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Looking Back, Looking Forward: Arts-Based Careers and Creative Work

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Abstract

The last two decades of research and policy discussion have illuminated important changes in both the opportunities and challenges facing artists and artistic workers as they pursue their careers and advance their artistry. The authors argue that artists need to be masters of navigating across historically disparate domains, for example, specialization and generalist skills, autonomy and social engagement, the economy's periphery and the core, precarious employment and self-directed entrepreneurialism, and large metro centers and regional art markets. In addition, artists both work beyond existing markets and create entirely new opportunities for themselves and others. As catalysts of change and innovation, artistic workers face special challenges managing ambiguity, developing and sustaining a creative identity, and forming community in the context of an individually based enterprise economy.

Keywords

artists, artistic labor markets, creative workers, cultural industries

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Almost 15 years ago, Pierre-Michael Menger (1999) published his seminal review article on artistic labor markets and careers. Menger raised a critical question that has puzzled social scientists for decades: Why do we see both rising employment and unemployment in the arts simultaneously? What accounts for this structural imbalance where the supply of labor (aspiring artists) outstrips demand (available jobs)? And, importantly, how does this disequilibrium influence arts-based careers? Menger and others have convincingly demonstrated that the oversupply of artists and arts-related workers is due to a number of factors including the low barriers to entry (e.g., no license or degree required to practice), the lure of autonomy and freedom, and a chronic underestimation of the risk involved and chances of success (Alper & Wassall, 2006; Menger, 2001; Neff, Wissinger, & Zukin, 2005; Throsby, 1992).

The uncertainty faced both by cultural organizations as well as artists shapes decisions and work arrangements throughout the cultural sector. Cultural organizations manage uncertainty through project-based work and flexible employment, using short-term contracts to hire artists to do specific jobs on a case-by-case basis, thereby avoiding high overhead costs while remaining adaptable to shifting marketplace demands (Storey, Salaman, & Platman, 2005). Artists manage uncertainty—including high rates of unemployment and underemployment—by holding multiple jobs, gaining continuous on the job learning and stretch work that allows them to compete for many different types of jobs and occupational roles, and developing and maintaining strong social networks in order to keep abreast of opportunities and to secure jobs through multiple referrals (Bridgstock, 2005; O'Mahony & Bechky, 2006; Pinheiro & Dowd, 2009; Throsby & Zednik, 2011). While developing and extending their skill sets is an important way for artists to manage contingency and uncertainty, other scholars have focused on the symbolic work that artists do to build reputations, convince others of their legitimacy as artists and professionals, and, importantly, to make sense of their precarious existence, find worth in what they do, and persist in spite of daunting personal and professional challenges (Grazian, 2004; Jones, 2002; Lena & Pachucki, 2013; Lloyd, 2010; McRobbie, 2004a, 2011; Neff et al., 2005).

Since Menger's article, both scholars and policy makers continue to study artists and explore ways of nurturing and supporting artistic careers. Our goal in organizing this special issue was to examine both what insights continue to hold true as well as what has changed over the past 15 years in our understanding of artistic careers. Importantly, along with important recent scholarship, we wanted to include the

perspectives of people working in a variety of policy arenas in order to more directly consider how our accumulating knowledge about artists might translate into policies to support artists and creative workers.

But why do we study artists in the first place? And why should we pursue policies designed to support artistic work? Cultural observers and critics, arts leaders, government agencies, and foundations have long been interested in the plight of artists. In 1790, U.S. Congress passed the first copyright law that set out to protect the economic interests of artists (Vaidhyanathan, 2003). In 1933, the Federal government recognized the plight of unemployed artist during the depression, leading to the creation of the Public Works of Art Project intended to employ artists in the decoration of public buildings and parks. In 1965, in part motivated by the Cold War, the United States established the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). The new agency provided individual artist fellowships in support of the vision of the artist as independent and incorruptible and as fearless truth-teller, demonstrating to the world that the American way encouraged freedom and creativity (Brenson, 2001; Dubin, 1987).

More recently, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) adopted recommendations concerning the status of artists, encouraging member states to recognize "the essential role of art in the life and development of the individual and of society" and to "protect, defend, and assist artists and their freedom of creation" (UNESCO, 1980). Ten years ago, 37 national and local funders in the United States contributed to a multimillion dollar research initiative, *Investing in Creativity*, that analyzed support structures for artists in the United States (Jackson, 2004). Most recently, in 2005, the Ford Foundation raised $22 million to support individual artists, arguing "most artists working in their chosen fields can not sustain themselves financially" and that working in "jobs in restaurants, schools, and stores just to make ends meet, leaves little time to create the great works of which they are capable. They need proper places to work and live and reasonably priced health insurance. In other words, funding" (U.S. Artists, 2013). In short, the well-being of the individual artist remains a major concern for both arts leaders and funders.

