

***“Statistics in the Wake of Challenges Posed  
by Cultural Diversity in a Globalization Context”***

**Are there too many artists?**

**The “excess supply” issue : a measurement puzzle,  
an increasingly flexibility-driven functional requirement  
and an unavoidable mismatch effect in creative activities**

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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 USA, over the period 1970-1990 the number of artists grew at a rate of 127 per cent, 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 towards a higher proportion of women. By contrast, ethnic composition of the artistic workforce remains considerably disequibrated, the non-classical 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 a highly unbalanced growth. Several historical studies on artistic professions have repeatedly insisted on an 'oversupply of artists' phenomenon, which they have associated to changes in the organizational apparatus of the artworlds or to technological innovations or, more radically, to 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 towards flexibility, helps to understand 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 1970's and the 1980's, 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 non profit sector of services for artistic training and for conservation and display of cultural heritage. Public spending under non-arts headings (e.g. local economic development, urban regeneration) as well as support for the cultural industries have 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. The anthropological definition of culture has become more and more legitimate as public support has taken into consideration the local community level and its whole apparatus (amateur activities, associations, so called socio-cultural 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 which 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, that 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 towards 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) 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 per cent work in the cultural industries with cultural occupations, 40 per cent have cultural occupations outside the cultural industries and 35 per cent 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 occupation is determined; 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 and 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 and 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 or 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.

### **The 'excess supply of artists' phenomenon: historical evidences and explanations**

The excess supply of artists has been underscored nearly as often as sociologists, economists or 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 provides another example. It took place in a Parisian artworld 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 and White (1965) have shown 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 lamenting 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 are 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.

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 (Crane, 1987; Moulin, 1992), and the pop music revolution (Peacock & Weir, 1975) or 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.

The delayed reaction of training systems to sudden shifts may play a major role in favouring temporary oversupply. Unlike short-term fluctuations that may be provoked by fads and fashions, long-run shifts causing an increase in private and/or public demand for the arts trigger an expansion in training facilities, and more artists appear. But, as Ehrlich (1985) 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 which collapsed with the coming of talkies. Existing practitioners are trapped in a disintegrating market while new aspirants continue to flood in.

Today, excess supply of artists has still, and more than ever, its scenery and its seasonal congestion peaks: whereas the dramatic example of the 19th Century annual or biennial Salon exhibition in Paris had been for a long time the true symbol of a congestion phenomenon in the arts, with exhibition halls full of paintings from the bottom to the ceiling (as satirically drawn and painted by Daumier), we can think today of the bookstores overwhelmed by crowd of debutant writers' novels, especially at the start of the literary calendar - how often do critics lament over the crazy publishing policy that releases hundreds of such novels over a very short span of time, during the literary prizes peak period in Paris. Or take the example of the simultaneous release of many big-budget movies on the same weekends, quoted by Camerer and Lovallo (1989) in their study on overconfidence and excess entry. One may also mention the ever more numerous classical musical contests with queues of contestants trying to win a prize and to attract critical and public attention. Yet, in this case, filtering procedures are less than vague, and one might expect that Camerer and Lovallo's remark (1999, p. 315), according to which, "when the criterion for success is more vague, people or firms should be more likely to overcompete, since ambiguity permits excess optimism" should not apply.

Excess supply of artists raises scientific disputes among economists: Frank and Cook (1995) call into question the way the winner-take-all markets operate, with their damaging features: the winner-take-all payoff structure generates a spiral of individual and social occupational waste, since it leads both to increasing (monetary and non-monetary) reward inequalities and to overcrowdings in the markets and occupations prone to an overestimation of one's chance to succeed. As a result, when excess numbers of contestants are induced to invest in performance enhancement in order to rise their individual odds of winning, these investments will be mutually offsetting and socially inefficient; end consumers may get more valuable products but the social cost are excessive. By contrast, Cowen (2000) argues that, as shown by Rosen (1981), firstly the superstars effect is welfare-improving (consumers get better performances) even if it leads to raising income inequality, but secondly, that the superstar phenomenon should not be overstressed. Indeed, fame is a positive-sum game, not a negative nor a zero-sum one.

