

Artistic Jobs in the Digital Age

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Like all other jobs in present times, jobs in the artistic field are changing under the influence of digital technology, but how widespread this is remains unclear. Because the essence of artistic activity lies in the artist's creativity, some feel digital technology has affected only a very small component of artistic activity, mainly the most peripheral. Although digital technology has affected artists, its influence is most perceptible in allied activities such as sales, management of space, and the solution of problems related to funding. The view that digital technology has only a minor effect on the arts undoubtedly stems from the belief that the production function of artistic activity requires a large amount of skilled work and very little capital. As the argument goes, because digital technology decreases the amount of capital required, its effect on artistic activity is marginal.

However, this line of reasoning reveals only part of the truth. If we unquestioningly accept the viewpoint that the production of artworks depends almost entirely on creative talent, we will likely gloss over the changes taking place in the way artists work and communicate. In this article, I explore two examples—writing and image-production (Greffe 1999).

In the case of literary activity, some believe that digital technology affects only the manner of reproducing signs and not the content—a view that limits the role of digital technology to the production of new and better typewriters/word-processors. According to others, digital technology brings about a distinct

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improvement in distribution methods by disseminating information suited to the nature of users or by speeding up supplies. The emergence of online writing or hypertext, which enables writers to turn their readers into potential partners or even coauthors (Greffe 2002, 56–68), provides the most obvious example; the change introduced in such cases has the potential to revolutionize the very nature of artistic creation and shift the traditional boundaries separating artists from those who use their creations.

The production of animated images has also undergone a substantial change.¹ In the beginning, the audiovisual sector concentrated on the production of original works that gave rise to as many new copyrights. Its products can be rerun, but the system depends on the creation of new products rather than on the revival of old ones. In the case of cinema, there is a marked asymmetry between information about the product and transaction costs: each film is a “prototype,” and consumers face a lack of information about the quality of the product offered. Consumers must therefore bear the corresponding transaction costs to know the quality of the product offered with the minimum assurance of reliability. Finally, consumers of services provided by the cinema consume them as a group in cinema halls. Very soon, however, television will create the virtual reality of a theater in the viewer’s home. With the advent of digital technology, new audiovisual products aim to produce new rights in addition to taking advantage of the existing rights that are a legacy from the past. Apart from artists, there are a number of categories of professionals involved in editing and blending images, whose activity is sanctioned too through the recognition of derivative rights.

These two examples—literary activity and the production of animated images—represent the two extremes of artistic production and reveal the influence of digital technology. In the first case, the very notion of the artist is questioned, whereas in the second, the notion of boundary is questioned. Digital technology influences the contents of artists’ products as much as the environment in which artists work and gives rise to a new situation for artists: artists must now become entrepreneurs who organize and manage their own talents. To do so, artists need a variety of skills. This new situation for artists challenges the old division between the artist and the craftsman.

THE EFFECTS OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY ON ARTISTIC ACTIVITY

The Contents of Artistic Activity

The first effect of digitization is to facilitate the circulation and transmission of ideas, references, patterns, colors, and so on. Databanks provide artists with more information than they can obtain through reading and travel. We know that, at one time, travel played an important role in the training of artists

and in rousing their sensibility. Even in the absence of these resources, digital technology allows artists to exchange information as part of a network. It is interesting to note that, in the field of plastic arts, the percentage of artists who use computers is higher than that of the entire population and that all artist working in the audiovisual field use computers.

This first effect is surpassed in importance by the second, which has made digital technology a new element of artistic production. In some cases, digitization helps artists develop and test the coherence of some creations, notably, pictures and plastic forms. In other cases, digital technology has given rise to “almost novel artistic creations,” such as special effects. In both cases, it has become an increasingly important element of the activities involved in artistic production, bringing significant technical and economic gains.

It would be wrong to think that digital technology has affected only the applied arts or the creative industries rather than arts in the strict sense of the word. For some artists, digital technology becomes important only when artistic products are associated with well-defined industrial and economic objectives. They expect digital technology to set them on a rational path necessary for industrialization. We are not yet fully aware of the potential of digital technology, but at present, we have reason to believe that its contribution to music and the plastic arts will be substantial in the future. By combining elements of simulation, coherence tests, exchanges, and revisions, it is possible to extend the scope of artistic activity beyond the narrow core of artistic creativity, thus bringing artists closer to workers who do not have any creative abilities. As a result, the traditional boundaries between art and craft, between the artist and the skilled worker, break down somewhat. In my view, this erosion of the boundaries will lead to a series of new cultural job profiles (figure 1).

