives me pleasure” (Interview, 22.12.1999). Another acclaimed Spanish film director with an Oscar to his credit, Fernando Trueba, who owns a production company together with his wife and executive producer, Cristina Huete, explains the role versatility issue in terms of an inner drive. Asked about the reasons for his multi-faceted approach to movies as film critic, scriptwriter, film director, producer, etc., he replies:

“It’s like when you fall in love with a woman. You approach her from different sides: you give her flowers, you talk to her friends, you try to make a good impression on her mother... Similarly, if you love movies, you approach them from all possible angles...[Y]ou embark upon various different ventures because all of them revolve around what you love most”. (Herebero, 1999)

Pedro also combines artistic work with art-related roles and non-art work, in Menger’s (1999) sense. His core activity is directing films, but in a related artistic vein he also gets involved in film projects as a scriptwriter, sometimes as art director, and in some cases even as an actor. He also builds and maintains relationships, his art worlds, from which he gets artistic –and in the early stages of his career even financial– support, as well as constant inspiration for his movies.

The non-art domain is present in the early stages of Pedro’s career. When he first came to Madrid, he took a variety of casual jobs. The printed edition of the script of his latest film *All about my mother* (Almodóvar, 1999) reveals that he bought his first Super 8 camera only after getting a “serious” job as a clerk for the telephone company Telefónica, which he kept for 12 years. During that period he not only earned money that he could use to realise his creative ideas, but also had the opportunity to observe the Spanish middle class in the early days of consumerism, with all its dramas and pettiness. In this pre-professional period he devoted himself wholeheartedly not only to living life to the full, but also to a whole range of artistic activities such as writing, acting, Super 8 filmmaking, singing in a spoof punk-rock band, and writing for underground magazines. The screening of his first commercial feature film on 16mm coincided with the arrival of democracy in Spain.

As he himself admits, despite his hatred of political dictatorships, Pedro is and always will be a “professional” oppressor behind the camera:

“When I direct, I’m a real dictator. I don’t give my actors any freedom”. (Fresneda, 2000)

Curiously enough, his “dictatorship” extends to other areas of his film projects, and he “controls everything to do with his films: music, sets, lighting, costumes...” (Holguín, 1994). A famous Spanish director of photography, Alfredo Mayo, who has worked with Pedro on several projects, explains:

“Pedro always tends to control everything, and with each new film he becomes more oppressive. It’s not that he shuts his mind to any suggestions people make, but... [i]t’s not enough to explain to him what a scene is going to look like on the screen, he has to see *exactly* what it’s going to look like....[W]hen he has a whim or falls in love with something, he fights and pursues it with insistence”. (Heredero, 1994: 459)

Mayo also throws some light on the way Pedro works with actors: “What he does is first interpret and act out the scene himself, so that the actors can then imitate what he does... He puts a lot of pressure on them...” (Heredero, 1994: 460).

The so-called “Almodóvar girls” (“*chicas Almodóvar*”, a term coined by the press to denominate the flock of female actresses who have worked with him and belong to his art worlds) give a wider range of opinions on Pedro’s style of directing. For example, Cecilia Roth, who appeared in his early films and was recently rediscovered as the main character of his latest film *All about my mother*, declares that her experience in this latter movie was that Pedro was present at every moment, observing everything, loving everything, defending everything (Almodóvar, 1999). Other actresses who worked in *All about my mother* describe working with him as “magnificent”, a “feast”, or “an opportunity to witness and experience the work of a brilliant (and expert) director”, and declare that “[s]eeing how a genius works and creates is one of the most dazzling experiences you can have in life” (Almodóvar, 1999).

The tightness of control is well expressed by one of the actresses in his latest film who affirms that “[n]othing, absolutely nothing is decided until HE decides it” (Almodóvar, 1999). Such tight control may erode ties among professionals who need a degree of independence in performing their task. But it is a tool in the service of the artistic vision of a very gifted person and the integrity of his creative identity. Or, as Paz concludes, in such cases “[t]he freedom of the team... lies in understanding the directions of the person who is in control of the story. It’s about understanding him and making his ideas possible” (Interview, 24.11.1999).