Instead of an unambiguously increasing concentration of rewards, Cowen states that countervailing forces operate, such as a convergence of quality that limits the ability of the very best stars to dominate the market for long, or more radically the elastic supply of fame, so that when demand for fame increases, the numbers of prizes, rewards and whatever fame generating distinctions is rising too.

## **Contingent work and the metrics of supply and demand analysis of the labor market**

Casual work and self-employment are today the prevailing work arrangements in the arts. Although long-term contracts exist in large and permanent organizations like symphony orchestras, operas houses or architecture firms, most artists work casually under short-term conditions and craft workers in the cultural sector are increasingly hired on that basis. Proportions vary with national contexts and occupations but trends are similar. The steady increase in the number of artists across all art sectors during the 1970's, 1980's and 1990's 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) or French surveys (Observatoire de l'emploi culturel, 1998a & 1998b).

How does freelancing and contingent work affect the way we analyze the artistic labor force?

Let us point to discrepancies between the supply and the demand approach of artistic labor markets and to their consequences for the "excess supply" issue.

From the labor supply standpoint, one should say: one individual equals one career, however successful that career might be. Of course, that may be true when employment relationship stands on a long-term basis and when careers are well patterned.

But, if short-term hirings and self-employment prevail, there is a gap between the vocational commitment and the way it transforms into work and it results in a career. Self-employment, freelancing and contingent work, which are the prevailing work arrangements in the arts bring into the picture discontinuity, repeated alternation between work, compensated unemployment, non compensated unemployment, searching and networking activities, cycling between multiple jobs inside the arts sphere or across several sectors related or unrelated to the arts.

Therefore, statistics on numbers of artists, such as those from Census surveys or from professional guilds or unions sources, have to be considered cautiously as indicators of the artistic labor supply and, accordingly, of the actual level of unemployment.

From the labor demand standpoint, things seem simpler: the focus is on contracts, hirings or on works sold on the market.

Thus, in contrast to the aggregate view of art as an occupational world, the labor market here is investigated at its most disaggregated level, that of the series of hirings, of work

opportunities and of bargaining relationships. These represent an individual artist's working life in a given period; when considered longitudinally, they display a career trajectory.

Disaggregated data lead to statistics on the amount of labor demand expressed in terms of quantities and prices of work.

If one brings supply and demand together, the main issue is: what is the impact of the fact that labour demand is expressed mainly in terms of contingent work? Numerous studies have shown that 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 nonarts work.

In their extensive study on the vertical disintegration and flexible specialization trend in the Hollywood film industry and on its effects on the labor market, Christopherson and Storper (1989) show that through subcontracting, financing and distribution of independent producers, utilization of less costly production methods and expansion of auxiliary 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.

Recent research on the French performing arts labor market leads to similar results (Menger, 2001). The data reported in the figures 1 to 3 are from the Caisse des Congés Spectacles, a fund that collects employment records from the artists and other technical and administrative personnel employed as intermittent workers in the performing arts in France - nearly 90% of the labor force in that sector. Records come from each individual hiring, with mention of the working time and the amount of fees. These records are registered in order to provide the personnel with monetary compensation for the legal vacation time they are entitled to claim, according to the legal rules governing contingent employment.



Figure 1

Trends in the French Performing Arts Labor Market : 1986-1997  
Disaggregated Data