The third effect of digital technology relates to public participation in the creation of works of art. By “public participation,” I do not mean the usual tests conducted in the motion-picture industry to determine whether a film is likely to please the public, an exercise that will determine the optimal editing of the film. Rather, I refer to the deliberate introduction of the public as a participant in the definition of a work of art, thereby giving it a role of a similar nature, if not of the same dimension, as that of the artist.

We have already mentioned the role of on-line writing in making the distinction between authors and public disappear. Walter Benjamin, in several essays, described similar changes in the relationship between writer and audience. In his essay “The Storyteller” (1935), Benjamin claimed that the craft of storytelling by peasants, artisans, and merchants in preindustrial society grew from personal experience and carried the traditional wisdom of proverbs (Benjamin 2001). Later, in his essay “The Author as Producer,” Benjamin explained how “the distinction between authors and public begins to disappear” and “the reader is already ready to become a writer” (quoted in Shiner

Media actor
Camera actor
Acoustic actor
Virtual studio actor
Motion picture actor
Moderator of virtual media sets

Creativity consultant
Arts consultant
Media communicator
Multimedia planner
Multimedia project manager

Designer
Installation designer (galleries, museums, night clubs, etc.)
Multi-media designer
Lighting designer
Performance designer

Printer online-publisher
Typesetter media editor
Cutter media designer

FIGURE 1. New cultural job profiles.

2000, 266). We must also consider the effect of digital technology on contemporary and electronic art. In some museums, for example, artists allow the public to put the finishing touches on a work of art by changing some elements or adding new ones. Such efforts are intended to develop a specific philosophy of art—digital technology cannot help but facilitate this development.

The use of digital technology has made possible another less intentional form—a large part of the public can now control the appearance of works of art by manipulating them to produce what can be called creative copies. The challenge for participants in this activity lies not in attaining perfection, which digital technology imposes right away, but, on the contrary, in escaping the constraints of perfection and proving one's originality, in addition to gaining the reputation of an artist.

The fourth effect of digital technology relates to the dissemination of works of art. By introducing new equipment, digital technology speeds up transactions and expands the market. Digital technology makes it possible to reach out to a wider public, in distant and even unexpected areas. The opportunities created by digital technology do not mean that artists are not subject to external pressures. To compete in the wider market created by increased distribution opportunities, artists must internalize a wide variety of tastes and

justify those they value. The history of the motion picture and recording industries bears testimony to the influence of these pressures, although there are always some marginal distributors willing to launch products outside the mainstream. Live shows and festivals react to these influences, and television channels likewise find themselves obliged to telecast a certain number of standard programs to ensure a minimum viewership. These constraints apply even in the case of monuments and museums; a few star museums and exhibitions put others in the shadow, even though the latter may display a greater creativity.

These economic trends may encourage some art institutions to sell their own name or, subject to certain legal provisos, the names of their artists, as a brand, label, or logo. They do this expecting to satisfy their postmodern consumers' need to differentiate themselves based on intangible elements. Thus artistic creations, paradoxically, end up as logos that often have very little to do with the product they represent, such as dramatic Picasso paintings on bathing suits.

Effects on the Artist's Environment

If we go beyond traditional artistic activity, four important factors emerge as having an indirect influence on the contents of artistic activity and the manner in which it is performed. The first factor relates to the nature of the boundaries separating the traditional domains of artistic activity. Until recently, these sectors—plastic arts, literature, live shows, music, and the audiovisual sector—remained quite distinct—the only examples of artists diversifying their activities were those of plastic artists using different media. It can be said that this diversification also occurred in the film industry, where several artistic professions cooperated in the production of common works. Digital technology, however, has created osmosis between these different sectors and, without necessarily changing their field of activity, artists find themselves involved in several fields at the same time. The work of art becomes an algorithm that can be changed at will and adapted to different media, and can appear in a variety of forms. Digitization permits and catalyzes this movement by introducing an element of interchangeability in works belonging to different domains, and it makes producers use the osmosis between artists as a fundamental dimension of their activity. In the audiovisual sector, such changes take place when writers, musicians, actors, and so on, design their artistic projects in light of projects designed by others.

