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# ARTISTIC LABOR MARKETS AND CAREERS

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## ABSTRACT

Artistic labor markets are puzzling ones. Employment as well as unemployment are increasing simultaneously. Uncertainty acts not only as a substantive condition of innovation and self-achievement, but also as a lure. Learning by doing plays such a decisive role that in many artworlds initial training is an imperfect filtering device. The attractiveness of artistic occupations is high but has to be balanced against the risk of failure and of an unsuccessful professionalization that turns ideally non-routine jobs into ordinary or ephemeral undertakings. Earnings distributions are extremely skewed. Risk has to be managed, mainly through flexibility and cost reducing means at the organizational level and through multiple job holding at the individual level. Job rationing and an excess supply of artists seem to be structural traits associated with the emergence and the expansion of a free market organization of the arts.

Reviewing research done not only by sociologists, but also by economists, historians and geographers, our chapter focuses on four main issues: the status of employment and career patterns, the rationales of occupational choice, occupational risk diversification, and the oversupply of artists.

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## INTRODUCTION

Artistic labor markets are puzzling and challenging ones for social scientists. As this review essay will show, theoretical work and empirical studies, stemming from various perspectives, may be brought together in order to solve some of these puzzles. The way these markets expand may help to understand what is at stake. Evidence of sustained growth in artistic employment over the

last 20 years is amply documented by several surveys and Census sources, and trends are quite similar in most advanced countries. In the United States, over the period 1970–1990, the number of artists grew at a rate of 127%—much more rapidly than the civilian labor force, and the rate of increase has continued to be high. The total number of women artists increased faster, and all artistic occupations, with the exception of musicians, have seen a steady shift toward a higher proportion of women. By contrast, ethnic composition of the artistic workforce remains considerably disequibrated, the nonclassical music sphere being this time one of the relatively few exceptions.

The pattern of change, of course, varies across the different artistic occupations, but the trend is almost everywhere the same. The overall picture of artistic labor markets and of their growth is, however, a quite paradoxical one: Employment but also underemployment and unemployment have been increasing steadily and simultaneously over the period. Obviously, fluctuations in supply and demand of artistic labor do not provide a satisfying explanation of what appears to be highly unbalanced growth. Several historical studies on artistic professions have repeatedly insisted on an “oversupply of artists” phenomenon, which they have associated with changes in the organizational apparatus of the art worlds or with technological innovations, or, more radically, with the emergence and expansion of a free market organization for the arts. But in each case, ad hoc arguments may overshadow structural disequilibria: The present development of labor markets for the arts, by highlighting an apparently irresistible trend toward flexibility, helps to explain the underlying processes of such a course of development, namely the built-in pervasive uncertainty of artistic undertakings and careers and the ways for individuals, as well as for organizations, to handle uncertain prospects and to manage the correlated individual and business risks.

One may speculate as to why artistic employment growth has been so rapid. As for demand factors, increases in real disposable per capita income have shifted demand curves for the arts and resulted in an increasing fraction of national income and employment being devoted to the arts. In Europe in particular, the steady growth of federal and local government subsidies, mainly in the 1970s and the 1980s, has accounted for much of the employment gain, perhaps more than for the overall change in consumer demand for artistic products and performances, due to the large expansion of the nonprofit sector of services for artistic training and for conservation and display of cultural heritage. Public spending under nonarts headings (e.g. local economic development, urban regeneration) as well as support for the cultural industries has also stimulated opportunities for cultural employment.

Here, it should be noted that the definition of art and culture has obviously been broadened as cultural policies have developed. A more relativistic view of culture has become increasingly legitimate as public support has taken into

consideration the local community level and its whole apparatus (amateur activities, associations, so called sociocultural activities) by setting up links between art, culture, leisure, schooling, and social work. At the same time, one may note an opposing trend in cultural policies: the development of a discourse about culture as a real economic sector. A new form of "cultural accountancy" has in fact emerged that seeks to quantify the economic output of public spending on culture. Of course, the wider the definition of culture, the more culture can claim to play an economic role, and the stronger the economic rationale of public support may appear to be, at least at first sight.

In terms of the increased demand for selective occupations, several industrial sectors that draw heavily on the skills of artists and other creative occupations underwent rapid expansion during the 1980s. The most striking change within the cultural industries was the rapid growth of the audiovisual and broadcasting sector, and along with it, of the advertising industry as well as that of the new media industries (video, corporate video) and of the computer game industry. No less striking is that employment in these growing sectors is mainly on a short-term contract or freelance basis, which magnifies the shift toward numerical flexibility observed elsewhere in the economy (Smith 1997). One should mention also the expansion of the crafts and of the design sector, which increasingly contribute to the rise in the numbers of artists in the Census data (Feist 1998).

These changes not only rely on demand factors but also raise definitional issues concerning what the artistic occupations are, where the boundaries of the artistic sector lie, and whether one should rather adopt a more expansive approach, both in terms of cultural occupations, so as to include arts-related occupations, and in terms of the cultural sector. Recent research on British Census data (O'Brien & Feist 1995, Pratt 1997) builds on an occupational as well as on a sectoral breakdown; the redefined categorizations cross both classifications. As a result, cultural work appears to spread across a number of professional occupations and industrial activities. Thus, in Great Britain, among the individuals involved in the cultural sector, 25% work in the cultural industries with cultural occupations, 40% have cultural occupations outside the cultural industries, and 35% work in the cultural industries without cultural occupations.

More generally, the set of methodological decisions and disputes that goes with any study of artistic labor markets is by no means negligible, since they reflect conflicting and evolving views of art and artistic occupations and may considerably bear on the scientific understanding of them.

The list of the limitations and discrepancies of Census data as well as of non-Census data opens almost every research report on artistic occupations: To mention only a few major issues, such a list may identify as problems the definition of who is a professional artist and how his or her occupation is deter-

mined; the delimitation of each specific artistic field, and the inclusion or exclusion of peripheral specialties within a field in a way that may be inconsistent over time or vary from one survey to the other; the variations in job classifications and the periodic addition of new occupations to the artists' subset in the Census classification; the lack of any serious treatment of multiple job holding, which is pervasive in the arts, whatever the combination of jobs and occupations inside or outside the sphere of arts may be.

Regarding the tricky issue of the comparative strengths and limitations of survey vs Census data, one need only mention the primary source of most variations: the definition of the artist. The Census uses a parsimonious classification rule, which narrowly interprets the "chief job activity or business last week" in terms of the kind of industry or employer concerned, the occupational content and the type of organizational sector. Surveys, by contrast, generally use one or several criteria, drawn from a list of at least eight (Frey & Pommerehne 1989) and are susceptible to categorizing various activities as art in accordance with the particular interests of the researcher (Becker 1982). The most controversial of these criteria is, of course, that of subjective self-definition as an artist: Although it seems to work in all ways except as a market test, it encapsulates a temporal dimension of occupational commitment, since artists may at times or repeatedly cycle between several jobs or experience occupational and sectoral mobility and yet continue to think of themselves as artists.

As stated by Adler (quoted in Jeffri & Greenblatt 1996), "a study of artists in a society in which occupational membership is (fortunately) not defined or restricted by a guild, an academy or a state system of licensing can neither comfortably ignore problems of occupational definition nor resolve them." Indeed, although some of the most remarkable studies by sociologists, economists, and art historians on art labor markets and careers have been historical ones (White & White 1965, Montias 1982, Warnke 1989, Ehrlich 1985), the definition of the artist as well as the orderly course of an artistic career appear today to be dependent variables in the process of how highly competitive and contestable labor and product markets, interacting or not with state and public intervention, operate and evolve.

The terms of such theoretical and methodological issues are by no means new in sociology since labels, taxonomies, and classification systems are core issues in interactionist and constructivist theories. One should note that sociologists deal with such matters more cautiously than do economists: While the former run the risk of questioning endlessly the significance of any quantitative measurement, the latter run that of taking for granted that Census data (almost the only source they use) will lead to strong results by virtue of sophisticated econometric computation, once they have acknowledged the obvious limitations from which the data suffer.

Despite all these discrepancies, a review of a number of recent studies on art labor markets will bring to light findings that seem hardly disputable and whose summary will allow us to highlight the key issues for a comprehensive approach to artistic labor markets.

Artists as an occupational group are on average younger than the general work force, are better educated, tend to be more concentrated in a few metropolitan areas, show higher rates of self-employment, higher rates of unemployment and of several forms of constrained underemployment (nonvoluntary part-time work, intermittent work, fewer hours of work), and are more often multiple job holders. They earn less than workers in their reference occupational category, that of professional, technical, and kindred workers, whose members have comparable human capital characteristics (education, training, and age) and have larger income inequality and variability. These traits are even more striking in the 1990s, according to the most recent reports using Census and BLS data, which enable general comparisons over time (in France the equivalent sources are Census and Enquêtes Emploi of INSEE).