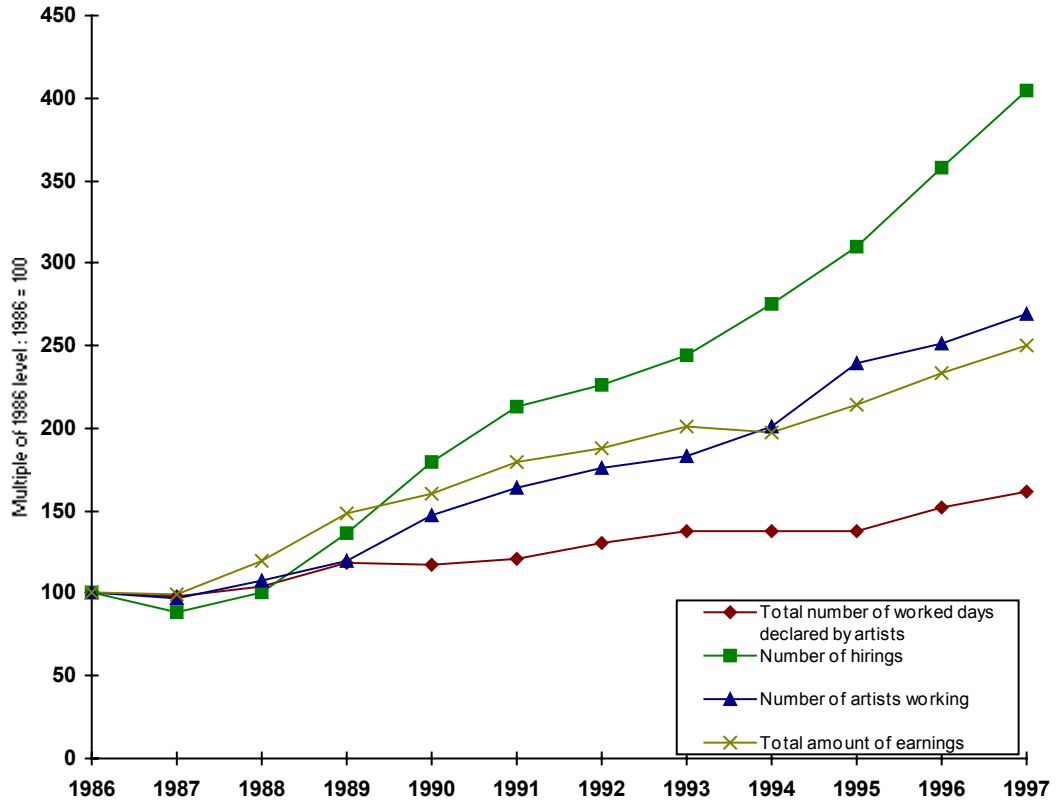


Figure 2

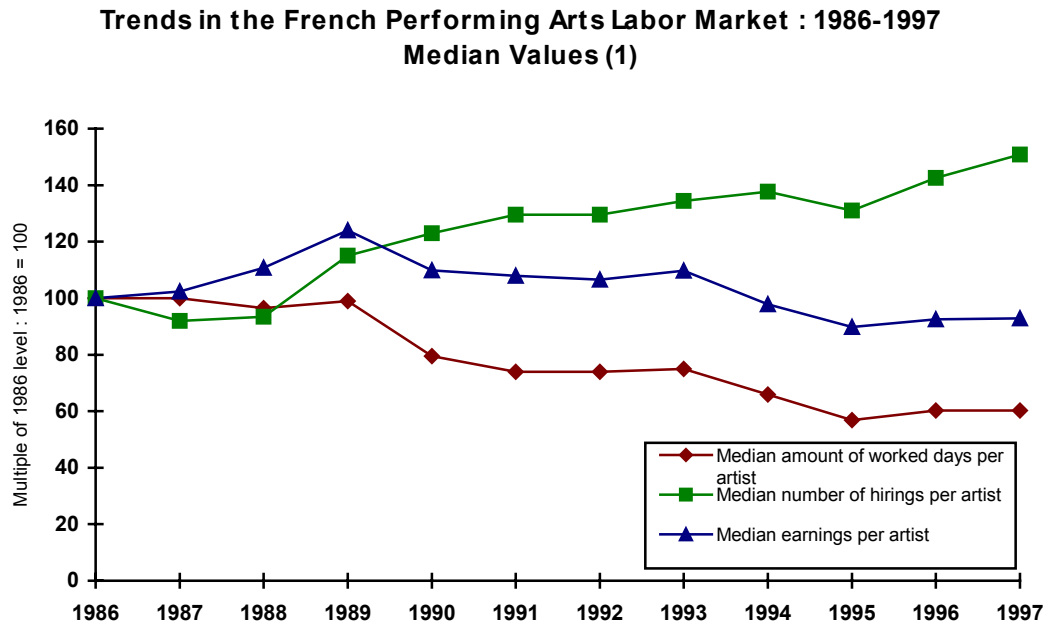
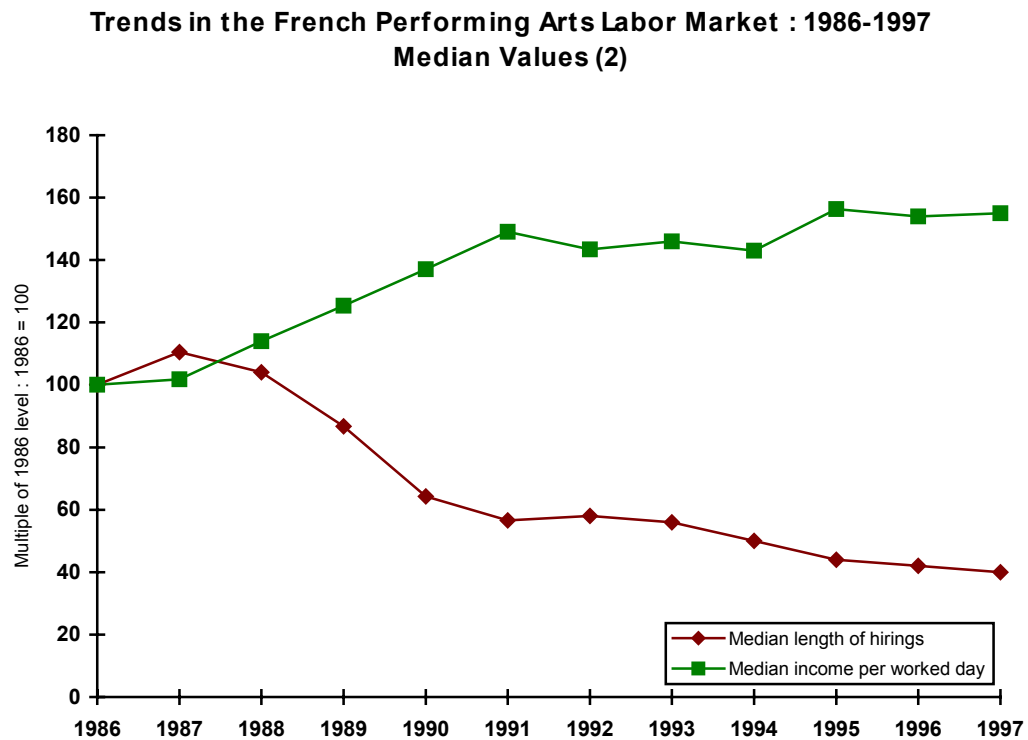


Figure 3



As shown in figure 1, the French labor market for the performing arts has constantly expanded over the period 1986-1997. However, the trend of the supply of work (the number of artists working) and the demand side trend (the number of hirings, the number of worked days declared and the total amount of earnings) evolved at rates of increase that differ significantly. As a result, displayed in figure 2, the median amount of working time and earnings per artist (unadjusted for inflation) decreased over the period, although the number of hirings increased: individual intermittent work was increasingly fragmented in shorter hirings, and competition turned out to become fiercer among the growing numbers of artists sharing the less rapidly growing "work pie". The last figure illustrates the way people are partly compensated for the increasing risk that goes along with the shortening of individual hirings; on the whole, however, the decrease of median earnings over the period indicates that employers do not insure the artists they choose to hire under such a working scheme against the consequences of the unbalanced growth of that labor market: employers and consumers may benefit from the increasing variety of talents supplying their work, at the expense of the increasing level of unemployment or underemployment, or at least at the expense of increasing variability in the individual working situations, both across the workforce and during the career of each artist.

The overall result is that of an increasingly wider gap between the trends depicting the evolution of each side of the market.