The second effect of digital technology on artists' environments consists in the ad hoc nature of cultural activity. In other words, the system is marked by a growing number of products, the life span of which grows shorter by the day, and by an increasing number of production structures, which have equally short life spans. New products give rise to new institutional forms. The

changeover to a new product leads to the end of the current production structure and the creation of a new ad hoc structure, and the process continues.

Digitization allows artists to reach out to more varied publics, whereas traditional portals called for the long and specific mobilization of cultural practices. Thus, in the audiovisual field, satellite television makes it possible to produce programs for specific population segments. This does not in any way eliminate the risk of these programs; rather, it multiplies the risk: such programs often have very short running periods, unless they are revived for a second time. Here again, the cinema, where a succession of films is being screened in theaters for shorter and shorter periods, provides the best example. Audiovisual software, like advertisements, operates on the same logic; therefore, the role played by industrial motives should be stressed.

There is nothing to prove that the same combination of artistic and non-artistic resources used for creating a particular work of art can be used successfully for creating another work of art. These resources cannot be systematically reassigned from one artistic activity to another to obtain a successful new combination every time, and it is therefore necessary to define new institutions or new contracts. This means a change in an outmoded system. The artist's work becomes, at best, a succession of contracts. The artist must be prepared to accept these constraints—the constant search for new contracts, the numerous negotiations that often bring into play the protective mechanism of intellectual property rights, and the leveling of earnings—and counter them, for example, by opting for insurance.

In effect, the entire artistic work market is in the process of change. In a traditional work market, workers sign contracts for a given period, irrespective of the nature of the specific activity required or the project for which they have been engaged. On the other hand, entrepreneurs or producers look for certain general qualifications, which, if the need arises, they supplement with specialized training or orientation before assigning their employees to different activities. In such a situation, it is not difficult to find the required skills in the work market, although price may differ depending on the circumstances. But in the artistic field, there is a direct link between the artist's skill and the nature of the activity or project; for that reason, one artist cannot be easily replaced by another for the same project. The relationship between an artist and a producer remains valid only for a particular project.² It is therefore necessary to define a project and, at the same time, look for a particular skill in a market that is not concerned with the period of activity but with the type of talent required for a particular activity. If the specific skill needed for a project is not available, it will be impossible to execute it. Because it is necessary to maintain the synergy between the progressive definition of the project content and gather the corresponding skills needed for its execution, there is no linear sequence between the definition of the project and its execution, as in

other fields. Three consequences follow from this situation: the project cannot be implemented unless the requisite artistic skills are found; artistic skills will remain unutilized due to the lack of projects needing these special skills; and the working period will be linked exclusively with the given project. This ad hoc element is an integral part of all activities that are intrinsically artistic, because the implementation of such projects depends on the existence of skills and talents that cannot be substituted by others (this is also true of many technical jobs now).

This new view of the work market has important consequences for the location of artists. It is widely believed that artistic activity can function equally well from anywhere. Digital technology makes it possible for artists to work in distant places. However, reality does not conform to this commonly accepted idea. Instead, we find artistic activities concentrated in towns and cities, especially in certain favored areas in metropolitan cities. Once artists are actively involved in projects that need constant revision, they must be in a position to move quickly from one project to another, even as they engage in related activities during the interval to have an alternate source of income. This is possible only in areas with high population densities and wide varieties of activities. On the other hand, producers or executors of cultural projects must be located in places where they can easily find people with specialized skills and thus cut down the corresponding transaction costs.