One may suspect that, according to such a bundle of characteristics, an increase in the number of artists as reported in the Census data may be far from corresponding to a similar increase in the level of activity, since the former trend may have different and contradictory meanings: If there is more work but an ever more rapidly growing number of individuals, a fiercer competition takes place that implies higher inequalities in the access to employment, more variability in the level and schedule of activity, and, on the whole, work rationing for those who share the labor pie and cycle more often from work to unemployment or from arts work to arts-related or non-arts work.

Extensive job and sectoral mobility as well as multiple job holding considerably affect the use of conventional work and unemployment indicators. Unemployment rates may be mismeasured for several related reasons: Individuals with artistic occupations may switch temporarily to work mainly in nonartistic occupations when unable to make a living in their primary vocational field, without stopping to produce art works. They would therefore not be classified as unemployed in their artistic occupation if they are primarily engaged in nonartistic work during the Census week. Accordingly, plotting change over time raises several difficulties. International comparisons are of course even more problematic.

A closer examination of descriptive statistics would provide us with considerable details about each of these traits, and it would in particular allow for the kind of fine-tuned differentiation between the several categories of artists that we find in the comprehensive NEA report on *Artists in the Work Force* (1996), in the Australian report by Throsby & Thompson (1994), in the British one by O'Brien & Feist (1995), or in French official annual reports based on Census and Labor Survey data (*Observatoire de l'emploi culturel* 1998a & 1998b).

Yet, our main aim here is rather to review explanatory models of work organization and labor supply in the arts and to focus on four main issues: the status of employment and career patterns, the rationales of occupational choice, occupational risk diversification, and the oversupply of artists. Our approach is deliberately multidisciplinary, since a number of studies have been done in sociology, economics, history, and geography that may be usefully brought together and confronted.

## EMPLOYMENT STATUS AND CAREERS

Generally speaking, although current trends show an increased blurring of the following distinction, employment strategies in general labor markets contrast, on the one hand, firms that emphasize low turnover and high productivity, bear costs of screening, trying out, and training, and use optimal reward schemes based on long-term contracts and tenured jobs, with, on the other, organizations that operate with casual workers and short-term contractual ties. How does this distinction apply to the arts? Wherever stable employment through long-term contracts exists for artists and craftworkers, it is to be found almost exclusively in large organizations operating on a pluri-annual basis—permanent organizations like symphony orchestras, opera houses, conservatories, or architecture firms—although these large organizations do increasingly hire personnel on a short-term basis. Temporary organizations or small cultural organizations use mainly or exclusively short-term contracts. Finally, creative artists operating as independent freelancing workers may themselves be seen as small firms building subcontractual relations with artistic organizations. On the whole, short-term contractual or subcontractual relationships prevail in artistic labor markets.

Normally, contingent employment possesses the characteristics that define “secondary” labor markets, where workers are mainly low-trained and low-paid and productivity differences between individuals are small. Yet most employed artists work under this form of employment and craft workers in the cultural sector are increasingly hired on such a basis. A paradoxical picture emerges, in which rather highly skilled and quite differentiated workers maintain weak employer attachments. Moreover, people (as well as organizations) may combine the different contractual forms: For example, musicians in orchestras can also be hired as freelancers for some studio recording jobs and hold a teaching position in a conservatory, so that the employment status distinction becomes blurred at the individual level. In fact, many opportunities can be found within a whole range of contractual arrangements: An artist’s success often goes along with increasingly strategic choices and, by contrast, less successful careers mean entrapment in constraining contractual formulas.

Among the salaried artists working on a long-term basis, musicians and their careers meet a rather well-patterned job system that has often been studied (Westby 1960, Faulkner 1973, Allmendinger et al 1994). Bureaucratic careers can be found in permanent orchestras with positions ranging on a well-defined scale of status: A majority of the orchestral players interviewed by Faulkner (1973) become anchored in their organization, experience no or little mobility, and, unless they feel entrapped, adjust and become committed to their role in a stable work setting. But Kanter's (1989) distinction between three main career structures—bureaucratic, professional, and entrepreneurial—applies only partly because of organizational and sectoral mobility. Indeed, advancement on the job ladder is limited since top ranks are filled up mainly through external recruiting, so that the mechanics of vacancy chains operate rather poorly. Individual career opportunities and their main elements—responsibilities, challenges, training, influence, earnings—develop through mobility within a stratified set of organizations ranked on a hierarchy of prestige, musical excellence, calibre of musicianship, working conditions, and operating budgets, either toward similar or higher positions in higher ranking orchestras or toward higher status positions in lower ranked orchestras.

Such moves are few in a professional lifetime: As described by Westby, each musician behaves like his own employment agency, compiles an inventory of probable and possible jobs, gets information about the approximate ages, professional histories, and abilities of the current holders of the most desirable jobs, so as to be prepared for an opportunity that may appear only once in a lifetime. The curvilinear profile of such career mobility means that the artist has to move early to reach the peak of this organizational set, and that chances of mobility diminish rather quickly after the age of 30 or 35, at least with respect to the top level tier of prestigious organizations. Publishing houses (Powell 1985) and architecture firms (Blau 1984, Champy 1998) are additional examples of permanent organizations that combine constraining hierarchies of jobs and career development through lateral mobility.

However, an increasing proportion of salaried cultural workers now work under a short-term contractual basis. The steady increase in the number of artists across all art sectors during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s appears to be driven by two forces: the rise of contingent work and the rapid increase of independent, self-managed work, with increasing numbers of artists now to be found in the sectors where self-employed practitioners work, such as creative writing, visual arts, and the crafts. This overall trend is reported in recent American (Alper et al 1996), British (O'Brien & Feist 1995), Australian (Throsby & Thompson 1994), and French surveys (*Observatoire de l'emploi culturel* 1998a,b).

Contingent work, insofar as it usually corresponds to the secondary labor market where workers are highly mobile and poorly skilled and jobs are very



routine, seems at first sight somewhat paradoxical in the arts. Yet, employment and work organization in the arts are indeed characterized by highly skilled, highly mobile, and well-paid workers moving from one employer to the next while accumulating experience through on-the-job training and highly diversified jobs. This is especially true of the performing arts, which appear to have been quite avant-garde in designing and experiencing the process of increasingly flexible labor markets (on Hollywood, see Storper 1989; for a somewhat idealized view of the Hollywood flexibility model, see Kanter 1995; and see Smith 1997, for the trend toward flexibility in the general labor markets).

Why does this paradoxical type of casual labor occur and develop so rapidly in the arts? Let's consider the organizational characteristics of artistic production. Casual employment structure and the corresponding search for flexibility are a core feature of artistic work, due to the "high rate of change over time of the content of activities," according to Stinchcombe's (1968) phrasing in his pioneering work on the craft administration of production and structures of activities. This occurs for at least four reasons. First, artistic products are often designed as prototypes and their market value depends on their originality and on a more or less pronounced differentiation or, as Caves (2000) argues, on a mixture of vertical and horizontal differentiation. According to these two contrasting properties, artworks are conceived as unique, which makes each artist into a monopolist, and are relatively substitutable, which results in a monopolistic competition once differentiation is conceived along a continuum, as an 'infinite-variety' property in Caves' formulation. Secondly, the combination of activities needed to produce a movie, play, or opera involves a large number of different artistic occupations and crafts, and each participant shifts to a new project just hours, days, or weeks after the initial one, with new requirements and challenges. Thirdly, tastes (especially in the most speculative art markets such as popular music, *hyped* contemporary painting, blockbuster novels, mass audience-designed movies and serials) undergo unpredictable shifts. Finally, uncertainty can be seen as a built-in characteristic of the creative process. On the supply side, it makes artistic work highly attractive, since predictable outcomes would lead to routine work (Menger 1989). On the demand side, consumer versatility and taste for novelty give social and economic value to newness and originality to the extent that these are unpredictable. Uncertainty must be considered as the true condition of the breakthrough innovation that opens up to its author a new (temporary) monopoly, and, simultaneously, uncertainty is also the threat contained in the destructive aspect of every true innovation.