While there is widespread agreement that both the nation's economic and health interests are advanced by studying and supporting the pipeline of scientists and engineers, nurses, doctors, and teachers, it is less obvious why artists deserve the same attention. Artistic careers are important for a number of reasons. First, scholars are attracted to artistic labor markets because they present interesting economic

puzzles—an oversupply of aspirants, a predominance of project-based work, widely uneven rewards, and rampant unpredictability where all hits are flukes (Bielby & Bielby, 1994; Menger, 1999; Throsby, 1992, 2012). Second, artists are increasingly seen as key economic drivers for cities and nations. In the post-industrial, global economy, many have argued that intellectual property—and specifically art, culture, entertainment, and media—will increasingly represent a growing portion of the gross domestic product. Governments have been interested in how to nurture more creative talent and produce the conditions where such talent can be leveraged to create new enterprises and innovation (Böhm & Land, 2009; DCMS, 2006, 2008; Florida, 2012; Howkins, 2002; Smith, 1998). Third, artistic workers often serve as canaries in the mine, foreshadowing larger trends in employment and careers (McRobbie, 2004b). A recent study by the Department of Labor finds that, on average, Americans between the ages of 24 and 45 will work 11 different jobs in their lifetimes (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). Both self-employment and project-based work are on the rise, and workers increasingly hold multiple jobs, face bouts of underemployment, and work across sectors and occupational roles. Studying how artists cope with uncertainty and the factors that influence their success should be relevant for understanding these broader social and economic trends facing today's (and tomorrow's) workforce.

To introduce this special issue, we first offer a review of critical findings from the last two decades that add new insight to our understanding of artistic careers and labor markets. After looking back, we then look forward, laying out a research agenda for scholars, policy makers, and educators.

From Specialist to Generalist

A significant transformation in America's cultural life took place over the course of the 20th century. With the rise of new technologies and the growth of national art markets, cultural production shifted from the studio to the corporation—from a craft orientation to a well-organized, professional, and differentiated system of work (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944; H. S. Becker, 1984; Negus, 2004; Tepper & Ivey, 2008). Howard Becker (1984) describes late-20th-century art worlds as highly specialized, where individuals with specific talents and technical abilities work collaboratively to produce films, music, advertising, or fine art exhibits. A glance at the rolling credits at the end of a movie reveals the highly differentiated nature of many art worlds today. Moreover, the very

competitive nature of artistic labor markets rewards those who are A-list artists, differentiating themselves based on being the most talented and experienced (Caves, 2002; Dowd & Pinheiro, 2013; Faulkner, 1983; Menger, 2001; Zuckerman, 2005). Thus, we often hear that success in the arts requires a minimum of 10,000 hr of training (Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Römer, 1993; Sawyer, 2012). Many arts training institutions, hoping their graduates will be competitive in high-stakes auditions and for prestigious fellowships, continue to emphasize disciplinary-based skill development, requiring students to specialize and invest countless hours mastering a very narrow skill set.

While specialization continues to be the norm in some artistic fields, the overall pattern, many argue, is toward generalization, flexibility, and broad competencies, rather than discipline-specific skills (Ellmeier, 2003; Iyengar, 2013). Careers have been described as protean, requiring artists to shift and adapt to diverse opportunities and to work in multiple roles (D. T. Hall, 2004; Inkson, 2006). In the current special issue, Kristin Thomson ("Roles, Revenues and Responsibilities: The Changing Nature of Being a Working Musician") describes the many different ways musicians earn a living in today's economy. Others describe these new labor market trends with the term *portfolio careers* (Bridgstock, 2005; Throsby & Zednik, 2011). Success increasingly requires meta-competencies such as broad creative skills, commercial acumen, and the ability to work across multiple media platforms (A. L. Bain & McLean, 2013; Bridgstock, 2011; Haukka, 2011; McRobbie, 2004b; Mietzner & Kamprath, 2013). Pinheiro and Dowd (2009) and Dowd and Pinheiro (2013), for example, find that jazz musicians who play many different genres earn more money and develop larger social networks than those who specialize in just one genre. And not only does success seem to require being a jack of all trades, but artistic aspirants themselves also seem eager to work across occupational roles and to develop more diverse skill sets (Throsby & Zednik, 2011). Today, interdisciplinary degrees and majors are some of the most popular courses of study for art students (Fendrich, 2005).

From the Margins to the Center of Economic Life

Beginning in the 19th century with the rise of Romanticism, artists have positioned themselves as rebels and social outsiders working largely in opposition to the market economy (Røyseng, Mangset, & Borgen, 2007). While many artists work squarely within the commercial

sector, status in the field of cultural production has largely been granted to those artists who embrace an art for art's sake outlook (Bourdieu, 1993). Critics, fellow artists, and the public attach the badge of authenticity to those artists who reject economic motives and embrace the bohemian ethic (Lloyd, 2010; Røyseng et al., 2007). Moreover, since the late 19th century, American elites have supported nonprofit, high-culture institutions—museums, opera houses, orchestra halls, theaters—as a way to institutionalize their tastes and secure their class position (DiMaggio, 1982). These nonprofit institutions further reinforce the idea that the best artists and artworks require support beyond the market place.