Finally, digitization offers an important challenge to the remuneration of artists through intellectual property rights. The protection of artistic property rights presupposes three conditions: the existence of a support system for organizing this protection, the exact identification of the author, and the spatial identification and monitoring of rights. The advent of digitization has brought about a fundamental change in these conditions. Digitization has led to the dematerialization of artistic works to a large extent. These works can appear in different forms and thus become independent of the original form that constituted the basis of the system devised for monitoring the observance of artistic property rights. Digitization has created such high storage capacities that users can order customized products to suit their needs and add new elements to them as they please. Artistic products are thus the result of an original work modified by multiple additions resulting from the dialogue between the user and the computer through the computer screen. Finally, international communication networks have made it possible to have any number of copies, and consequently, it has become nearly impossible to exercise any control on the violation of rights within the national framework.³

Digitization can strengthen the collective management of intellectual property rights in two ways: As the number of outlets multiply and diversify, it will become difficult for actors to individually negotiate each contract; they will have to keep a constant watch on how their works are being used and find the

most relevant interlocutor in the multimedia chain. As for producers, they have to bear very high transaction costs to obtain the overall rights from the rightful owners involved in the production of texts, photographs, animated pictures, and music, and it is better for them to entrust the job of fixing the appropriate fees to institutions. In 1996, the European Union envisioned a single-window system for the entire European region. This system would have made the task simpler and lowered transaction costs related to the knowledge and the implementation of rights. But two years later, in April 1998, the European Conference in Birmingham adopted a diametrically opposed stance, probably because those involved in digitization have nothing to gain from the confirmation or consolidation of artistic property rights.

From an artist's perspective, three economic mechanisms seem possible. The first solution would be to grant a license for the productive use of art works. For example, a film company could receive a license to turn a literary work into a film, and a television company could receive one to make a serial based on the same work. The license should stipulate the different ways in which its products would be commercialized in the future and the specific conditions for exploiting each of them. Once the uses of a work are defined, the beneficiary of the license will be able to keep the entire profit without having to take any operational risks.

The second solution would be for artists to stop giving licenses and enter into a partnership agreement with a company by offering their assets for the creation of new products. When entering into partnerships, artists will have to possess three types of skills or assets—creative ability, technical know-how, and marketing skills. Such partnerships may be useful in the long run, but they expose the possessors of creative talent to difficulties regarding both recovery of assets and sharing of profits.

The last solution consists of investing directly in the production of electronic works. Such investment is fraught with risk, but the anticipated results can be substantial. In any case, the experience of the new giants of the digital age shows that, sooner or later, it is necessary to work in partnership with other companies because the work involves a number of highly sophisticated and specialized skills. If none of these three solutions is possible, artists can still opt for an immediate and total payment in full discharge of all rights.

BEING AN ARTIST IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Three basic changes are taking place for artists in the digital age. They must become entrepreneurs of their talents by combining new skills with traditionally recognized skills. They must join other workers to form a new category built around intellectuality and applied creativity. This last factor determines the number of artists and their place in society.

The Artist as Entrepreneur

In this sense, artistic activity becomes a process by which the concept of employment is replaced by that of enterprise, and the artist becomes something of a business organization rather than an isolated worker. Experts in human resources management consider artistic activities an area in which workers move from one activity to another in an effort to capitalize their skills and experiences.

Artists therefore tend to look after their business themselves. They possess a specialized talent that cannot be substituted by any other but that they must manage in a context that is wider and more open to outside influences than before. For this reason, it is advantageous for them to remain in control of their talent because it forms the basis of an activity that would collapse in its absence.⁴ Artists become entrepreneurs as they exploit a special asset and participate actively in defining the conditions in which this asset will be used. They must make sure that the particular project is “just in task” and “just in time,” so they can manage to their own advantage the investment they have made to earn a reputation. In cases when artists’ specialized skills are recognized, artists can take direct responsibility for the execution of the projects of which they are the center. In other cases, artists find it difficult to adopt this kind of strategy, as they do not have the minimum reputation needed as authors, scriptwriters, directors, actors, editors, and so on.