Flexibility can be attained through three main social requirements: a system of performance contracts, a system for transmitting information about the performance capacities of people, and a minimization of overhead costs (Stinchcombe 1968). The performing arts meet these requirements: for each

project—film, opera, or theater performance, musical show, etc—new teams are formed and then dispersed. Networks help to build the stable relationships that are needed to lower transaction costs. They facilitate hiring procedures through patronage and trustworthy ties among peers, and they convey reliable information about skills and talents quite rapidly, since formal screening and hiring processes would often be inefficient and too costly in a casual work scheme.

The distinction between short contractual arrangements (at firm level) and employment processes (at industry level) is blurred by the multisided activities of each worker as well as by the dense formal or informal relations between employers. Indeed, artistic production is based on three components: (a) a nexus of ties between firms involved in the different parts of the production process and between the many employers who draw from the artistic labor pool, (b) an original way of processing information through this network in order to minimize the costs and length of the sorting and hiring operations, and (c) conventional industry-wide negotiations and arrangements regarding wage and fringe benefit schemes. An effective way to overcome the complexities of the disintegration of the production process is to rely on spatial concentration. Especially dense transactional relationships between production units have geographically sensitive cost structures. The greater the costs per transaction, the greater the probability that firms will agglomerate in order to benefit from external economies of scale (Storper & Walker 1989, Scott 1997, Quingley 1998).

Artistic activities show a very high level of spatial concentration in a few locations or even in one dominant city in each country. It is also remarkable that even in the presence of the active decentralization of cultural public policy, the concentration of artists and art professionals does not decline. The Parisian case is striking: during the 1980s, the population of artists and professionals involved in cultural production expanded rather rapidly in France (+ 55% between 1982 and 1991), but the share of artists living and working in Paris and Ile-de-France also increased (from a 45.8% to a 54.1% rate; see Menger 1993).

In their extensive study on the vertical disintegration and flexible specialization trend in the Hollywood film industry and its effects on the labor market, Christopherson & Storper (1989) show that through subcontracting, financing, and distribution of independent producers, utilization of less costly production methods, and expansion of auxillary markets, the demand for short-term contract workers increased. They go on to explain how changes in labor supply occurred as well. Using pension data sources, they demonstrate that the aggregate quantity of work available (i.e. the total hours of work), even if increasing, increases far less rapidly than the pool of individuals employed intermittently, generating a growing competition and resulting in a decreasing average participation in production.

In the case of casual work, the risk of unemployment is pervasive, and insurance devices through long-term contractual relationships are, by definition, missing. The typical worker will view the risk of unemployment as something that must be compensated for by a higher hourly wage. Compensation for uncertain labor prospects is in fact observed in the performing arts since intermittent artists and workers earn much higher hourly wages than do those employed on a long-term basis. The wage premium is the price that employers must pay in order to draw on a reserve army of underemployed individuals whose availability has to be secured. A loss of flexibility in employment decisions would be more costly for firms. Yet this compensating differential scheme operates only imperfectly, since hourly wages are not higher for greatly underemployed workers than for their more successful colleagues.

Compensating wage differentials therefore play their role mainly at the industry level. Individual differences in hiring probabilities are, by contrast, not subject to compensation: here is another kind of risk. This is simply to say that casual work in the performing arts stems from the freelance status of employment. In such a context, accumulation of hiring records acts as a reputation signal in a self-reinforcing process: hiring calls for more hiring. As the intermittent working system expands, at any given time the number of job candidates more and more exceeds the supply of full-time jobs. New forms of employment instability and new forms of labor market segmentation appear, since the quantity of work allocated varies considerably across the workforce. As job allocation takes place on an individual basis and involves on-the-job accumulation of skills and reputation, experienced and network-building artists and workers are frequently hired; by contrast, younger or less skilled individuals, loosely connected with the most active entrepreneurs, form a peripheral population facing discontinuous employment and longer spells without work. Thus, differences in annual earnings of workers may reflect differences in hours worked more than in wage rates (Christopherson & Storper 1989, Rannou & Vari 1996, Debeauvais et al 1997).

In a vertical disintegration of production and highly flexible work scheme, firms minimize their risks by using contractual relationships that transmit the market uncertainty down the hierarchy of control to subcontractors and ultimately to individual workers. Contingent workers thus become more and more like independent workers, cycling between employers and between work and unemployment spells. In that sense, freelance artists may be better thought of as operators of small businesses. Although asymmetrical, the relationship between the employer and the freelancer is that of a matching process where both sides build a career interdependently, as carefully demonstrated by Faulkner in his study of the Hollywood job system (1983, Faulkner & Anderson 1987). Artists as well as entrepreneurs accumulate a history of results, and their performance ratings translate into reputations and into distinct industry identities.

Careers are two-sided affairs, with entrepreneurs making distinctions among qualified artists, and artists (directors, screenwriters, composers, etc) making distinctions among film productions. In a market of projects, careers advance incrementally through recurrent and nonrecurrent matches. Artists learn how to spread their occupational risks by forming career portfolios, i.e. by mixing one-shot ties, which are the normal feature of a loosely coupled hiring system, and recurrent “bread and butter” accounts with a few producers. Faulkner shows that such a spreading of accounts allows the artist to hedge his or her bets, to get information about a wider environment, and to accumulate credits in a human capital investment program, through a variety of work, stylistic diversification, and adaptation to changing teams.

As cumulative productivity profiles greatly differ, distinct matching proclivities segment the labor market, and matchings are neatly stratified in equivalent classes of market agents. Yet given the high variance in activities, and the volatility of the cultural industries, career advancement and attainment are never secured.

Neither a stage process nor a simple interactional process (Abbott 1990), such career trajectories combine traits from professional as well as from entrepreneurial careers, as defined by Kanter. Artists rely on skills as well as on opportunities to take on evermore challenging assignments that bring them greater knowledge and more rewards; they have an external market value based on reputation; they exhibit less loyalty to particular organizations than to their professional community; and they may manage their working life much as property owners do when spreading their risks. To that extent, they may be compared to small firms and their labor market to a network of small units trading along matching processes from one project to another. The analogy with small firms may be taken one step further when multiple job holding and role versatility are brought into the picture, as shown below. The large number of small artistic organizations and their high rate of turnover may be explained that way, since composers (Burke 1997), choreographers (Sussman 1984), and stage directors (Menger 1997) can easily set up companies or fringe firms by relying on a portfolio of resources and multiple roles.

According to Weick’s notion of self-designing organizations (Weick 1979, Weick & Berlinger 1989), careers in such a labor system are subjectively patterned because they are committed to impermanence, to cumulative learning and exploration, rather than tied to external career markers. Regarding the dynamics of personal growth and achievement, one striking feature of careers in the arts is their temporal aspect. To consider only each end of a working life in the arts: Precocity often plays a significant role, not only as a mythical feature of the “self-generating genius” topos described by Kris & Kurz (1987), but also as a symptom of the ambiguity of the transition from training to work, since many creative artists and performers produce serious work and get cred-

its before their formal training is complete (Menger 1997). Conversely, late starters are particularly prevalent among writers (Throsby & Thompson 1994), and the increasing occupational flexibility of careers also leads to late entry for a second career, whether this corresponds to a deferred vocational choice or to reconversion following redundancy, as is the case in the crafts sector surveyed by Knott (1994). Of course, self-employment status typically allows for such switches.

The span of a career varies greatly with the type of art (e.g. dance vs creative writing), with the subsector of each art world (classical dance vs contemporary dance), with the nature of the occupation in it (performing vs creative work), and with the organizational and market features of each world. Sharply contrasting examples can be cited: A conductor's career may extend until near the end of his life with almost no time for retirement, but classical dancers have career schedules constrained by severe physical requirements. In the high arts sphere, reputation may be a factor of exceptional longevity, and that from a twofold point of view: The sense of achievement is enhanced, well beyond the average working-life term (Anzieu 1981), and the reputation as capital may be converted into an artistic and economic rent, since the famous artist faces a rather inelastic demand for his praised work (Moulin 1987). By contrast, skyrocketing success in the mass market arts and entertainment industries is subject to sudden shifts in market demand toward new competitors and is characterized by highly volatile reputations.

Self-employment is today the most frequent work status in the arts. Proportions vary with national contexts and occupations, but trends are similar: Self-employment increasingly acts as a driving force in the expansion of artistic labor markets. The careers of self-employed artists display most of the attributes of the entrepreneurial career form: the capacity to create valued output through the production of works for sale, the motivation for deep commitment and high productivity associated with their occupational independence—control over their own work, a strong sense of personal achievement through the production of tangible outputs, the ability to set their own pace, but also a high degree of risk-taking, as shown by the highly skewed distribution and high variability of earnings, as well as the low amount of time allocated on average to their primary creative activity (Alper et al 1996). Thus, as stressed by Freidson (1986a), self-employment may bring with it only an illusory independence and autonomy: The freelancers who fail to move into the inner circles of successful colleagues get locked in a precarious situation.