This bifurcation between the commercial and the noncommercial, the excellent and the base, the elite and the popular, is increasingly breaking down (Eikhof & Haunschild, 2007). Richard Peterson was one of the first to bring attention to the idea that boundaries between art forms—and between the high and the popular arts—were blurring for arts *consumers*, with high-status consumers shifting from snobbish tastes to omnivorous tastes, liking both reggae and Rachmaninoff (Peterson & Kern, 1996; Walker & Scott-Melnyk, 2002). But recent studies of artistic careers also suggest that artists are willing to move across sectors and no longer see working outside the commercial sector as a badge of distinction or authenticity (Bridgstock, 2013; Ellmeier, 2003). This transformation may, in part, be due to shifts in policy language, with government leaders (Böhm & Land, 2009; DCMS, 2006, 2008; Florida, 2012; Howkins, 2002; Smith, 1998) and academics (Florida, 2012; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2010; Lloyd, 2010) increasingly focusing on the role of artists as drivers of economic growth and innovation. In his article in this issue, Sunil Iyengar, director of Research and Analysis for the NEA, describes how the NEA shifted its focus over the past 5 years to the idea of artists as workers. He quotes the NEA chairman as saying, "The time has come to insist on an obvious but overlooked fact—artists are workers. They make things and perform services, just like other workers, and these goods and services have value—not merely in lofty spiritual terms but in dollars and cents" (2013, p. 498).

Research increasingly demonstrates that most artists work across sectors, and they do so with little regret or concern about selling out (Ellmeier, 2003; Lindemann & Tepper, 2012; Markusen, Gilmore, Johnson, Levi, & Martinez, 2006). Artists are crafting portfolios of jobs that enable them to harness their creativity and earn a living, whether working in nonprofits, commercial enterprise, in their own business, or working for free. The Future of Music Coalition's Kristin

Thomson, a contributor to this special issue, conducted a recent study of artist revenue streams and concludes that "the artist as entrepreneur is now not only possible, but almost a prerequisite" (2013, p. 516). In fact, business and management skills are the number one area that graduates of arts programs wish they had been more exposed to in college (Strategic National Arts Alumni Project [SNAAP], 2011; Tepper & Kuh, 2010).

From Autonomous to Socially Engaged

Our understanding of artistic work and careers is largely influenced by assumptions of unique, autonomous artists who value, above all else, the opportunity to express their individual talents and creative visions (G. Becker, 2001; Boorstin, 1992; Røyseng et al., 2007). Given this view, we place a premium on nurturing and developing this individual spark of genius. On a recent music panel in Nashville, a group of artists' managers talked at length about nurturing and developing artists over a long period, including allowing time to audition different ideas, fail often, and eventually cultivate a core sense of their unique artistic expressions. Charlie Peacock (2012), a Grammy-award-winning producer, remarked, "The goal of the artist manager is to help the artist get to a place where they say, 'Oh, this is who I am; this is what I am supposed to be doing; this is what I want to say.'" While artists have always collaborated to get their work seen or heard, they have long labored under the assumption that freedom and autonomy from social obligation is essential (Tepper, 2011). In fact, the work preference model in economics suggests that artists take on multiple jobholdings, work long hours, and accept low earnings largely because they will do almost anything in order to subsidize their own, individual, art making (Throsby, 1994). But, according to Bill Ivey (2008), former chairman of the NEA in the United States, this autonomy and independence comes at the price of diminished social standing. Ivey writes, "While artists can bring a special perspective to public policy, Americans remain suspicious of artists who insert themselves into the public sphere" (p. 65).

But, importantly, recent work and writing has found that many artists see their roles differently. Instead of an artistic career organized to optimize opportunities for individual creativity, artists instead seek to be socially engaged in their communities. They see themselves as educators, social workers, policy actors, and health providers (Lena & Cornfield, 2008; Simonds, 2013; Throsby & Zednik, 2011). And Nick Rabkin (2013), in his article for this special issue ("Teaching Artists: A Century of Tradition and a Commitment to Change"), points out that the role of

the artist as both educator and social service provider has a long history, beginning in the United States with the settlement movement inspired by Jane Addams and the Hull House in Chicago. And today, Rabkin reminds us, more arts graduates end up in education than in any other occupation.