The existence of small enterprises, or even enterprises consisting of a single person, in the field of arts acquires a new meaning. Some economists suggest that this is due to the tendency of large enterprises to outsource some of their requirements for greater flexibility and for transferring adjustment costs to others. Outsourcing happens frequently in the film industry, where many independent producers perform tasks that were earlier managed by the big film companies, or in the book publishing industry, which entrusts a large number of jobs (such as iconographic and documentary research) to other agencies. But very small artistic enterprises also owe their existence to the artists’ need to exploit their assets more gainfully, use an appropriate organization for every new project, and protect their intellectual property rights more effectively. This protection is a complex matter in the case of a salaried person, and it seems easier to protect one’s rights with the help of structures under one’s own control. The emergence of very small enterprises appears quite logical in Europe, where the number of freelancers is increasing in numerous subsectors. This development has not affected the museum sector but is very evident in the audiovisual sector, especially in the United Kingdom (Greffé 1999). As a result, three new types of enterprises in the cultural and audiovisual sectors have emerged: large enterprises (television companies, publishing houses, and national theatres); small enterprises run by a small group or an individual (performing arts and editing of

multimedia products); and, more recently, small virtual enterprises that do not need physical space and often form a part of a network.

Old and New Skills

The shift from dependent production organizations to more independent production organizations demands a revised understanding of the skills required for artistic production. They extend from artistic skills to technical and management skills in the field of plastic arts as well as in the fields of heritage conservation and audiovisual communication. Artists must have the skills of a legal expert, a financier, and a manager to make the most of their artistic talents.

The field of music has been revolutionized by the introduction of new technologies that have transformed the creative processes regardless of the type of music or the setting. Musicians can now set up proper production studios in their own homes. The computer and the availability of appropriate software have made it possible to produce music without the presence of singers or instrumentalists. These new technologies have also transformed the distribution process following the invention and the spread of the DVD, which improves the sound quality, and the mini disc, which offers almost limitless possibilities for the storage of music. Although talent continues to be the core of the system, the musician must be capable of performing other functions within a team comprising artists, agents, managers, publishers, distributors, and legal experts. Even if this team becomes virtual, each of its members must understand the functions performed by other members and assume them as and when the need arises.

In the audio-visual field, digital recording has brought about a radical change in the nature of jobs and the skills needed for performing them. The three major basic skills are audiovisual design, technical expertise, and the understanding of organizational problems, as evidenced by the creation of new jobs such as audiovisual media designer and film and video editor. Audiovisual media designers, for example, have to define and produce audiovisual programs using electronic equipment. They must be capable of consulting the persons in charge of programs about the purpose and the risks involved. They must be able to select the required equipment and maintain it, analyze and verify recordings, look for material in visual and sound archives, and master the changes in format and standard. Then, they must record, analyze, process, and edit audio and video recordings. And finally, they must be able to handle editing equipment and know how to mix pictures under the supervision of directors and cameramen.

The book publishing industry has been revolutionized by the advent of polyvalence, which has become necessary following cutbacks in production

and design departments; computer aided production, which has brought about improvements in the editorial function; and marketing systems. A person working in the publishing industry must understand the public, know how to diversify diffusion channels, take the responsibility of developing rights, and manage relations with multimedia agencies. According to many observers, the most striking feature is the appearance of the “information professional” in all artistic sectors (Schmitt 1998, 3). Artists now serve as an interface between production and the supply and use of information. They act as mediators between systems and users, and they must possess artistic, creative, and communication skills.

All of these changes are headed in the same direction, and they raise questions regarding artist training. When examining artists’ training systems, wherever such systems exist, it becomes clear that they essentially combine two elements: art history and instruction in the techniques of expression peculiar to a given field. In the present context, this system is outmoded because it ignores the introduction of new elements, which are no longer limited to a mastery over information technology and computer-aided design, in the main activity of artists. In the past, artists depended on agents or agencies for the collective management of these rights, but because many artists work in isolation, artists must now possess communication skills and the ability to manage questions related to intellectual property rights and other issues.

This new situation for artists has led to widely different approaches. For example, the Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts has successfully incorporated into its training program for musicians certain aspects of management and law that constitute more than one-third of the program. On the other hand, the program devised by Institut National du Patrimoine in Paris, which trains conservators in the restoration and upkeep of monuments, museums, archaeological sites, and so on, is more ambiguous. In the beginning, the latter had planned to devote almost one-third of its training program to imparting economic and legal knowledge, which is very important for persons involved in art-related activities as well as in management. However, under pressure from certain lobbies, and even from a large number of students, that proportion was reduced to one-tenth. Instead, knowledge of art history and techniques of expression dominate the program—a step that has proved to be very harmful.