In theory, because most creative artists are self-employed, it would seem meaningless to equate fewer working hours with unemployment spells or underemployment levels. Their income, which reflects whether their works are in demand (that is, whether they are sold and at what price), does not derive from a quantity of working time at a given wage rate (Frey & Pommerehne 1989).

Creative artists and craftspeople decide whether or not to continue to work in their chosen field according to their income and to the stream of their expected earnings. If their income is low, because of low demand for their work, a simple increase in production, through more work, may have no effect, and an excess supply of the works for sale at lower prices may not easily trigger an equilibration process because the price acts as a signal of quality and a decrease in the price of works of a contemporary artist will promptly be interpreted negatively. Oversupply of the works they produce cannot be defined at any given price. That's why so many creative artists, since they can make their own work opportunities, may, despite working hard and being fully committed, suffer from low or very low income levels, and develop a sense of null or even negative correlation between effort and earnings, an effect reported in many studies (e.g. Jeffri 1991, Moulin 1992).

## THE RATIONALES OF OCCUPATIONAL CHOICE

In most advanced countries, Census data provide quite similar pictures about artists' earnings. Mean annual earnings appear to be less than those in occupational groups that require similar levels of professional training and qualification. Filer (1986), in a quite provocative paper, has refuted the "myth of the starving artist" by estimating the income penalty to be less than 10% in the artistic occupations and by estimating on 1970 and 1980 Census data that artists have a higher probability of remaining in their occupation five years later than do workers in all nonartistic occupations. But his study does not distinguish between arts and nonarts sources of income nor, within income derived from art, between that from creative activity and that from arts-related work. Moreover, the income penalty estimated by Filer varies greatly among the different artistic groups (e.g. -69% for dancers, + 58% for actors and directors).

In short, as summarized by Wassall & Alper (1992) and by Throsby (1994) in their review of a number of recent studies, artists actually appear to suffer from significant income penalties, to have more variable income both across time for an individual artist and across artists at a given point in time, and to get lower returns from their educational investments than is the case in other comparable occupations. Although data based on similar sources and similar methodological design may be difficult to obtain for a careful comparison of each category of artists' incomes over time, the distributional evidence remains the same. The skewed distribution of artists' income is strongly biased toward the lower end of the range: Artistic careers are and remain risky.

Despite the evidences of low returns from vocational creative work and of the high degree of income inequality, artists are not deterred from entering such an occupation in growing numbers, nor is there as much withdrawal from

artistic careers as would be expected. Are artists irresistibly committed to a labor of love, or are they true risk-lovers, or perhaps “rational fools” to use a notion developed by Sen?

The “labor of love” argument (Freidson 1990) insists that occupational commitment and achievement in the arts cannot be matched to the monetary considerations of a market economy of exchange; they should better be conceived as skilled and sustained activities that entail a social value that artists carry out by making a living in host occupations such as teaching. Artists’ notion of their “calling,” analyzed by Kris & Kurz (1987) as a historically recurring feature of artistic biographical narrative, calls to mind the “inner drive” reported by Jeffri & Throsby (1994) as the foremost criterion of professionalism according to US visual artists. The ideology inherited from the “art for art’s sake” era may even reverse the meaning of success and failure, so that only recognition by the peer group matters, at least in high art worlds (Bourdieu 1992). One way to deal with this ideological dimension is to turn it into an inherent cultural trait—a kind of occupational characteristic that goes along with artistic life or, to be more precise, that blurs the boundaries between occupation and private life, and between their respective rationales. However, once this trait is regarded as belonging to the initial socialization process of the artist via a very early manifestation of ability and taste for the arts, such an explanation turns out to be highly deterministic and ultimately tautological. Artists are presumed to commit to their art and to link to their community of fellow artists, whatever degree of success in the market they may meet. Inescapable commitment results in a highly inelastic labor supply function

The second argument is that of occupational choice under uncertainty. Artists may be risk-lovers (whatever origin one may assign to this preference), or they may be induced to take risks by a probabilistic miscalculation. Occupations where enormous rewards are concentrated in the hands of a small number of practitioners, whereas the majority of entrants may do poorly, entail a high degree of uncertainty. Entry into these fields has, to a large extent, the aspect of a lottery where players overestimate their chances, as has been emphasized by A Marshall (1947). The analogy with a lottery is actually ambiguous: While it is helpful to think of the skewed distribution of incomes as a matrix of payoffs, it is also misleading because it suggests that success is purely random and has nothing to do with individual abilities and characteristics.

A third, less deterministic view may be offered that substantiates an occupational choice dimension without overshadowing the characteristics either of work or of workers. Rewards in artistic jobs are of two sorts: Aside from monetary rewards, there are the so-called nonmonetary rewards or “psychic income” flows, which have in fact been regarded for a long time as an essential dimension of work. Analytically speaking, every job can be regarded as a bundle of characteristics, resulting in several possible combinations.

Wage differentials compensate for more or less attractive work and equalize among workers the total monetary and nonmonetary advantages or disadvantages.

This economic theory of equalizing differences (Rosen 1986), which goes back to Adam Smith, seeks to explain the diversity of characteristics of work and workers in such a way as to give central consideration to individual preferences and choice, provided that there is perfect information on both sides of the market. Artistic work can be considered as highly attractive along a set of measurable dimensions of job satisfaction that include the variety of the work, a high level of personal autonomy in using one's own initiative, the opportunities to use a wide range of abilities and to feel self-actualized at work, an idiosyncratic way of life, a strong sense of community, a low level of routine, and a high degree of social recognition for the successful artists. All these benefits have a so-called shadow price, which may be compensated for by a lower income than would be expected from less amenable jobs. It should be noted that in strong contrast to the ideological argument, especially to its deterministic aspect, people discover what a nonroutine job really is only by experiencing it.

The benefits derived from nonmonetary income are, however, not of a uniform magnitude: An analysis in terms of equalizing differences requires that we adjust the total amount of these benefits according to the job, the level of professional achievement, and the conditions that prevail for those in the profession who, still waiting for success, are forced to take on secondary jobs. Comparisons between artists salaried by an organization and independent artists (Fohrbeck & Wiesand 1975, Taylor 1987) reveal, for example, that the latter obtain higher levels of nonmonetary satisfaction but have lower average incomes than do salaried artists, due to higher levels of job-insecurity, higher rates of unemployment, and greater variance in individual incomes around the mean. Some of the studies that have been done on the activities of certain categories of salaried artists even go so far as to reject, to a great extent, the presence of any compensating "psychic income": The emblematic case of orchestra musicians illustrates the countermythology of the artist subjected to the constraints of an organization, resigned to a humdrum and narrowly specialized labor, very distant from what long years of apprenticeship oriented toward individual accomplishment in a soloist career had led him or her to expect (Arian 1971).

It should be also stressed, as does Spilerman (1977), that the salience of particular job facets might vary with a worker's age. Artists offer many examples of a "career-line vulnerability to aging." As they get older, freelancers like actors appear to be increasingly sensitive to job insecurity and to the steady strain of searching for jobs, gathering information about new projects, and maneuvering repeatedly to remain visible in a highly competitive labor market (La-



plante 1990, Menger 1997). Orchestral musicians (Faulkner 1973) and dancers (Federico 1983) experience well-patterned sequences of job change over their life cycle: the upward mobility chances of the former decrease quite abruptly after about age 35, which induces them to adjust their occupational commitment, and the latter have to plan their reconversion at about the same age. Of course, shifts in career patterns may be provoked by changes in market conditions or by aesthetic innovations. Modern dancers start and end their careers later than classical dancers. Painters today can expect official recognition and financial success much sooner than their predecessors could: As Moulin (1992) and Galenson (1999) show from different perspectives, changes both in the nature of modern painting and in the market for contemporary art may shift demand towards the works of the early period of an artist's career. Very young artists can therefore expect high immediate reputation, but the market also turns out to be more volatile and reputations vanish sooner.

The economic argument is attractive for its elegant parsimony. The artists who remain in artistic occupations despite low earnings and highly uncertain earnings prospects gain something else that has to be taken into account in order to preserve the rational occupational choice frame: The additional income flow that one would expect to draw from another occupation, according to one's skills and qualifications, has been exchanged in return for psychic goods. However, such an argument holds only in a conceived world of activity in which there is no room for anything else but exchange and arbitration based on a series of minute and well-informed calculations.