In relation to this tight artistic control over the film project, an interesting issue is the extent to which such control hampers innovation. Asked whether Pedro plans the filming in detail and then follows the plan, or rather improvises as he goes along, Alfredo Mayo replies:

“It depends. He [Pedro] says he lives his films very intensely. In fact, he lives them so intensely that, depending on how he has slept or what’s worrying him that particular day, he starts to invent things or to change everything. It’s true that he always rethinks the film in his head and, though sometimes the filming is very well prepared and the details have been worked out with almost manic precision, he also improvises a lot and always incorporates new ideas”. (Heredero, 1994)

This kind of improvisation is only possible because it is Pedro’s company and team that carry out the production. If this were not the case, budget and time constraints would leave no scope for sweeping changes, however well justified artistically. This demonstrates the freedom a director has if the technical and financial needs of his artwork are serviced by people committed to his artistic mission. Thanks to this trust-based nucleus’s unconditional acceptance of the artistic vision, the artist does not need to waste energy negotiating the changes he wants to make to his artwork.

Role versatility and control are taken to an extreme by Ventura Pons, who handles both the business and the artistic sides of his film projects himself, besides being Vice

President of the Spanish Academy of Cinematographic Arts and Sciences. Asked why he does not “outsource” the production tasks to somebody he trusts, he replies that it is not merely that he does not have a close relative, in the way that Pedro has Agustín. It is mainly, he says, because “I do not want to lose control. Everything [in film making] is very important” (Interview, 22.12.1999).

Another singular feature of Ventura Pons is his ability to “de-couple” his role as producer from his role as film director. Thus, when directing a film, he sticks to the budget and schedule he himself has established as executive producer. He also has different styles in art and in business. For deal making he needs to socialise and keep strict accounts, while for scriptwriting he needs imagination and isolation, so he does it mainly at night. Such full role consolidation, in Baker and Faulkner’s (1991) sense, is possible thanks to Ventura Pons’ choice to work with a small budget and at a certain pace. He enjoys what he does and wants to stay small, but in control of all the important details (Interview, 22.12.1999).

To sum up, the more creative the artist, the more he wants to control the process of producing his artwork, and the more he needs to bind his own trajectory to that of a trusted partner who can take care of the production side of his creative needs. Hence, maverick film directors unbind their creativity by binding themselves to a nucleus of support, through which they assemble their own art worlds, taking the place of traditional networks.

Assembling and renewing art worlds

Film projects require the collaboration and participation of a large number and variety of professionals at all stages of development, filming, and post-production. The co-operation of organisations that are part of the story or that provide vital materials, etc. is also needed. That is why the list of credits in Pedro’s latest film *All about my mother* contains a huge number of companies that were involved in one way or another. The natural question is how such a large network of collaborators is built up and interwoven in the film project. Further, it is not only a question of making the film but also of providing distribution and promotion, and satisfying the interest Pedro awakens in the media and in other institutions and organisations.

Paz compares El Deseo to a multinational company in terms of the scope of its activities:

“In many ways we are almost a multinational company. Everything is coordinated from here... We monitor every premiere, every event related to our films. Furthermore, all the myriad activities that take place because of Pedro and his work are served from here. Pedro arouses enormous international interest in every way you can imagine – from invitations to book launches or inaugural ceremonies for educational courses, to requests to serve on the jury of beauty contests or to direct an opera. It all comes through us. As a public figure, Pedro generates a lot of work: it takes time and effort just to say ‘no’ to them. But we aim to respond to all requests, whatever the actual response, because we believe we should be a production company that stands out precisely for its attitude to people and relationships” (Interview, 24.11.1999).

This shows the need for art worlds, in Becker’s sense, for artwork production, and the role of the production company in creating and maintaining relations for current and possible future projects. Pedro’s time is highly valued by his team, and each team

member has his or her own field of contacts to look after to ensure that Pedro is free to devote himself fully to the creative side of film making.