The European Union’s MEDIA Program, under which some thirty centers have been established in various states to train members of diverse audiovisual professions, provides our last example. Each center is meant to provide training in a specific area, but each must also work in coordination with other centers so that its efforts are not confined to an excessively narrow field. The experiment has been only partly successful because some countries have not participated wholeheartedly in the program.

The Artist as a New Applied Intellectual Worker

However, the main change is perhaps much more profound. Very often the artist is considered as a complex, protean, and ubiquitous person having all the traits of a showman (an image with which artists would readily identify with), or as a skilled craftsman (a status to which historians and economists often reduce artists). Portrayed as bohemian, artists in romantic literature transform themselves completely when they become court painters overawed by royal patronages. Cast out by society, which artists despise, they are exposed to material cares and the great perils of their art, much like Musset's *Fantasio*. But this picturesque portrayal makes artists reflect on themselves. In the personas of Baudelaire and Mallarmé, the old showman becomes an ironic figure. In Apollinaire and Picasso, we witness the reconstruction of the showman's harmonious image. Artists leave the circus ring and move into a lunar landscape. They, who once served as a tool to illustrate allegories, now dare to dream. They invite the viewer to witness the miracle of their art and to interpret it as they see fit. Artists do not wish to prove anything but want only to show and to be seen.⁵

But the showman also has something in common with the craftsman. In his book on the artists of the quattrocento. *L'œil du quattrocento: l'usage de la peinture dans l'Italie de la Renaissance* (1982), Michael Banxdall points out how the contracts of the great Florentine painters were actually intended for craftsmen. In his beautiful book, *The Invention of Arts*, Larry Shiner shows that the Renaissance created a great, but somewhat artificial, divide between the craftsman and the artist (Shiner 2000). The transformation of the craftsman into an artist was not easily accepted, and, after the death of Leonardo da Vinci, some writers did not hesitate to say, "*However praiseworthy painting may be. . . . It must nevertheless be considered as very inferior to poetry from the point of view of dignity and authority. . . . Painting is . . . closer to manual labour than to intellectual effort and it is generally practised by ignorant people*" (Blunt 1966 94, emphasis added). From then on, artists gradually gave up the workman's garb and donned the mantle of grace and talent, although they continued to suffer economic hardships. What we now prize as works of art were originally considered to be the products of craftsmen, the idea being that, because subjects were more or less imposed on the craftsman-artist, the quality of the artist's work, rather than the work's content, gave it its real value. Although copies and imitations were not frowned upon, skill became a determining factor of value. After the Industrial Revolution, things changed once and for all, and the artist's creation became the very antithesis of the industrial product and even the craftsman's product. The artist became a part of the artistic community, described by Sartre as a "community of saints." Artists did not know if there would be a demand for their products,

and, if ever there was a demand for them, artists were certain that it would come from the middle-class. The academy overshadowed the market, and artists did not take long to realize its importance. Their reactions were quite varied—some took refuge in the doctrine of “art for art’s sake,” whereas others played industrialism against economics.

Unlike the worker, especially as depicted in economic analyses, the artist has certain specific traits. The artist’s day cannot be divided into “working hours” and “free time,” as it is extremely difficult to say when the artist is in the process of creating. For this reason, the concepts of even a training period, preparation, and presentation have no meaning. One can even say these “creative intellectuals” are working and not working at one and the same time. There is no division between a “working area” and a “nonworking area,” because areas such as the stage, the workshop, and the studio only serve to crystallize the transition from inspiration to implementation and presentation.

Today, we may quite rightly ask ourselves if we are not helping bring about a reconciliation, or even an osmosis, between the artist’s and the craftsman’s work, not by going back to the practices of the Renaissance but due to the convergence of the creative industries. Digital technology plays a significant role in this reconciliation. It has facilitated more collaboration among artists in some fields and has enabled those who have mastered digital technology to borrow from artistic work and introduce its references in their own fields. The artist thus collaborates with planners, designers, software engineers, and producers of images, whereas earlier these varied professionals worked independently. This has given rise to professions based on applied intellectuality.