### **Excess supply and monopolistic competition**

The artistic labor markets seem to correspond to the spot market model of textbook economics. Ironically enough, the arts appear to have been forerunners in experiencing the trend toward increasingly flexible labor markets; I should even say, toward hyperflexible markets: freelancing means indeed that one may be hired for only two or three hours, without any costly dismissal procedures.

But it is in fact a rather paradoxical competitive market: on one side, employment is more and more contingent, as we used to see for secondary labor markets, but on the other side individuals are highly skilled and nonsubstitutability is a core value, as in the so-called primary labor market. At the same time, segmentation of the workforce may be so strong that in fact the seemingly old-fashioned distinction between primary and secondary markets remains somewhat relevant.

Things might be better conceived in terms of a monopolistic competition with some of its essential features: high differentiation of products (goods and labor services, that is works and performances), a large variety of consumer preferences and excess capacity of production, which is a common trait of imperfect monopolistic competition (Lancaster, 1979). The application of a monopolistic competition model to the market of art works, which are durable and highly differentiated goods, is fairly known. But one might speculate about extending the model to the market of inputs in itself, that is to the labor market.

In theory, the supply of artistic talent is infinitely differentiated: An artist's reputation provides her with a temporary monopolistic position on the market, as long as her skills and talents are in demand. However, the evaluation and employment of talent obey in practice to much cruder schemes of hierarchization like the 'A-list vs B-list' distinction (Caves, 2000). So a

strong objection could be raised here: may we apply the same analytic tools to the different strata of a population of artists since the level of reputation, the amount of work and the occupational success vary considerably among them? Shall we consider as monopolistic suppliers of their own work artists who face a rather inelastic demand curve, due to their (temporary or strongly established) fame, as well as artists who are induced to act as monopolistic suppliers (i.e. to trade their human capital and work as freelancers) although their market value and market power are very poor? In the latter case, artists, either young aspiring ones, or moderately or poorly successful experienced ones, face the risk attached to a self-employed or quasi self-employed position without benefitting from the rent attached to its seemingly monopolistic supply.

In fact, as the contingent 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: accumulation of hiring records acts as a reputation signal in a self-reinforcing process: hiring calls for more hiring. 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; Debeauvais *et al.*, 1997).

In addition, one should note that the population of employers and small organizations in the cultural sector is surprisingly numerous. In the record and motion picture 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), record companies (Burke, 1997), and publishing houses (Boin & Bouvaist, 1989). In the performing arts, the expansion of the non-profit 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.

Thus contingent employment magnifies numerical flexibility for those who are handled as substitutable workers in the lower segments of each category of occupational role, although they felt attracted to an artistic occupation by claiming to be endowed with a unique set of skills, talents and abilities.

Consider now the creative artists, whose compositions, paintings, manuscripts, screenplays are put up for sale by gallerists, publishers, talent agencies and so on. Because most of them are self-employed, it would seem meaningless to simply equate fewer working hours with unemployment spells or underemployment levels. Their income, which reflects whether

their works and services 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 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, since the price acts as a signal of quality and a decrease in the pricing 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, yet suffer from low or very low income levels, and develop a sense of null or even negative correlation between effort and earnings, as reported in many studies (e.g. Jeffri, 1991; Moulin, 1992).

However, the monopolistic competition approach gains much more explanatory power if a familiar trait of artistic life is brought into the picture, that of multiple-job holding, and, more generally, that of the diversification of activities and resources along an insurable risk-taking behavior scheme.

### **What kind of worker is the artist? A professional? An entrepreneur? A skilled contingent worker? A microfirm?**

Several studies, mainly in a socio-historical perspective, have equated the great artist with a kind of innovative entrepreneur designing not only stylistic innovations but also new organizational ways of working and distributing his or her work; see for instance Alpers's study on Rembrandt (1988), or Elias'one on Mozart (1993), or Fitzgerald on Picasso (1995). Basically, current individual work trajectories combine more and more traits from professional as well as from entrepreneurial careers. Artistic careers exhibit low loyalty to organizations, and, like professional careers, they rely on reputation certified by the community of peers and by the inner circles of experts and middle men in the art worlds.