In addition to teaching, many observers have described the growing trend toward social practice art. According to a recent story in the *New York Times*, practitioners "freely blur the lines among object making, performance, political activism, community organizing, environmentalism and investigative journalism, creating a deeply participatory art that often flourishes outside the gallery and museum system" (Kennedy, 2013, p. AR1). While artists have long used their artwork to make political statements, contemporary social practice art has become one of many ways in which artists can build careers. Such art engages community members less as audience and more as active participants. Importantly, its creation and presentation requires working with community partners outside of the arts, navigating community politics, and gathering resources from agencies, nonprofits, and other social service providers. Most artists do not have the training required for this type of work; likewise, most arts institutions and funding agencies have no experience supporting and recognizing such work (Brown & Tepper, 2012). So while the opportunities for socially engaged art might seem abundant, such artists fall in the cracks between existing institutional structures that are set up to support either art making or social service provision, but not both together.

From the Precariat to the Self-Empowered

Artists are often depicted as victims of a post-Fordist economy. Companies have shifted the risk of creative work onto artists who are underemployed when business is slow, pay for their own education and continued training, work multiple jobs to make ends meet, and survive with little social provision, health care, or affordable housing (A. Bain & McLean, 2013; Eikhof & Warhurst, 2013; Ekinsmyth, 2002; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2010; McRobbie, 2002; Neff et al., 2005; Standing, 2011). Importantly, for critics of neoliberalism, creative workers get lured by the hype of autonomy and creativity only to find themselves exploited by low wages, part-time jobs, and often unglamorous routine work (Comunian, Faggian, & Jewell, 2011; Crawford, 2009; McRobbie, 2002). The artistic precariat find themselves employed in "career-less jobs, without traditions of social memory, a feeling they belong to an occupational community steeped

in stable practices, codes of ethics and norms of reciprocity and fraternity" (Standing, 2011, p. 12).

But the post-Fordist economy, while creating uncertainty and risk for artists and creative workers, also cedes a great deal of control to those who work as freelancers. Today, we see a reversal of classic economic arrangements where capital hires labor. Instead, talented individuals—whether artists or software designers—are hiring capital, management, and related services (e.g., studios, presses, social media platforms, publicists, distributors) in order to take creative projects of their own choosing from concept to market.

As we write this article, the subject line from an incoming marketing e-mail from a company called Entrepreneur the Arts reads, "Are you ready to design your life?" The email offers a series of workshops geared toward artists to "take your creativity someplace you want it to go. . . ." Similarly, the front cover of the July 6 issue of Billboard reads, "The New DIY, Your Career in Your Hands." Featured on the cover is a smart phone with a dozen different icons, each representing a different part of the work a modern musical artist must master: record tracks, distribute music, promote brand, engage fan base, book tours, sell tickets, handle merch, shoot videos, raise capital, manage yourself, and secure synchs. The article suggests that, thanks to new technology, "independent artists can control their own destinies wherever they are, from their phone, tablets and laptops" (Nagy, 2013, p. 22).

Throsby and Zednik (2011) argue that artists increasingly see these other activities as useful new assets in their career portfolio, an evolving patchwork of projects, jobs, educational experiences, and skills. Similarly, Charles Handy (1995) argues that creative workers shun traditional career trajectories and, instead, "develop a product, skill, or service, assemble a portfolio that illustrates these assets, and then go out and find customers for them" (p. 26). Ultimately, today's artists increasingly take responsibility for their careers; they are proactive and self-directed, anticipate change, and transform their skills and attitudes to accommodate such change (Inkson, 2006). As Bridgstock (2005) notes, this portfolio of skills allows artists to switch from seeking employment security to security in employability.

Throsby suggests one implication of the portfolio career is that emerging artists need to be exposed to specific training in career management. Similarly, Bridgstock (2011) argues that it is critical for arts training institutions to help students develop an entrepreneurial artist identity, which involves being able to identify creative opportunities consistent with core values and purpose, and then generating ventures

or enterprises, finding collaborators, and pursuing these opportunities. She argues that artists must approach their career strategically:

> They must make a realistic appraisal of their current skills and knowledge in the context of the present state of the industry, whilst maintaining a strong idea of their personal career goals. They must then use their professional networks to identify and to exploit emerging strategic opportunities to showcase their transferrable work skills and gain new ones. (Bridgstock, 2005, p. 44)

But, as many have pointed out, collecting a portfolio of skills, especially in a competitive marketplace, may require aspirants to work for free just to get experience. In his ethnography of music business interns appearing in this special issue ("Making the Intern Economy"), Alexandre Frenette (2013) describes the challenges that interns face in developing meaningful skills in the context of low-status and highly ambiguous (and ambivalent) roles.