ARTISTS NETWORKS

Because artistic activity involves groups of actors, practices, and references, it is bound to be compared to a network. Because the knowledge of artists is mobilized within a network, artists are in a better position to innovate by the linking of knowledge than by working in isolation or by stressing their differences from other members of the network. The production of a work of art is not so much the accomplishment of an individual as that of a professional group. When artists form a group, they do not necessarily work together, but each of them works independently within the group.

The multiplicity of practices and procedures that lead to the creation of a work of art is responsible for the variety of cultural professions or “applied intellectuality.” Art is created through a continuum of activities with numerous poles; a creation is not independent, nor can it be assimilated with another work. As Howard Becker writes, “[I]n the world of art, every function can be considered artistic, anything that an artist does, even his most undisputed action, can be an encouragement for someone else” (Becker 1988, 116).

Artistic activity thus progresses through successive accumulation: “New concepts are being constantly added to earlier ones: design to the plastic arts, industrial design to design, industrial packaging to industrial design” (Bernié-Boissard, Dreyfuss, Le Strat 1999, 97). Artists move from one activity to another, from collective activities, such as staging shows, to more individual activities, such as teaching art. These networks may actually come in the form of an association, or they may have a hierarchical structure; they could be specialized bodies (such as artistic, technical, or management) having corresponding positions. A cultural institution brings these poles and positions together in a single structure and gives them a definite form. The only danger is that these diverse elements, which are supposed to work in tandem, may start working only for themselves. Conflicts subsequently become inevitable, which underscores the formalism of these institutions. The ultimate imbalance is reached when works of art become the product of the institution.

In light of all of this, how do we now define the work of an artist? Is it the creation of a product or participation in an activity? The first answer seems obvious, but the second is not without significance, because aesthetic and artistic criteria are unstable and do not suffice to define the areas of artistic activity. Besides, artists now identify themselves more in terms of the environment or the network to which they belong rather than in terms of artistic reference: “[C]ommunication within the sphere of activity and co-operation in specific situations try to compensate for the decline in the membership of artistic groups” (Bernié-Boissard, Dreyfuss, Le Strat 1999, 103). In the absence of other obvious benchmarks, the identity of artists is determined by their activities within the network, as some of their products will become works of art, even if they do not gain recognition. This does not mean that artists do not strive to create works of art; it only means that they need time to establish themselves as artists. Recognition depends as much on artists’ roles as producers as on their function as creators, as much on their activities as on their work. This change of attitude has grave consequences. Instead of basing their self-definitions on the idealization of their creative function, artists define themselves based on their activities and practices. Artists thus contribute to the much-touted disenchantment of art, but at the same time we gain in terms of pertinence.⁶

Artistic activity covers a variety of disciplines, opinions, sensibilities, and social positions. It sustains itself by denying that it belongs to any group or that it indulges in diverting techniques or in overstepping references. The main principle underlying the understanding of artistic activity has less to do with its result than with the heterogeneous association of its components. The method of coordinating activities and the persons involved is as important as the work that they produce. By approaching artists in this manner, we can no longer think of them in terms of their gifts, their precociousness, their

bohemianism, their talents or as unchangeable and invincible persons. These concepts are deeply rooted in the artistic environment, and they make it easier to understand the psychodynamics of artists than the functioning of the art market. Too often, the notion of vocation has been used to justify, rather than explain, the years of suffering and underpayment and to sidestep the role of talent and sociopolitical factors. This view of the artist as a creator is gradually disappearing, and people are beginning to realize that it is no longer necessary to depend on natural aptitudes and talents. According to Menger, the artist is a hybrid who lives by the logic of income (talent, creation, and reputation) and the logic of insurance (acquisition of skills, use of spouse's resources, and so forth) (Menger and Vari 1995). Artists have now become socialized, whereas earlier they were idealized.