One striking dimension of the segmentation of the labor force has to do with the entrepreneurial skills a number of artists acquire on the job. For, although brokerage has emerged as a major device for mediating labor allocation and matching processes in a highly fragmented and segmented labor market (DiMaggio, 1977; Bielby, Bielby, 1999), artists may be induced to exercise supervisory or managerial skills and, in so doing, to blur the line between management and labor (Christopherson, 1996). In that respect, the artist's earnings, like those of any self-employed worker, depend not only on her skill, talent and effort, but also on how well she performs the managerial and entrepreneurial functions (Aronson, 1991).

And organizational or aesthetic innovations may induce role combinations and hybridizations that shift or extend the entrepreneurial 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; Hesmondhalgh, 1996, on the entrepreneurial strategies of sound mixers and DJ's in the dance music record sector. Artists set up more often than not companies or fringe firms.

More generally, the artist may be viewed as a microfirm when attention is given to the supply of the numerous bits of work and efforts out of which the artist makes a living: the way she acts to supply work in several related markets and to perform various occupational roles within his artworld points to the differentiation of the working profiles that underly the competition among artists not only for success in the vocational labor market but also for securing and maintaining a position in the art world taken as a whole.

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 the 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). Wassal and Alper (1992) review a number of surveys which document the extent of multiple job holding among artists, including their own 1981 survey of 3000 New England artists, which found that only 24 per cent 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/non arts earnings distinction as providing a more complete picture of artists' income sources, but that simple dichotomy in itself does not go far enough. In order to capture the full range of relationships between labour supply and earnings experienced by artists, a three-way division of working time and earnings is essential (Throsby, 1996, Menger, 1997): that between 1) 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, practising), 2) 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; 3) non-arts 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).

The range of various resources and jobs may be compared to a portfolio of financial assets (Faulkner, 1983, Menger, 1989). As to the management of artistic work in itself, that way of handling uncertainty corresponds to 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 relies on a mix of tightly and loosely coupled work associations. With sectoral diversification of hirings, artists may also be financially better off and have greater career continuity on 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. 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 an artist copes with uncertainty throughout his career<sup>1</sup>.

Finally, artists may share the occupational risk by pooling their resources together as in the case of groups of visual artists who, at least for a while, provide their members with mutual support (Simpson, 1981, Crane, 1987), 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 act themselves already like microfirms.

By bringing the several components of this 'management of individual risk' scheme into the picture, we see that the excess supply issue has an analytical weakness, if the notion of oversupply refers to a disequilibrium in only one of the labor markets supplied by the artists, that of their principal vocational work. As stated above, when multiple job holders cycle between rationed and less- or un-constrained 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

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<sup>1</sup> 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 labor market only up to the point where an adequate return was received to support their primary artistic work.

steady "management of risk" scheme is more attractive than occupational alternatives outside the arts sphere.

Thus the question "are there too many artists?" comes close to the following one, which has been already raised above, and which is customary in dealing with monopolistic competition: are there too many small firms and businesses?

### **Excess supply, individual and social costs and remedies**

The oversupply issue may be split into three more precise questions: how constrained and rationed is the vocational job market? And how does the market of arts-related jobs work? How insurable is a risky occupational prospect that is socially so highly valued?

Regarding the first issue, it appears that under a highly flexible working scheme, the competitive nature of the artistic labor markets is enhanced: accordingly, the variability of individual situations is increasing. 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, 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). Are there devices that may alleviate this competitive pressure?

There is a whole apparatus of collective agreements and social institutions that substitute for the missing role of the normally unique employer, so that creative industries, surprisingly enough, are heavily unionized. This apparatus evolves. One could hardly find today barriers to entry which limit access to artistic jobs as under labour institutions regulating access to jobs like the roster system, or like any powerful licensing system to deter untrained candidates from jobbing. Compensation devices are the most common feature: compensation for uncertain labor prospects exists, for example, in the performing arts since intermittent artists and workers earn much higher hourly wages than those employed on a long-term basis.