From the Core to the Periphery

Scholars have long recognized the importance of cities for creative and artistic work. Large cities benefit artists in part because they provide a more robust arts market, with a larger and more educated audience; they exhibit agglomeration effects, where a dense networks of cultural producers and project-based work make it easier for artists to piece together employment; and historically, core cities—that is, Vienna, Paris, New York, Los Angeles, and London—both develop reputations as artistic hubs and serve as magnets for artists seeking the aura and status of the city as sources of validation (e.g., "you're not a real artist unless you've made it in New York"; Blau, 1992; P. G. Hall, 1998; Shaw, in press). While both small and medium-sized cities have seen their artistic assets—museums, performance halls, and theaters—grow in the last 50 years, research on creative workers in the United States has disproportionately focused on core cities—New York (Crane, 1989; Currid, 2006, 2007; Heckathorn & Jeffri, 2001; Neff, 2005; Pinheiro & Dowd, 2009; Zukin, 1995), Chicago (Grazian, 2005; Lloyd, 2010), and Los Angeles (Faulkner & Anderson, 1987; Scott, 1996, 1997).

Yet recent research suggests that many artists choose to work in peripheral cities, and that understanding the labor market dynamics of these second-tier or off-center cities is critical to understanding artistic workers in the 21st century. Ann Markusen's 2013 article for this special issue ("Artists Work Everywhere") demonstrates that a majority

of artists "work outside of the three largest megalopolises, especially in medium-sized cities and metros, where their shares of the workforce sometimes exceed national averages. Even farther from the stereotype, many artists choose to work in small towns and rural areas." Markusen's research shows that cities such as Boston, Seattle, Minneapolis/St. Paul, San Diego, Nashville, Miami, and Washington, DC, have above average artist concentrations. Many of these second cities have magnet industries that make them attractive to artists, for example, advertising, film, technology, and music. Pacey C. Foster's 2013 article in this issue ("Mobile Project Networks") shows how the budding film industry in Boston is creating a collection of highly mobile, creative projects that support a growing cluster of creative workers and service firms.

Yet artists also move to second cities because they are both more affordable and offer a better quality of life. With growth and dispersion of arts training institutions across the country, many artists today spend considerable time in cities where they attend school. During these formative years, they develop dense networks of teachers, classmates, and local artists; such a supportive and familiar environment may be hard to leave, and many graduates stay and work near their alma mater after graduation. In fact, SNAAP reports that 35% of all graduates stay and work in the city where they attended school, with the largest numbers remaining in nontraditional art cities in the Midwest and South (SNAAP, 2013).

Importantly, as artists build careers in second cities or off-center art worlds, many seek ongoing connections with center cities (e.g., New York, Los Angeles) in order to boost their reputations and their market opportunities. Samuel Shaw's (in press) research on contemporary visual artists in Portland and Nashville, for example, shows that many off-center artists are forced to build their career translocally, both by seeking network connections and exhibition opportunities elsewhere and by working to establish a positive reputation for their local scenes. Similar to the other trends discussed earlier, the movement from center to periphery is complicated, and most artists occupy a space somewhere between the two poles. As discussed later, this presents some unique challenges for artists in both forging their own artistic identity and establishing an ongoing community of support and practice.

Looking Forward: A Focus on Artistic Catalysts as an Agenda for Future Research

Much of our research and writing about artistic careers has been focused on the fundamental economic irregularity of an oversupply of

labor—too many aspirants for too few jobs—and questions such as: What drives people to pursue (and continue to pursue) work where the risk/reward ratio is so skewed? How does this oversupply structure the market in terms of wages and contracts, self-employment, winner-take-all dynamics, and the nature of gatekeeping? The oversupply thesis assumes that the system is stable and static—that we are seeking an equilibrium where a certain set of workers are matched to an equal number of jobs, requiring a certain set of skills applied across a discrete set of industries and sectors.

The last two decades of research and policy discussion have illuminated important changes in the opportunities and challenges facing artists as they pursue their careers and advance their artistry. Artists need to be masters of navigating historically disparate domains—for example, specialization and generalist skills, autonomy and social engagement, the economy's periphery and its core, large metro centers and regional art markets, artistic imaginations with pragmatic, commercial tasks—as they seek to create ways to capture income from their creative talents.

Moreover, artists are not only navigating these disparate domains; they are also synthesizing and integrating across them, all the while developing new, emergent opportunities for securing resources, projects, expertise, and jobs. In the cultural industries, labor markets are dynamic, entrepreneurialism is rampant, and the ceaseless push for innovation means that opportunities emerge quickly and often bring together newly combined resources and talents. In such an environment, focusing on artists working within a fixed labor market of professions and occupations needs to be coupled with an emphasis on artists as catalysts of change and innovation (Cornfield, in press). Artists are not only using hybrid roles and skill sets to secure legitimacy and resources for their projects (Baker & Faulkner, 1991), but they are also inventing wholly new titles, products, and markets that do not yet exist.