Thus, Agustín is in charge of deal making, establishing and nourishing ties with production companies or other bodies for financing the films. The strong, trust-based relationship is extended to these inter-organisational relations, and the company works with its partners through a “key-man clause”. As Agustín explains (Interview, 01.12.1999), whenever they deal with a particular company, whether for distribution or for promotion, they do so through a specific person, and the departure of that person signifies the end of the contractual relationship. This is a very strong restriction that may lead to losing a client, but it guarantees the necessary trust and differential service beyond what ordinary films will get. As Agustín put it, “I am interested in the person, not in a box in an organization chart”. In his view, this can be attributed to the world they come from – a modest village family, a visceral world in which personal relations and trust are very important (Interview, 01.12.1999).

Michel, another member of the team, handles international relations and travels with Pedro to festivals and ceremonies. Paz has the difficult task of dealing with the enormous interest of the press and the other media in Pedro and his work, maintaining close relations despite occasional refusals to grant their requests. Esther takes care of relations with companies for production purposes, while her sister Lola is in charge of the more personal side of Pedro’s activities.

Thus, by having trusted and dedicated helpers to look after the many different networks that film production requires, Pedro keeps control over these networks and enjoys the legitimacy and resources they may offer. He also saves energy and time to concentrate on the creative core of film making.

However, even with the support of his brother, his team, and the “key men” in partnering companies, Pedro cannot devote himself entirely to inventing and directing films. That is due both to the nature of artwork, and to the peculiarity of Pedro’s style. First, by its very nature, creative work in film making requires spending time on other activities that feed the creative impulse. In the words of Fernando Trueba, people who want to be film directors “have to live as much as possible, read all they can, and see a lot of movies” (Heredero, 1999).

Apart from looking for fresh ideas, Pedro has to take part in promotional activities and award ceremonies to help build his and his films’ image both in Spain and abroad. Recently, his film *All about my mother* generated a huge favourable response from critics and audiences, bringing him a spectacular number of awards, sometimes more than one a day (Francia, 2000), and improving his prospects of an Oscar nomination, or even an Oscar. In several interviews in the press, Pedro has admitted that such activities are exhausting, but even so he is ready to devote himself wholeheartedly to the task if that is an indispensable step towards an Oscar. The following paragraph gives us an idea of the impact such undoubtedly art-related activities have on the director’s core artistic activities:

“These are very, very intensive days and weeks in America, and all this kind of activity leaves me feeling empty and slightly depressed. I need to stay in touch with other new projects, and on the planes and in the hotels I intend to keep working on a new story I have in mind. But I can never find enough time, and that ends up frustrating me. Nothing alienates you more or leaves you with a worse taste in your mouth than this intense social life. At least, I find it difficult to cope with when I have an overdose of it. I’m bound to get a hangover, and then I’ll have to withdraw to my house and try to recover”. (Francia, 2000)

So, it turns out that even with one's own production company as a buffer, there are certain activities that cannot be "outsourced" to trusted others and have to be performed by the director himself in order to enhance the diffusion and legitimacy of his artwork, though sometimes at the expense of his creative impulses.

Conclusions

In this paper we seek to further the understanding of an underexplored topic in the literature on careers, that of symbiotic careers embedded in self-created opportunity structures, such as production companies. We explore the reasons why directors set up their own company, and the mechanisms through which these independent structures allow outstanding artistic and commercial performance.

The framework we propose for addressing these issues is illustrated by a single in-depth case – that of the internationally-recognised Spanish film director Pedro Almodóvar, who has his own production structure, shared with his brother Agustín. This case is compared with those of two other film directors, Oscar-winning Fernando Trueba and Ventura Pons. While we cannot generalise about the entire population of Spanish film directors with their own production companies, we can gain insights into the ingredients of a successful creative trajectory, indivisibly intertwined with that of a trusted partner.

Extra caution is required in interpreting the results owing to the fact that our main sample is an internationally renowned film director. In other words, we focus on a "public" figure whose actions and image are constructed by and through the media. Therefore, the reasons an actor gives discursively for acting in the way he does may diverge from the rationale he employs at the moment of acting (Giddens, 1984: 4). Or, as Weick (1969) affirms, careers are sets of actions interpreted as such ex-post rather than planned as a career ex-ante.