The three-tier compensation scheme<sup>2</sup> depicted by Paul and Kleingartner (1994) shows how collective bargaining contracts and regulatory mechanisms have evolved due to technological

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<sup>2</sup> According to Paul and Kleingartner, "All the MPTV basic agreements contain provisions that cover all workers on an egalitarian basis. Minimum pay rates, grievance procedures, work rules, seniority protection, health coverage, and retirement benefits are examples of such provisions. In this regard, MPTV basic agreements resemble union contracts in most other industrial sectors. They go beyond those provisions, however, to provide a framework for individual bargaining by higher echelons of union members. That framework is contained within a three-tier compensation scheme the elements of which are conceptually distinct but intertwined in practice: 1) a basic minimum pay rate; 2) a framework for workers to negotiate individual personal services contracts; and 3) an industrywide system of supplemental payments, that is, residuals." A. Paul, A. Kleingartner, 1994, pp. 667.



innovations and new market opportunities and how unions may adapt to keep their viability in a context of increasingly flexible production. Instead of protecting jobs from increasing contingency, unions may bargain for the payment schemes to adjust to the new opportunities offered by an enlarged and more diversified distribution of artworks and entertainment products. In France, unlike in most countries where the Unemployment Insurance is beyond the reach of the freelancers, intermittent work is equated with a wage-earning position, in the performing arts, and so allows workers who are eligible (*i.e.* those who meet the criterion of a certain amount of work over a given period) to get compensated for the unemployed periods of time (Menger, Gurgand, 1996). Indeed, the relationships between professional work and organizational versus spot market labor contract settings diversify more than ever, and so does the whole range of models of individual vs collective bargaining over one's employment terms.

These compensating schemes operate at the industry level: the reward premium they provide 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, individual differences in working probabilities are not subject to compensation. Thus, since private employers leave aside most of the elements which constitute an artist's career, the social and human costs of the structural excess supply of workers fall to the individuals with their own scope of occupational risk management techniques as well as to public cultural policies and to non-profit organization support.

As to the second issue - that of arts-related work opportunities - the "diversification of risk" approach, in focusing on the combination of insecure and secure sources of income, 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 Baker and Faulkner's study (1991) which examines the shifting combinatorial patterns in Hollywood filmmaking and sees roles as resources to enact positions in evolving organizational settings.

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, 1986) 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 creative practice is more influenced by on-the-job experience.

Here one should note that side labor markets like that of teaching may have inflationary effects when they absorb artists unable to make a living in their vocational field. As shown in several studies (e.g. Ehrlich, 1985, Menger 1997), the training system may play an unintended role in the self-congesting spiral of oversupply, since teaching positions and kindred activities in non profit art organizations shelter artists from occupational risks.

In any case, art worlds, like sport worlds, would not be able to attract enormous numbers of aspiring professionals nor to sort them out so bluntly if they did not supply a whole range of occupational roles apart from the most enviable and most rewarding ones, and if the economic viability of the vocational as well as of the related labor markets did not rely on a sophisticated mix of funding sources and compensation devices. In that respect, the excess supply persists and evolves insofar as the nexus of ties between several intricately labor markets evolves in itself. So art worlds not only stand the oversupply of artists, but nurture on it, insofar as artists may set up portfolios of resources and of work experiences whose existence and viability go well beyond the frontiers of the artistic worlds in themselves.

Thirdly, one may ask which occupational risks are manageable and insurable, and which are not. Which individually, through different schemes of diversification of work and income sources? Which collectively, on a professional community basis? And which socially, through cultural policy support? Answers may vary greatly among the different art worlds, depending on their whole institutional apparatus.

A common feature of the political and public, lay or academic, debate about the arts is that of the social costs and benefits of artistic excess supply. Consider how uncertainty, which is the core of artistic creativity as well as of labor market organization, plays a highly ambivalent role. On the one hand, uncertainty means that art is a highly desirable and admired affair but also a highly risky business. On the other hand, uncertainty, as it surrounds any decision to support new artistic creation, also provides a true rationale for the public support of artists: since an ever increasing number of pieces of art and culture are consecrated and offered for public admiration in museums, concert programs, books, and audiovisual or computerized archives, they 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, and this enhances a betting behavior on short-term or long-term success and on immediate or deferred fame.