Studying artists as change agents and system innovators requires new research questions. Instead of trying to isolate the skills, work practices, contracts, wage differentials, employment incentives, formal credentials, employment pipelines, and labor flows of differentiated occupational categories, we argue that scholars who study cultural industries need to pay attention to the role of artists as catalysts of change. We need to better understand how artists both create changes in the labor market itself and the way cultural work is done. What is their process of innovation and enterprise? What is the nature of their work and the resources they draw upon? How do different network structures produce different opportunity spaces? How do artistic workers create and manage

planned serendipity—the spaces and exchanges that produce unexpected collaborations and opportunities? And how do creative workers broker and synthesize across occupational, genre, geographic, and industry boundaries to create new possibilities?

Nexus Work: Managing Ambiguity in Creative Projects

As artists advance their creative projects from idea stage to implementation, they need to garner and bring together resources, expertise, and commitment from across disciplines, genres, organizations, communities, and industries. While generating ideas is a key first step, recent research suggests that if implementation of those ideas is required, researchers must also pay attention to how the ideas and perspectives of contributors to the project are integrated and synthesized (Fleming, Mingo, & Chen, 2007; Ibarra, Kilduff, & Tsai, 2005; Lingo & O'Mahony, 2010; Obstfeld, 2005). More specifically, Lingo and O'Mahony (2010) suggest that creative producers must strategically leverage and manage three types of ambiguity in their integration work (or what they call *nexus work*): differing interpretations and perceptions of where the project is going (what is success?), who should have control over decisions (who is the expert?), and how the work should proceed (what process should we use?). A focus on ambiguity provides an important distinction from existing research in the cultural industries that has examined uncertainty in the labor matching and resource-gatekeeping process. Unlike uncertainty, ambiguity cannot be resolved with additional information. Instead, ambiguity arises when multiple interpretations are both possible and present and is made more salient when the leader of the project does not have clear authority over others involved. If ambiguity is not managed deftly, conflict over claims to control and expertise can undermine both commitments to the project as well as the project's ultimate success. In many ways, all of the changes described earlier suggest that dealing with ambiguity will be the key challenge and opportunity for artistic workers in years to come.

Building off Lingo and O'Mahony's (2010) work, further research is needed that examines how a broader range of cultural producers—representing different disciplines, art forms, and different types of creative projects—manage ambiguity arising in their work. For example, how did the creative team seeking to advance the +POOL project, a civic project to design a floating, clean river swimming pool in New

York's East River, manage ambiguity as they worked with federal and state officials, engineering firms, citizens, and crowd funding backers to advance to the pilot phase of their project? Do additional types of ambiguity arise as artists embark on civic projects and, if so, how do artists manage this ambiguity? What support structures and work practices are more or less useful for artists as they advance projects that integrate resources, expertise, and support across different combinations of genres, art forms, cities, industries, and purpose?

These findings have particular relevance for educators interested in preparing their students to be catalysts of change and innovation. First, they must look beyond traditional entrepreneurial courses focused on marketing and finance to courses and experiences designed to prepare artists to not only invent and imagine but also to deftly respond to ambiguity by navigating the implementation of their often complicated, collaborative, and multifaceted projects. Such experiences might help focus on the ability to improvise and respond in the moment; elicit the ideas and interpretations of others; translate and share ideas across disciplines; broker and negotiate differences in perspectives, goals, and interests across contributors to their projects; build coalitions; and analyze and manage obstacles to change—for example, technological, cultural, social, political, and organizational. Increasingly, this is the future context that awaits many artists and artistic workers.

Cultural Work and Identity

The protean career described both earlier and in the pages of this special issue requires the constant reinvention of the self (D. T. Hall, 2004). But successful reinvention also requires a core, stable, artistic identity. As Inkson (2006) notes, "the paradox might be that the more the career protagonist stays the same (on the inside) the more he or she has a firm base around which to change (in adapting to different roles)" (p. 59). Dealing with uncertainty, setbacks, and constantly shifting opportunities requires artists to have a strong personal compass—a sense of what makes them tick, what they are good at, and what network of enterprises or projects will best sustain their career (Gruber, 1988; Zwaan, ter Bogt, & Raaijmakers, 2010). The elements of this identity include answers to such questions as "Who am I?" "Who do I want to be?" "What is important to me?" and "How can my work advance these values?" (Ghassan, Bohemia, & Stappers, 2011).

But, what are the cultural resources available to artists as they forge their artistic identities? Richard Lloyd (2010) demonstrates how artists

draw on the long-standing cultural narrative of bohemia to justify their marginal economic position: Aspiring artists, largely from middle class backgrounds, take working class jobs in order to live like an artist. Others discuss the importance of the charismatic myth for young artists, a belief that they are called to be artists because of their extraordinary talents (A. Bain, 2005). This myth, according to Menger (1989), maintains the artists' belief in magic and supernatural powers that can help them persist in the face of insecurity (as cited in Røyseng et al., 2007, p. 3).