Moreover, the compensating differentials argument formulates its notion of the compensating wage premium with respect only to the differences in average income levels across occupations, once standardized for a number of individual income-related characteristics (mainly education, experience, age, sex, ethnicity, location of residence, and of work). However, from a distributional perspective, artistic occupations show a high variance in income. Poverty rates among US artists are higher than those for all other professional and technical workers (Alper et al 1996). Again, the inequalities and uncertainties reflected in this large dispersion of rewards may be conceived as double-sided. Factors behind this skewedness include, first of all, differences in talent, insofar as these differences are rewarded by the organizations that hire the artists and are perceived and valued by the surrogate and final consumers. Stinchcombe (1986 [1963]) distinguishes between talent as a complementary factor of production and talent as a nearly additive factor. The former is found in firms, activities, and positions (e.g. scientific research, "winner take all" systems, soloist performances in violin concertos) where output value may benefit more than proportionately from differences in individual levels of ability; accordingly, earnings inequalities are high. By contrast, the distribution of rewards is less skewed and seniority a more important factor where individual perform-

ance has a less dramatic impact on the value of the total production, as in a symphony orchestra. Moreover, in the first case, due to the differential skews of the distributions of talent and income, small differences in talent can become magnified in wide earnings differences, as Rosen (1981) shows in his superstar model. On the demand side, lesser quality is a poor substitute for greater quality, so that preferences are strongly biased toward the latter; on the supply side, due to joint consumption technology (that of mass production and the distribution of art and entertainment through records, books, TV, radio etc), the marginal costs of production do not rise in proportion to the size of a seller's market, but profits do. The appealing and paradoxical result of such a model is disputable, since the basic assumption that small differences in talent may lead to huge return differentials requires a measurement of talent and quality other than income (Hamlen 1991, 1994); however, it is consistent with the distribution of incomes observed in the industries relying on scale economy of joint consumption (see Laplante 1990, and Menger 1997, for differences in actors' earnings distribution in theater vs TV and cinema). In a sense, this model may help to underscore the impact of evaluative biases, too. The process of valuation of art and artists is indeed subject to considerable inflexibilities, asymmetries, and imperfections.

To speak of reputation instead of talent, provided that reputation is conceived as a social process, as Becker (1982) or White (1993) do, highlights the fact that the appraisal of art and artists varies with the organizational traits of each art world, since it reflects the cooperative and competitive activities of the various members. Several dimensions of appraisal exist, of which the spot market value of the outcome is only one. Deferred financial success occurs especially in art markets where the appraisal is initially undertaken by a narrow community of experts and learned consumers, and where a capital of recognition may be accumulated that is eventually converted into an increasing share of demand, which may provide the most famous artists with a slowly increasing flow of earnings (Bourdieu 1992). Thus, at each point in time, the distribution of earnings ranks artists whose cumulative career experiences differ widely; in that respect, income differentials may serve as a proxy for talent measurement if talent is equated not only with a flow of marketable abilities but also with a stock of recognizable characteristics, investments, and achievements. In an imperfectly competitive market, as the markets for artistic services and products are, considerable informational problems arise concerning how consumers can know and appraise the many characteristics of a large amount of highly differentiated goods. As Becker (1982) points out, the condition of perfect information among tastemakers and consumers holds quite exceptionally. Employers have search and information costs, as do consumers. Both may minimize their search costs by using price or the artist's visibility as an index of quality: Rather than being a causal factor, talent becomes a depend-

ent variable, socially determined by the behavior of employers on one side of the market and consumers on the other side (Towse 1993). This is why talent may be conceived as embodying not only artistic abilities and technical skills, but also behavioral and relational ones. For example, Peterson & White (1989), studying the local world of studio musicians in Nashville, and Faulkner (1983), in his study on composers in the Hollywood film industry, show that those performers who succeed in a highly competitive market master several kinds of skills in order to secure a monopolistic control over the hiring system.

To consider talent as an initial endowment that is unequally distributed, and that only needs a proper occasion to be set in motion and to express itself, misses another fundamental feature, that of uncertainty in its twofold manifestation: that of uncertainty regarding the chances of individual success in a course of action and that of strategic uncertainty, which relates individual expectations to the behavior of other artists, as well as to the gatekeepers' and consumers' evaluations and preferences in a competitive market.

According to an expressivist model of praxis that can be traced back at least to Hegelian philosophy (Habermas 1988) and that plays a major role in Marx's theory of labor (Elster 1985), self-actualization through creative work entails a basic distinction between labor as a routine and alienating activity and work as a nonroutine pursuit. This distinction plays a major role in Arendt's (1959) theory of work as a nonutilitarian kind of lasting human achievement, as well as in Freidson's (1986b) view that artistic professions present a challenge to conventional conceptions about vocation and labor. Stinchcombe's (1968) analysis of uncertainty as a variance-related concept demonstrates how people have recourse to superstitious beliefs (luck, divination, supernatural coercion) or to their more sophisticated equivalents (genius, creativity) in dealing with highly uncertain activities: Talent for dealing with uncertainty turns out to challenge any measurement of its characteristics. Hirschman's (1986) classification of different kinds of work in terms of the varying predictability of their intended outcome brings to light the noninstrumental nature of the artist's striving effort. In the uncertain course of creative action, the strenuous overcoming of obstacles takes place through alternations of tension and the anticipated savoring of the future result. Therefore self-actualization through work, which makes artistic activity so attractive, occurs only if the outcome is unpredictable. The possibilities of personal invention are wide open, and at the same time, the artist is never sure that she will express herself in her work as she expected to.

The two kinds of incentives in occupational choice that have been mentioned up to this point can be related as follows: Nonroutine work, the most celebrated examples of which are artistic, scientific, and entrepreneurial work, provides psychic and social gratification proportional to the degree of uncertainty of success. The more the work is nonroutine, the less one can be certain

about the immediate or long-term chances of individual achievement. It should, however, not be overlooked that artistic work also entails routine aspects, both in relative terms—the various artistic occupations and the various individual achievements in each of them may also, of course, be ranked according to how routine or nonroutine the work is—and in absolute terms—no artist could every time reconstruct afresh his own frame of activity, and no collective work could be achieved if conventions didn't exist as stabilizing forces (Becker 1982). The fact remains that the nonroutine dimension of artistic creative work is the most demanding, the most rewarding, and the most acclaimed one, and that which gives it such a great social value.

This also means that performance in nonroutine activities hardly depends on skills that could be easily objectified, transmitted, and certified in the training system. Indeed, the impact of schooling on earnings is typically smaller for artists than it is either for all workers or for managers, professionals, and technical workers (Filer 1990). Insofar as nonroutine activity refers to a wide range of changing and challenging work situations, it therefore implies that abilities may be revealed and skills acquired only progressively, in the course of action, through a process of learning-by-doing, which is highly informative and which cannot be perfectly anticipated *ab initio*. Even if one were to assume that innate abilities command success much more than formal training, talent could express itself only by coping with work situations that reveal the multiple characteristics of what artistic achievement really is. It should be added that if talent could be detected more rapidly, then quit rates in artistic professions would be much higher.

A dynamic occupational choice model may help to explain how workers accumulate skills through experience and learning-by-doing. As nonroutine work implies a steady human capital investment, it takes place in a matching process where jobs are “tied packages of work and learning” (Rosen 1986) and are ranked along their varying learning potentials, as shown in Faulkner's (1983) research on the work of freelance composers in Hollywood. The attractiveness of artistic jobs can therefore partly derive from their high learning potential, at least as long as the work is nonroutine enough.

Marx's rather solipsistic conception of self-actualization virtually precludes the possibility of failure, both because everyone is endowed with the same abilities and because competition as a source of alienation must be avoided. Yet the risk of failure is a built-in characteristic of artistic undertakings. Moreover, failure or success does not merely depend on the creators' own appraisal of their work, unless their art world forms a community of producers who have no interest in others' production nor in anyone's consumption (Elster 1985). Individuation through creative work, which greatly accounts for the admiration of artists, requires that others have an interest in one's work, and, consequently, that some competitive comparison occurs. This points to the

strategic side of uncertainty, that is, to uncertainty about the choices and behaviors of other agents, as in games of incomplete information. Firstly, competition cannot be separated from the individualistic search for systematic originality and innovation that has been characterizing the production of art since the nineteenth century, so that artists, like all other social actors, do not behave other than interdependently and competitively. Secondly, uncertainty as it stems from the nonroutine and noninstrumental aspect of work brings to light another characteristic: Competition is highly indeterminate, since work experiences have more or less to be constantly renewed in order to be attractive and fertile. Uncertainty plays a major role not only during the early part of a career but throughout the whole span of the professional lifetime. One can never be sure whether one's next film or record will be a hit or will at least be held in high esteem by peers; the only certainty in work is that it will always have to cope with discontinuities and a high rate of change in content.