Digitization implies important transformation in the nature of the artistic activity, and it is difficult to outline what will be their results. But in reference to Benjamin's highly anthologized essay "The Work of Art in an Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936), would it be possible to say that, as the arts lose their traditional aura, they may become more present and active in our economic and social life?⁷

NOTES

1. The audiovisual sector consists of several segments such as cinema, television, video, and commissioned programs, considered from the production as well as the distribution and operation angles. Following the digitization and compression of data, the boundary between the audiovisual and cultural industries, such as the press, the recording industry, and photography, has become more tenuous and difficult to distinguish. There is an element of continuity, but it is a basic criterion such as the place of production or the type of initial dissemination, which retains a certain homogeneity at the time of analysis. As a result, a whole series of services have totally changed the audiovisual sector, especially cinema and television. I mention, in particular, bouquets of programs and thematic channels, conditional access to pay channels, interactive television, interactive multimedia products, video on demand, and near video on demand.

2. An analysis of the relation between the number of employers and the number of working days supports the earlier diagnosis. Among those who worked only one day in the year, 98 percent had only one employer and 2 percent had two employers. Among those who worked 260 days or more during the year, only 23 percent had a single employer, 31 percent had two employers, 22 percent had three or four employers, and so on. Irrespective of the number of working days, there are usually several employers, and the probability of having fewer employers decreases with the increase in the number of working days. In view of this intermittence, it becomes difficult to talk of a career. For more details, see Greffe 1999.

3. Certain innovations, which appeared in the 1960s, have already given us an inkling of this upheaval. Following the advent of cable networks in the United States, some copyright holders and distributing agents claimed that they undermined traditional production and distribution mechanisms and that eventually the existence of artistic products would be compromised. Cable operators offered to pay a compensation, but that was not enough to remedy the situation, especially because for some time the courts maintained that broadcasting through cable networks amounted to organizing a private show and that it was not a public broadcasting service. With the coming of electronic art, another new feature appeared, the active role played by the viewer or visitor, because many works of electronic art allow the visitor to manipulate the lighting and change shapes to a certain extent (Tinguely's *Rotaza*, Spinoven's *The Eye*, and so forth).

4. This type of behavior is generally used to control the sharing of financial gains obtained from an artistic activity and it also underlines the strong link between artistic skills and the existence of a project.

5. In her Ph.D. dissertation, *Les figures de l'artiste*, Université de Bordeaux, 2001, Sandrine Bazile shows how Georges Rouault's successive portraits of the clown depict the artist's view of himself. In *Pierrot de profil* (Pierrot in profile) (1925), Rouault sees the artist as a clown who distances himself from his own personality. His sequined costume should not mislead us, for "the artist ought to free the world from pain even if he cannot free himself from his own suffering . . ." (Bazile 2001, 65). The same clown, who admits quite candidly that his face is made up, is willing to be humiliated in *Le Clown Tragique* (The Tragic Clown) (1932), but his Christ-like appearance delivers a lasting message. In *Au clair de la lune* (In the Moonlight) (1948), the artist's face appears calm and serene for he has delivered his message, and it is up to those who receive it to interpret it as they please.

6. If we admit that artistic activity has precedence over the artist as a creative force that shapes the material world, we must envisage the possibility of an artist who does not produce any work of art. Several interpretations are possible. Some artists think that by crystallizing their creativity in a work of art, they come into conflict with themselves because it arrests their artistic activity, which, by definition, is an open and unending process. It is true that the work freezes their creativity at a particular point in time, but this makes it easier for the user to understand the work. Some artists opt quite openly for noncreation, as they do not want to be compelled to give proof of their artistic status and prefer to live for themselves and the people around them. Still others claim to defend an open and evolving art and are not interested in the promotion and diffusion of their works. But if you cannot associate a work with an artist, how can you assess the artist's contribution, creativity, or productivity? As Bernié-Boissard, Dreyfuss, and Le Strat writes, "How can one break away from the overpowering and structured view of the artistic product? How can one avoid the excessively conclusive role of creative work?" (1999, 85). One solution is to allow artistic activity complete freedom without trying to arrest its development and leave it to other artists to give it meaning and value. The unity of the work no longer lies in the artist's intention or in the object's unitary nature but in the conclusion of a work of art. The viewer's active participation is needed because it helps to make news, complete a process, and inspire a work of art. Artistic activity thus leads to a situation where the viewer's intrusion can give shape to what was only a glimmer in the mind.

7. In a sense, this was the objective of the Bauhaus philosophy that intended to resist "the established fine arts system by trying to reunite art and craft and restore art's social purpose" (see Shiner 2000, 258).

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