But, Røyseng et al. (2007) argue that this identity, based upon the charismatic myth, is difficult to sustain as artists work increasingly outside of institutions dedicated to perpetuating the myth (i.e., noncommercial arts institutions) and as boundaries blur between popular and fine art as well as between nonprofit and commercial culture. Interviews with young artists reveal that they still believe they have a special gift, and many believe artistic work is a calling. But they also reinterpret the myth in ways that emphasize the hard work involved in becoming an artist, the routine and unglamorous aspects of their careers, and the integral role commerce plays in their lives. Grimes and Lingo (2013) find that the socialization process of artists and entrepreneurs (whether in entrepreneurial incubators or creative studios) involves supplanting the myth of artists as individual, heroic geniuses with a more collective and commercially oriented conception and practice that involves both advocating for one's idea while also eliciting and synthesizing the input of others.

Nevertheless, (and as noted earlier), consistent with the bohemian ideology and reinforced through public discourse about contemporary art, artists often see themselves as outsiders. Wittkower and Wittkower (2006) capture this aspect of artistic identity when they note that "The 'otherness' of artists is widely accepted by the general public . . . . there is an almost unanimous belief that artists are, and always have been, egocentric, temperamental, neurotic, rebellious, unreliable, licentious, extravagant, obsessed by their work, and altogether difficult to live with" (as cited in Gaztambide-Fernández, 2008, p. 233; see also Getzels & Csikzentmihalyi, 1976). George Becker (2001) notes how such an image creates a self-fulfilling dynamic: Artists and creative individuals come to believe that true artists display these personality traits and then organize their identities in part based on these traits to signal to others that they are true artists. But, with the changes discussed earlier (e.g., self-employment and promotion, entrepreneurialism, project-based work, social and political engagement), artists increasingly work in settings that require a different set of personality characteristics

and dispositions, for example, professionalism, marketing, negotiation, political acumen, and sociability. Thus, today's creative artists might best be described as having complex personalities that allow them to succeed in multiple contexts. Such complexity, resulting from a breakdown in clear roles, creates what Fred Davis (1994) calls *identity ambivalence*, contradictions between one's self-image and the image and expectations that society has of you. Laurie Fendrich (2005) argues that today's aspiring artist is caught in a "tug of war over what exactly constitutes an artistic identity" (p. B6).

So, artists need a strong creative and artistic identity in order to handle diversity, risk, and failure while sustaining their purpose and passion in the absence of regular financial rewards (Bridgstock, 2005, 2011, 2013; D. T. Hall, 2004; Inkson, 2006). But the old tent poles of this identity are strained by structural changes in not only the art world and the economy but also by new artistic practices and contexts that challenge traditional notions of who an artist is and what an artist does. We need more research on what sustains creative identity as artists move across diverse contexts and increasingly find themselves working in nonarts jobs (Pachucki, Lena, & Tepper, 2010). How are their identities reinforced? What type of communities and what sorts of connections help sustain their creative identities? In their research on graduates of arts training institutions, Lindemann and Tepper (2013) find that an artist's creative identity should not be taken for granted. For example, some arts graduates have a more portable creative identity than others and therefore are able to see themselves as creative even when working outside of the arts or in a variety of everyday contexts. In short, we need a robust theory of artistic identity that takes into account how artists become *professionally socialized* in a world where the definition of professional artist is murky and the locations of socialization are varied and diverse.

Communities of Practice and Support

Much of what is described earlier and in the following pages reflects a postbureaucratic, deunionized, and highly individualized world of work. Two blocks from the Curb Center for Art, Enterprise and Public Policy, Nashville's historic Music Row is showing signs of decline. In its heyday in the 1980s and 1990s, Music Row was a bustle of music labels, publishing houses, and, most importantly, music studios. But the remaining large studios exist mainly as historical markers of a bygone age. Increasingly, musicians are working from their home studios, recording

digital tracks and sending them to producers and engineers through the Internet, who assemble tracks from other musicians, also working remotely, into the final product. In short, while there are still important physical spaces where musicians and arts-related workers gather in Nashville, more and more work happens in isolation. Thus, the itinerant cultural worker (Barley & Kunda, 2006) must marry the benefits of free agency with the downside of social isolation and the breakdown of traditional occupational communities. Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2010) quote a freelance music writer who sums up the isolation felt by many artists: "You don't talk to anyone, you don't see anyone anymore" (p. 38).