According to DiMaggio (1986), uncertainty is at the core of the evaluation of any work and this uncertainty principle bears on collective choices, both from an intra- and intergenerational equity point of view. Uncertainty, as it vanishes 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 and Ross (1979), people sometimes may require overly optimistic subjective probabilities to goad them into effective action. 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. On the one hand, public policies may be burdened with a significant part of the costs of providing artists with direct support or with work opportunities in the arts-related occupations. On the other hand, market organizations sort out talents without any relativistic scruple, in contrast to public support policies: support may encourage aspirant artists to enter the market and alleviate the filtering process up to a 'social policy' egalitarian scheme, that suffers from contradictions on both extremes of the talent distribution - artists sorted out by the market or by the 'invisible college' filtering process complain about the damaging effects of a paralyzing oversupply; unsuccessful artists militate for extending a support policy whose efficiency is hardly sensible enough.

### **Conclusion: talents, misallocations, optimal matchings, uncertain prospects**

Self-employment and contingent work may magnify the oversupply of artists, by blurring the frontier between functional flexibility and numerical flexibility. But they obviously do not explain why oversupply has been for such a long time a structural trait of artistic worlds.

Things would be simple if artists could form quite correct expectations about their chances of success, or at least, of decent living within the occupational sphere they choose to enter. Competition would seem to be less wasteful, failures and occupation switchings less frequent if not marginal, misallocation of talents due to excessive lure of stardom or of self-achievement promises would not hamper the development of other occupational worlds that might be short of such diverted abilities, training systems would not favor wasted investments, and competition might gain in fairness, since artists would have enough time to prove themselves. Such an argument has a strong and a weak version: the strong version is that of an optimal allocation of talents according to an 'optimal division of labor' scheme. Such a world can be found in functionalist models of society, originating in Durkheim's work but also in some economic models of welfare analysis of work, such as Lancaster's optimal division of labor model (Lancaster, 1979), where people should be optimally matched to the occupation where their abilities and skills are better employed: required is of course the optimization of the educational and training system that detects abilities and provides individuals with the best-fitting skills and the use of optimal reward schemes that deter people from choosing what happens to be their first-best occupational fate<sup>3</sup>.

This view could hardly apply to art. In its sheer essence, art has been celebrated and valued as the symbol of creative, innovative and non-routine work. Creative and non-

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<sup>3</sup> The two Lancasterian propositions in his welfare economics of work are:

- the optimal match proposition:

"Among all the allocations of persons to jobs which satisfy the requirement that every person holding a job has the skills needed to perform it, there is an optimal allocation."

- the optimal division of labor proposition:

"If the number and specification of jobs can be varied, there is an output-maximizing division of labor which gives the greatest output from the skills available in the population and an optimal division of labor which gives the greatest overall welfare from work and consumption. The output-maximizing and optimal divisions of labor need not be the same." K. Lancaster, 1979, pp. 326-327.

routine work provides psychic and social gratification proportional to the degree of uncertainty of success. The more the work is non-routine, 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 non-routine 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 non-routine 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.

What does non-routine imply? That performance in non-routine 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, 1986, 1990). Insofar as non-routine 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.

So a weaker form of the "optimal division of labor" argument is the optimal trial-and-error process. If talent can be detected more rapidly, then quit rates in artistic professions will be much higher and turnover rates will help forming more realistic expectations about one's chances. And if artists behave rationally, 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.

In a more realistic dynamic occupational choice model, informational considerations are brought in, as in the job matching approach of occupational choice (Miller, 1984) that seems to fit 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 costly and rewarding 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. Workers accumulate skills through experience and learning-by-doing. As non-routine 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 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 non-routine enough.

Many artistic occupations provide this kind of information only through a 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

seldom exists), 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. 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.

However, the applications 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 with 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), which designs the consolatory counterpart of the world depicted by Frank and Cook - a 'loser-take-all' society standing beside the winner-take-all society. Hence the rather puzzling challenge faced by the statistical measurement and account of careers and achievements in the arts.

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