In a rational behavior model, expected risky occupational outcomes should be experienced in a way quite similar to that predicted by the theory of option pricing in finance. An optimal sequential decision scheme orders occupational alternatives with respect to risk; it is rational to choose the job with the greater risk first and to switch to a less risky alternative if the outcome turns out to be unfavorable.

This approach gains much greater realism and explanatory power when informational considerations are brought in, as in the job matching approach of occupational choice (Miller 1984) that fits rather well with the results of surveys on the careers of freelancers (Menger 1997). A job applicant only learns gradually how well he is suited for a particular artistic occupation and to what extent he can expect to meet success in it. It is a trial and error process: One becomes more and more informed about the various facets of the occupation and about one's own abilities through doing the job. One tries to find the occupation or the job for which one is best suited. Many artistic occupations provide this kind of information only through the learning-by-doing process, either because formal training is not strictly required to enter the professional community and to succeed (in some artistic occupations like that of writer, formal training plays a more minor role, although there does exist in the US a huge industry in creative writing classes), or because formal training doesn't act as an efficient means for selecting talents and screening abilities. This is probably why so many artists think of themselves as self-taught, even in occupations where formal training plays a true role (Moulin 1992). For example, most actors, while rather satisfied with the technical aspects of their training, are nonetheless critical of the lack of preparation. More information about one's abilities and chances of successful professionalization is mainly acquired in the course of practicing (Jackson et al 1994, Menger 1997). Yet the learning and information acquisition process is costly. Jobs where one can benefit more

from learning by doing are on average less well-paid initially than jobs where applicants can be selected on the basis of university degrees or through other immediate skill certifications.

High variance in the earnings distribution, according to this model, means therefore that, on the one hand, young and inexperienced artistic workers accept low rewards in exchange for information about the job and about themselves, which allows many of them, after a while, to estimate more precisely their chances and thus to opt to leave the occupation, or at least, to give up the project of making a comfortable living in the arts.

On the other hand, a small number of artists will successfully benefit from the learning process. In other words, scarcity of talent always remains a key factor that explains the super incomes (be these monetary or nonmonetary) of a few highly rated artists, but no one is able, *ex ante*, to make an accurate estimation of the value of his or her talents and skills, and to assess the chances she or he has to get them priced and recognized.

However, the application of this job matching model to artistic occupations raises two issues. Firstly, it may be asked how much information one needs before being able to assess the quality of one's job match, considering that occupational practice acquires so many different and changing forms, takes place in so many environments, and in relation to many diverse employers and patrons. In addition, this high variability in practice probably influences the artist's behavior regarding risk-taking. In some respects, each work experience in the performing arts, such as theater or movie production, is unique and new, each team of artists and technicians is different. One can get the feeling that there is no end to the learning process and to the assessment of one's talent and that no situation is really crucial when one has to decide how far to go ahead in such a career. This could explain why many artists maintain for so long the hope that they will eventually become famous, even after death. Romantic writers and poets invented a well-known psychological and ideological device for fighting against short-term disenchantment: the "loser is eventually the winner" game (Sartre 1971, Bénichou 1985). Secondly, once multiple job holding is taken into account, risk diversification considerations may advocate for an enlarged definition of occupational choice, where several related jobs provide switching opportunities that, instead of building irreversible sequences of choices, may result in a cycling pattern of allocation of occupational time between various kindred activities.

In this case, an interesting way to test the assumption that, against the standard economic view, workers may derive satisfaction from the process of work itself and not just from the income it earns, is to study whether artists turn down better-paid jobs in order to pursue their vocational work. In estimating labor supply functions for Australian artists with arts and nonarts wage rates as explanatory variables, Throsby (1992) shows that artists supply the nonarts la-

bor market only up to the point where an adequate return was received to support their primary artistic work.

## OCCUPATIONAL RISK DIVERSIFICATION

Both sociological and economic studies of artistic occupations show how artists can be induced to face the constraints of a rationed labor market and how they learn to manage risky careers by resorting to the insurance devices that are at hand. Pioneering empirical research (Baumol & Bowen 1966) has found that artists may improve their economic situation in three main ways, which are not incompatible and may be combined: Artists can be supported by private sources (working spouse, family, or friends) or by public sources (subsidies, grants and commissions from the state, sponsorship from foundations or corporations, and other transfer income from social and unemployment insurance); they can work in cooperative-like associations by pooling and sharing their income and by designing a sort of mutual insurance scheme; and finally, they can hold multiple jobs.

Most studies, both in sociology and in economics, have focused on this last means, since apart from being widespread and becoming more so, it brings into light a puzzling feature of the artistic labor market: that of the diversification of risk through one's own human capital and labor, which seems a much more unusual phenomenon than risk management through financial assets and income from various sources. In fact, it brings artists close to entrepreneurs since, like property owners who can spread their risk by putting bits of their property into a large number of concerns, multiple job holders put bits of their efforts into different jobs (Drèze 1987).

Multiple job holding shows a general upward trend, and artistic workers rank among the highest in the percentage of all workers who have secondary jobs; in addition, artistic occupations rank at the top in the percentage of all jobs held as secondary jobs. If one adds the numbers of primary and secondary job holders in a given occupation, so as to estimate the total number of practitioners in that occupation, almost every artistic occupation appears among the 25 occupations employing the largest proportions of their workers through a secondary job (Amirault 1997). Wassall & Alper (1992) review a number of surveys that document the extent of multiple job holding among artists, including their own 1981 survey of 3000 New England artists, which found that only 24% of artists did not hold a nonartistic job.

As shown by Throsby (1992, 1994, 1996) in his studies on artists' income and labor supply, not only must economic studies recognize the arts/nonarts earnings distinction as providing a more complete picture of artists' income sources, but they must also recognize that simple dichotomy in itself does not go far enough. In order to capture the full range of relationships between la-

bour supply and earnings experienced by artists, a three-way division of working time and earnings is essential (Throsby 1996, Menger 1997, Paradeise 1998): that between (a) the creative activity itself, which corresponds to the primary creative labor and the tasks associated to the preparation of the artistic product (thinking, dreaming, searching for materials, rehearsing, practicing); (b) arts-related work, which includes the various activities within the particular art world that do not contribute directly to producing the artistic product, but still rely on the skills and qualifications possessed by the professional artist; common examples of such work would be teaching activities and management tasks in artistic organizations; (c) nonarts work, which may differ considerably both among individuals, among the arts, and over the individual life-cycle in an artistic career. For example, recent US Census and survey data report that while a majority of authors (as primary occupation) hold secondary jobs in other professional occupations and especially in educational fields, actors' and singers' secondary jobs are mainly in sales, clerical, or service jobs—jobs with a history of low pay and poor benefits (Alper et al 1996; see also Kingston & Cole 1986).

The range of various resources and jobs may be compared to a portfolio of financial assets (Faulkner 1983, Menger 1989). This way of handling uncertainty has already been evoked above in the case of the freelancer, who may insure himself against downswings on the employers' side as well as strengthen his position by building a career portfolio that is mixed with tightly and loosely coupled work associations. With sectoral diversification of hirings, artists may also be financially better off and have greater career continuity in a highly fragmented labor market.

Holding other jobs outside one's vocational field of activity corresponds to a better known scheme of occupational risk diversification, though the hackneyed examples of artists forced to hold jobs totally unrelated to their art are partially misleading. In facing the constraints of job rationing in their artistic field or those of an unsuccessful position in the art market, artists manage the risks of their main commitment to their art through job diversification, but the composition of their portfolio also evolves as their personal position in the art world at different stages of their career solidifies or gets weaker. The sources of income and multiple job earnings are much more dispersed at the beginning of an artist's professional life and come under greater control when the artist's reputation grows and when his or her ability to select among different opportunities allows him or her to reach a more careful balance between constraints and fulfilling commitments. Instead of thinking statically in the terms of the old dilemma—freedom or alienation—the portfolio model of occupational risk management offers new insights for the dynamic study of how artists cope with uncertainty throughout their career and allow the maintainance of the centrality of choice for the course of that career.