While such isolation may seem extreme, a larger issue raised by this introduction and the special issue is how artists can create new forms of community and collective support in the absence of traditional organizations, unions, and professional communities (Wittel, 2001). Dowd and Pinhiero (2013) in this issue ("Ties Among the Notes: The Social Capital of Jazz Musicians in Three Metro Areas") remind us that the social life of the artists and the networks that form as a result have a large impact on artistic careers. Wittel describes new forms of network sociality where independent media workers mix work and play through monthly salons, networking events like First Mondays, regular dinner parties, conferences, and speed dating events. These intense, if fleeting, interactions are the "paradigmatic social form of late capitalism and the new cultural economy" (p. 72). Similarly, Dan Cornfield's forthcoming book *Agents of a Changing Art Word: Creating Community in an Enterprising Age* attempts to identify the way entrepreneurial artists are remaking vital artistic communities in an increasingly individualistic art world. He describes artists who start businesses to help promote and support other artists; he also describes artistic advocates who create nonprofit organizations that provide a range of professional services from career development to economic, legal, and policy functions. Cornfield also describes how unions themselves are being transformed to offer new health insurance programs, practice space for musicians, and new wage scales for artists who work in nontraditional settings. Similarly, Markusen describes the important role played by artist centers such as the Minnesota Center for Book Arts and the Ninth Street Media Consortium in San Francisco where artists can learn, network, get and give feedback, exhibit, perform, and share space and equipment (Markusen & Johnson, 2006).

Furthermore, entrepreneurial artists who regularly stretch the existing horizon of possibilities regularly encounter both failure and the

isolation of working across boundaries while not quite belonging to any of the groups that they span (Shorthose & Strange, 2004). Who do they turn to for support as they embark upon their experiments? Where does community and networking reside? Additional research is needed that examines the emerging platforms that both foster community and support the boundary-spanning work of these artists. Such inquiry should examine both funding platforms (e.g., Kickstarter and IndieGogo) that connect artists with interested funders as well as search platforms (e.g., CollabFind) that provide ways for individuals to search and connect with specialized talent—local or global—for projects. While these platforms provide support, do they also create ties that bind? Do they provide mentors? Do they create safe spaces for artists to audition ideas and get feedback? What is the role of conferences (e.g., Better World by Design) in feeding a sense of community and support for nonroutine projects among like-minded artists? How can policy makers augment and foster these types of community?

Returning to the Question of Why We Study Artists

This special issue offers both evidence of and argument for new ways of thinking about artistic careers as well as fruitful areas for future scholarship and policy making. While we can justify such research and policy in our efforts to grow and support the creative economy and economic competitiveness, we should also recognize the important contribution artists make not only to our economic bottom line but also to our culture and heritage. There is a popular line among Nashville music industry leaders, adopted by the Nashville Songwriters Association International, that "it all begins with a song." The expression calls attention to the belief that the success of an artist, an album, a record label, and the entire music business depends on extraordinary songs written by talented artists. In other words, regardless of the changes in how art worlds are organized and the structure of artistic labor markets, in the end we must consider the art itself.

Focusing on the quality and content of art is particularly important as we seek to generalize insights from artistic careers and creative production to other creativity-based industries. What do the labor market dynamics described earlier and throughout this special issue mean for art and the production of novel ideas and innovation in other contexts? How do these different work arrangements, different ways of developing a career, and different motivations change the type of art and creative

outcomes available to the public? How does the structure of artistic work shape the innovation, excellence, content, and themes inscribed in our books, films, music, galleries, and performance halls, and what does this imply for creative workers in other contexts? In the past, scholars have looked at macroeconomic structures and their impact on cultural production (Peterson & Anand, 2004; Peterson & Berger, 1975). But how do daily career and work pressures facing artists influence what they choose to work on and the talents they bring to their chosen projects? When artists forge their careers in the highly public spaces of YouTube and Facebook, does it influence the quality and content of their creative production? Fewer young artists today have the luxury to develop their artistic voice within the safety of a record or publishing deal, or in a long-term contract with a gallery or a theater. Today's artists are exposed to market forces, audiences and fans, and critics much earlier and much more often. How do these factors influence the risks artists take and the projects they work on?

Now is the time to reconsider how to bring the work itself back in to our studies of artistic careers and the creative workforce (Barley & Kunda, 2001). As other disciplines seek to incorporate skills and practice from artistic careers and work—for example, Philadelphia University's Strategic Design MBA for Hybrid Thinkers™ embraces empathic listening, user-centered design, integrative thinking, and rapid prototyping to address today's business challenges—we need to better understand how artistic creativity is influenced by career decisions: The strategies for getting and finding work, the ways in which artists develop and sustain networks, the ways in which they promote themselves, the teams they assemble to make and market their work, and the integrative work involved in bringing creative projects from idea stage to implementation in 21st-century markets. We believe that the contributions to this special issue begin to illuminate the careers of artistic entrepreneurs who often work in between existing institutional spaces, and, in so doing, redefine both how culture works (Schudson, 1989) and the work of culture.

Authors' Note

This introduction and the special issue more generally deals with both artists —for example, those who create original works of art—as well as those who work in roles that support its production and distribution—producers, managers, agents, publishers, editors, and so on. Throughout the essay, we use *artists* as shorthand for both artists and *arts-related workers*.

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