We find that the constraints that existing production structures impose on creativity generate dissatisfaction in talented film directors, who need freedom to express their vision. Still, the decision to start one's own company also depends on the availability of a trusted person, preferably a very close relative, who is totally committed to serving the talent of the creative person. That is to say, for an artist to successfully embed her career trajectory in her own production structure, she may need to have at her entire disposition the career of a trusted partner. In other words, they need to jointly develop a "symbiotic" career.

Once this tight career coupling or symbiotic formation appears, it may not be sufficient, especially if the creative person's artistic and commercial ambitions are large and at odds with the industry. The artist has to build up and nurture a trust- and affection-based nucleus of supporters, which will include her production team; that is, she has to "nest" the symbiotic career in an inspired and dedicated core team.

Each member of this core team will be responsible for creating and maintaining relations of trust and affection (though without the same intensity as the relations between the two halves of the symbiotic career) with people from various different domains that are relevant for film making. This saves the creative person's energy and allows her to concentrate on art creation and self-actualisation, while at the same time controlling a diversity of art worlds.

Even extremely gifted people cannot produce artwork on their own. They need the collaborators they themselves and/or their trusted partner draw into the project, cutting across social layers (i.e., existing ties from the art worlds of previous projects, new ties formed through participation in events or through the artistic labour market, etc.).

The tight affective and trust-based nucleus the film director forms cannot maintain the director's artistic integrity and identity on its own. A further mechanism which he or she may resort to is role versatility, i.e. combining artistic, art-related, and non-art work. Assuming that film directing is the main artistic activity, there are many art-related options left that increase the director's control over the artwork. He may get partly or completely involved in the scriptwriting, or he may take part in public promotional activities to enhance his visibility, professional legitimacy and reputation, and aid the diffusion of his artwork. Ties may be established not only for publicity reasons, but also to satisfy the need for constant self-actualisation and inspiration by discovering new experiences and meeting interesting people.

Taking this into account, it appears that despite creating tightly coupled affective nuclei around her, a film director cannot completely insulate herself from market uncertainty or non-artistic activities. Publicity may squeeze out creative energy but it also builds on reputation and access to novel ideas, people, and possibilities.

An interesting issue for further exploration is when a symbiotic trajectory acquires sufficient critical mass to reach a professional peak. Is the peak achieved through accumulated experience and/or self-actualisation, or through having rich support networks? Further, once a peak is reached, how can one recover the creative energy spent in servicing the peak (in public relations, for instance)? How does one carry on after reaching saturation point? How do the support structures secure the continuation of the artist's career after success?

Another issue that deserves more attention is the sustainability of the symbiotic career. When is such mutualism durable? What ties and bonds are needed to allow the symbiosis to continue? To what extent is the dominance of one of the trajectories over the other beneficial for both parties? What happens to the symbiosis when success arrives, or when international networks (Hollywood film production, for example) replace local ones?

As this study focuses on a particular phenomenon, that of creative career advancement through symbiotic careers, we believe that the analysis can be extended to careers in domains other than that of art. More generally speaking, it may offer insight into entrepreneurial careers embedded in entrepreneur-owned companies in which the entrepreneur's success depends on symbiosis with a trusted partner. The paper can thus be seen as part of a larger effort to restore the belief that by creating and changing structures to suit them to the activities they have in mind, managers can gain ownership of their own career trajectories.

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Appendix 1

List of interviews

- Almodóvar, Agustín (24.11.1999). Executive producer, El Deseo, S.A., Madrid
- Almodóvar, Agustín (01.12.1999). Executive producer, El Deseo, S.A., Madrid
- Armas, Beatriz (de) (29.11.1999). Subdirectora general de Fomento, ICAA, Ministry of Culture, Madrid
- Capparós-Lera, J.M. (20.12.1999). Film critic and historian, director of the Film-History Research Centre, and professor at the University of Barcelona
- Masclans, Angels (03.03.1999). Executive producer, Oberon Cinematográfica, S.A., Barcelona
- Pons, Ventura (22.12.1999). Director and executive producer, Els Films de la Rambla, Barcelona
- Sufrategui, Paz (24.11.1999). Public relations manager, El Deseo, S.A., Madrid
- Trueba, Fernando (01.12.1999). Film director, Fernando Trueba, P.C., Madrid