However, in focusing on the combination of insecure and secure sources of income, the “diversification of risk” approach fails to deal with the characteristics of the different kinds of work that may be associated with the creative one. It is assumed that a secondary job doesn’t provide the artist with anything else except income. Indeed another, complementary, dimension of multiple job holding is overshadowed, which concerns above all the relationship between creative work and related artistic work, and which is described in the “role versatility” scheme (Nash 1970[1955]). In certain art worlds, like that of “serious” music, high technical skill requirements act as a selective barrier to entry as well as an integrating device among the professionals employed in the various occupational roles (composer, performer, conductor, publisher, and so forth), whose differentiation has increased with the professionalization process. Through role versatility, the composer may reduce the financial risk in his creative activity but also extend his control over the distribution process of his music, facilitate his interaction and communication with the other roles, and increase his prestige among his peers. Roles simultaneously or successively played are thought of in terms of positions in various spheres, as in Abbott & Hrycak’s (1990) work on eighteenth century German composers, or as in Baker & Faulkner’s study (1991) that examines the shifting combinatorial patterns in Hollywood filmmaking and sees roles as resources to enact positions in evolving organizational settings.

More generally, sociologists of art are good at exploring how organizational or aesthetic innovations induce role combinations and hybridizations and transform both the content of cooperative activities and the extent of control over new market resources—see Moulin 1992, on the case of the entrepreneurial artists who work as performers and producers of services in the contemporary visual art markets; Christopherson 1996, on the emergence of entrepreneurial filmmakers whose managerial skills blur the lines between management and labor; Kealy 1979, on the emergence of the hybrid ‘artist mixer’ in rock music; Hesmondhalgh 1996, on the entrepreneurial strategies of sound mixers and DJ’s in the dance music record sector.

Wherever practice needs a specific training, the center of the artistic role constellation is traditionally the teaching role, the most frequent ‘pool’ profession (Abbott 1988) or ‘host occupation’ (Freidson 1986b) for creative artists. This teaching position in the arts has been compared by Baumol as well as by Freidson to the role of teaching in academic life, which hosts and supports research activities; this might explain why creative artists so often consider themselves researchers. The paradox of artists whose educational profile as a group is close to that of managerial and professional occupational categories but has far less impact on their earnings can also be solved. Throsby (1996) shows that relationships between arts income and art training may be strong for arts-related activities such as teaching whereas income from primary crea-

tive practice is more influenced by on-the-job experience. Human capital and role versatility considerations militate for arts-related rather than nonarts jobs and portfolio choice considerations for stable salaried supplementary jobs: teaching fits best. White (1993) suggests that the artist as teacher combines two opposing forms of career, one (teacher) that represents the image of the traditional career, since it entails seniority and some ordered sense of cumulation from training, and another (the artist as genius) that is built on originality and conveys a sense of destructive creation. That paradoxical role combination is especially striking in avant-garde music (Menger 1983) and visual arts (Moulin 1992).

Methods for dealing with risk may be classified in terms of individual, co-operative and collective action (Peacock & Weir 1975). In a sense, multiple job holding and role versatility blur the frontier between individual and collective action: Artists, as suggested above, may better be conceived as small firms, drawing resources and building careers from changing combinations of roles, income sources, work settings, and employment statuses. Similarly, artists may share the occupational risk by pooling their resources together as in the case of groups of visual artists (Simpson 1981, Crane 1987), who provide each of their members with mutual support, or of the main symphony orchestras in London, which operate on a self-managed organizational basis, with musicians being shareholders of their own company and cumulating that position with freelance hirings elsewhere (Peacock 1970). Most of the small organizations in the live performing arts (dance companies, chamber orchestras, baroque and contemporary music ensembles), work on this co-operative basis, which recurrently brings together workers who are themselves already mini-firms.

Sociological studies on the collective action of unions in the arts are fewer than those devoted to state and public support for the arts. One common feature of the unions' intervention concerns the income transfers and redistributions that may allow workers to adapt to more flexible and more disequilibrated artistic labor markets. Apart from traditional direct (grants, awards, salaries, income guarantees) and indirect (purchases of works, tax and social security facilities) forms of public support to artists, which are mostly prevalent in European countries (Mitchell 1992) and mainly intended for self-employed creative artists, collective action regarding the artistic labor markets deals with the funding of nonprofit organizations such as performance companies that employ artists as well as with the impact of increasing flexibility. Paul & Kleingartner (1994) show that in the US film and TV industries, the actors', writers' and directors' unions, unlike craft unions, have expanded in spite of the introduction of highly flexible production. A three-tier compensation structure allows artists both to be covered on an egalitarian basis (through minimum pay rates), to allow those whose market value exceeds union scale to negotiate ad-

ditional compensation, and to get additional payments (residuals) for the reuse of the films and TV programs to which they have contributed. This last device can hardly be underestimated. Residual compensation, whose total amount now matches total initial compensation, softens the impact of work intermittency by generating a passive income stream. As film and audiovisual markets expand and flexibility increases, residuals as the focus of labor relations in that sector symbolize the shifts that result from the collective bargaining process. The French unemployment insurance system put in place for artists and craft workers in the performing arts plays a similar role of compensating these intermittent workers for their recurrent unemployment spells (Menger & Gurgand 1996).

## THE OVERSUPPLY OF ARTISTS

The oversupply of artists has been underscored nearly as often as sociologists, economists, and historians have dealt with artistic labor markets. One could hardly find a piece of research where an excess supply of artists is not documented. Disequilibrium seems to be a sort of permanent critical situation. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the glut of novelists and poets in Paris, as analyzed by the late Cesar Graña (1964), led to Parisian bohemianism and accounted for the success of the “art for art’s sake” ideology, which acted as a compensating device for the subordination of the artist to the impersonal market forces. In several other European countries, literary proletariats were similarly spawned by the mid-century publishing boom.

The Impressionists’ revolution took place in a Parisian art world whose institutional apparatus—the Academic system—was collapsing, as the pressure from the greatly expanded number of professional painters on a framework conceived to handle a few hundred men increased and as the functional gaps in the system widened. White & White (1965) show how control was lost over the flow of recruits through art schools, the flow of paintings produced, and the careers of the painters: A free market took over to launch innovative artists and movements, on a more flexible and also much riskier basis of open competition involving dealers, critics, painters, and buyers. Supply was no more to be regulated, so that oversupply was known to become a permanent feature of that market. In Berlin and München, at the turn of the century, the art market, as depicted by Lenman (1989), was similarly overcrowded with painters competing for recognition and success. Periodic panics about the glut and the high rate of unemployment didn’t deter students from entering art schools in growing numbers. In his minute study of the music profession in Britain, Ehrlich (1985) reports substantial evidence of a glut at the turn of the nineteenth century, at the end of a 60-year period during which musicians had become one of the fastest growing professional groups; he shows how musicians, aside from la-

menting over the damnable flood, tried to react to the pressures of relentless competition and its consequences (very low fees and depressed incomes, underdealing practices,...) by establishing professional associations and trade unions, despite increasing segmentation among the workforce.

In each of these cases, a similar array of factors is invoked: a rising level of demand (enhanced by factors such as urbanization, increasing educational level, growing incomes, more leisure time, public support), changes in the commercialization of art, which bring market principles of organization and bargaining into harmony with the stream of artistic innovations, and technological innovations affecting the transmission and the distribution of art. Unlike short-term fluctuations that may be provoked by fads and fashions, long-run shifts causing an increase in private and/or public demand trigger an expansion in training facilities, and more artists appear. But, as Ehrlich shows in the case of musicians, inflexibilities may dramatically hinder the equilibration process if demand turns down, as in the case of the briefly flourishing demand for musicians in cinemas that collapsed with the coming of talkies. Existing practitioners are trapped in a disintegrating market while new aspirants continue to flood in. The training system may play an unintended role in the self-congesting spiral of oversupply, since teaching positions and kindred activities in nonprofit art organizations shelter artists from occupational risks.

Innovations in artistic production, as a result of the interaction between new techniques, aesthetic shifts, and market transformations, have often been studied in respect to their impact on labor supply. Some of these innovations tend to lower or to modify the usual skill requirements and/or the quantity of input factors in the production process, resulting in an increase of the artists' productivity, a growing competition among them, and a declining control over entry and professional practice through the traditional devices of the professionalization system. Among numerous possible examples, we may cite the new methods of production of paintings in seventeenth-century Holland (Montias 1996), the deskilling process at stake in many avant-garde innovations in visual arts (Moulin 1992), and the pop music revolution (Peacock & Weir 1975) and the success of dance music (Hesmondhalgh 1996), which can be partly explained as the result of the widespread availability of production technology, of the transformation of the record industry, of shifts in authorship, and of the segmentation of market demand. Technical innovations, like motion pictures, radio, television, records, and other recent changes, increase the extent of scale economies in artistic and entertainment activities (Rosen 1981). As the market supply of works and services grows, the scope of each performer's audience gets larger, and more numerous artists are induced to enter the labor market, though some occupational trades and niches of specialization may disappear. Even if there is a resultant greater concentration of the distribution of rewards among the most talented, who can operate on an international scale, the lure of

enormous rewards and large social recognition may favor an occupational gambling behavior, as success seems like a lottery game in a more speculative market of talents.

In itself, the population of small-sized cultural organizations has been described as a contributing factor to innovativeness, but effects on artistic employment have not been underlined as much. Indeed, the population of employers and small organizations in the cultural sector is surprisingly numerous; in the cultural industry, although oligopolistic market control by major companies remains a striking feature, mainly through the control of distribution and finance (Aksoy & Robins 1992 and Storper's reply 1993), a vertical disintegration scheme at the production level can hardly be overstressed, resulting in an increasing number of independent film producers (Christopherson & Storper 1989, Storper 1989), record companies (Burke 1997), and publishing houses (Boin & Bouvaist 1989). In the performing arts, the expansion of the nonprofit sector and the increase in public support have favored the multiplication of dance companies (Sussmann 1984) and theater groups (Menger 1997). Even if demographic trends concerning the rise and fall of organizations differ across the various arts scenes (for an extreme example, see the case of dance music; Hesmondhalgh 1998), on the whole, the expansion of the craft-administered production sector, with its growing product differentiation, acts as an inflationary labor supply factor since it draws on an increasing number of aspiring young artists. Lower costs pose fewer barriers to entry, but a substantial share of the risks are transferred to the artists who face a fiercer competition and more uncertain career prospects.

Here one should think not only in terms of artists' oversupply at an aggregate level, as a result of growing interfirm competition in more contestable markets, but also of an intraorganizational process designed to deal with an uncertain and turbulent market environment. Organizational flexibility in the arts plays a major causal role in structural oversupply. Employers in project-based organizations seek to draw from a large pool of artists and personnel in order to build efficient and well-matched teams, because they may gain from the variety of talents and skills at hand, and to reduce overheads. Similarly, for record companies or book publishers, as highlighted in Hirsch's pioneering paper (Hirsch 1972) and Coser et al (1982), overproduction of new items, along with allocation of numerous personnel to boundary-spanning roles and cooptation of mass-media gatekeepers, is a rational organizational response to an environment of low capital investments and demand uncertainty, especially in the most speculative and entrepreneurial segments of the market. Because of a strategy of differential promotion of the numerous items released, the corporate sponsoring is only focused on a small proportion of them.

More generally, however, the notion of oversupply has to be questioned (Killingsworth 1983), since it refers to a disequilibrium in only one of the labor

markets that artists supply, that of their principal vocational work. As stated above, when multiple job holders cycle between rationed and less- or unconstrained job markets, or when individual, cooperative, and collective devices of compensation for and insurance against risk are at hand, notions of underemployment or oversupply may be hard to apply, provided that work under such a steady "management of risk" scheme is more attractive than occupational alternatives outside the arts sphere.

The oversupply issue may then be split into two more precise questions: How constrained and rationed is the vocational job market? And how does the market of arts-related jobs evolve?

Regarding the first issue, it appears that under a highly flexible working scheme, the competitive nature of the artistic labor markets is enhanced so as to increase the variability of individual situations. Indeed, estimating one's chances of success may be increasingly difficult since long-term career prospects disappear behind a daily strain of getting credits; and variance in reputations is accordingly higher too. Thus, the explanation of oversupply by the 'risk-taking behavior' scheme seems to be especially appealing: where information about the quality of the individual occupational match is delivered only through on-the-job experiences which are more and more fragmented, and aspirants are not screened at the entry. Oversupply consequently stems from the sorting mechanism on which the competitive labor market relies: The resulting segmentation of the artistic work force means that at each point in time there seem to be shortages of talented workers and an excess supply of less talented ones (Towse 1996).

As to the second issue, part of the arts-related contingent jobs or stable positions are offered by publicly supported institutions. Employers of course are better off if they do not incur the major part of the costs of securing pools of employable artists. One unintended consequence may be a highly unbalanced growth in artistic employment. Through short-term contractual ties, employers take no responsibility for most of the elements that constitute a career, so the social and human costs of the structural excess supply of workers fall on public cultural policy as well as on personal means of risk management. Moreover, market organizations sort out talents without any relativistic scruple, in contrast to public support policies.

## CONCLUSION

The contemporary artistic scene is more contestable. On the one hand, the valuation process is subject to more volatility, leaving more room for speculative bets and for joint action by several categories of actors to promote artistic movements, innovations, and fashions. On the other hand, a paradoxical alliance has emerged that unites the obsessive conservation of cultural heritage

(the result of a long-term selection process) with the promotion and support of the New. Because they are consecrated and offered for public admiration in museums, concert programs, books, and audiovisual or computerized archives, an ever-increasing number of pieces of art and culture act as permanent reminders; one cannot forget that this selection has emerged from an even greater stock of works whose significance and value needed time to be correctly appraised and sorted out. This legitimates a transfer of the title and merit of past artists and creators onto their contemporary heirs, be these known or unknown at this time.

Uncertainty here plays a major and highly ambiguous role. On the one hand, as discussed above, uncertainty means that art is a risky business. On the other, uncertainty, as it surrounds any decision to support new artistic creation, also provides a true rationale for the public support of artists.

According to DiMaggio (1986), uncertainty is at the core of the evaluation of any work, and this uncertainty principle bears on collective choices, from both an intra- and an intergenerational equity point of view. Uncertainty, as it disappears over time, turns into an extremely skewed distribution of fame and success, in the long term.

Thus, it can be claimed that it is in the interests of society at large to nurture an oversupply of artists so as to have the best possible choice of talented artists. Indeed, as pointed out by Nisbett & Ross (1980), people sometimes may require overly optimistic or overly pessimistic subjective probabilities to goad them into effective action or to prevent them from taking dangerous actions. The social benefits of individually erroneous subjective probabilities may be great even when the individual pays a high price for the error.

Cultural policies as regarding patterns of public support for artistic labor markets may be at odds with the way firms and entrepreneurs take advantage of the attractiveness of artistic occupations and of individual erroneous expectations. Increasing flexibility, which can be associated with higher rates of artistic innovation or, at least, with increasing differentiation in production, transfers more and more of the occupational risk down onto artists. Artists may only partly manage it through individual strategies of diversification. Public policies are burdened with another part of the costs of insurance against individual risk (that of low income and low reputation) as well as social risk—that of having innovations underrated and of experiencing a suboptimal cultural development.

Actually we never know exactly of which kind is the uncertainty that, in the short term, has to be managed through insurance devices: Is it exogenous or endogenous? Should a lack of jobs and an unsuccessful career be attributed to insufficient ability? Or is it due to insufficient demand for the kind of ability with which the artist is endowed? Moreover, ability and talent themselves may be ambiguous: “Talent” should be considered not only as an exogenous factor

of market success but also as an endogenous factor shaped by competition through innovation. The more competition raises the rate of innovation or, at least, of differentiation between prototype-like works, in exploiting and stimulating consumer demand for novelty, the more the sorting mechanism will be based on shifting specifications of marketable talent.

Only some of the occupational risks in the arts are insurable. One tends to forget this when the enormous variance in artists' reputations and incomes is ascribed to an endemic crisis of cultural underconsumption because, presumably, demand is on the whole too weak, or, to take another symptom of the same social dysfunction, because consumer preferences are shaped by market forces and by the inequalities on which class societies are based and so become fixed on a desperately limited number of works and artists.

Indeed, this argument neglects the role of an essential factor in the professionalization of artists and in the remuneration of talent by the market: competition and its endorsements, through which those qualities that are temporarily the most prized also become the rarest. Full employment in the artistic labor market would require, on the one hand, a regulation on entry into the profession, and, on the other, either sufficient homogeneity on the supply-side or a high enough degree of insensitivity to differences in quality on the demand-side, such that the substitutability of artists and goods in the various sectors of production ensures against disequilibrium in the market. But, then, on what is that other requirement, that of the free expression of individual creativity, to be based? On artistic individualism; the product of a movement of progressive autonomization and professionalization of the sphere of artistic activities, according to the Weberian analysis, and the force behind competition among artists. To isolate the nonmonetary dimensions of artistic work and imagine that the practice of artistic activity could be at once fully satisfying and risk-free is to ignore the two interconnected principles of the evolution of artistic life. It was professionalization by the market as the organizational form of artistic practices that made possible the triumph of creative individualism; but professionalization also maximizes the role of risk in the choice and exercise of professions in which those who feel called upon to create are infinitely more numerous than those who can succeed.

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