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Artist Communities

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Artists are creative producers working in a variety of cultural industries, including visual art, music, literature, theater, film, and comedy. Few artists work in isolation. Artists have social ties not only with distributors and audiences but also with other artists. When artists share symbolic and material resources through enduring social ties, they form a community with varying degrees of self-identification and identification by others. Artist communities may include other actors in the cultural industry who interact with the members, but the community principally revolves around social and artistic relationships among artists. These communities can be geographically localized or dispersed, short-lived or lasting, porous or bounded in membership, and composed of weak or strong social ties.

Social Ties

Artists both share and compete over scarce resources within and outside the artist communities. Each artist has a unique position relative to the other artists in the community, and each artist community has its own position relative to other artist communities. These positions are constituted by artists' social ties to particular distributors, audiences, and other producers as well as the quality of these ties, which marks each artist's prominence, prestige, and centrality within the cultural industry.

Network analyses, which map individuals' social ties, have been used to examine how different resources, including ideas, social connections, credentials, and money, flow through cultural industries and shape artists' careers. Artists' social relationships with other artists influence their creative output. When members have many mutual connections with one another, creative materials, such as products and ideas, will be circulated more widely both inside and outside the community. However, after a certain threshold, these mutual connections have a negative impact on creativity, because common, rather than novel, information is shared. This makes it more difficult for artists within the community to innovate, leading to creative products becoming more homogeneous.

Artists' social relationships with other artists also affect their career trajectories. Artists belonging to communities composed of a large number of weak ties can create and break certain social ties to increase their prestige without jeopardizing their participation in the larger community. This flexibility facilitates both lasting careers as well as critical attention. In contrast, members of close-knit artist communities may have stable careers but tend to have less critical attention as they are relatively isolated from the rest of the cultural industry. While interaction in artist communities enhances both the novelty of creative products and artists' career success, artist communities that become dense cliques can restrict the dissemination of ideas at the cost of both creativity and status.

Art Movements

Artist communities are composed of both interpersonal relationships and shared knowledge. Members of the same artist community can interact socially and share material resources without necessarily building off of one another's innovations (e.g., artists may share work space, social connections, and industry knowledge). Conversely, artists may not have an interpersonal relationship, as with artists who have never met, but may instead share an artistic relationship. In this case, artists may follow

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one another's work and work with similar ideas and styles. By regularly looking at one another's work, artists both validate their conception of their artistic vision and build on others' artistic innovations in their own work. Artists tend to make the most important innovations—measured by experts' historical reception of artists' bodies of work—when they interact with other artists as part of an “art movement.” These artists may see themselves as part of the same art movement when they socialize with one another, present their work to the public together, and make statements about the connections between their works. When these artistic relationships are identified by others in the cultural industry, they may be publicly legitimized as such. Lower-status artists can increase their prestige through affiliation with higher-status artists in an art movement. Artistic connections are not independent from social connections, as interpersonal relationships often lead to common engagement in artistic ideas and styles and because others in the cultural industry may draw these artistic connections when artists' interpersonal relationships become known. While most artist communities do not coalesce into cohesive and publicly recognized art movements, artist communities are usually constituted by both social and artistic connections.

Artist communities are not everlasting but go through life cycles of emergence and degeneration. This life cycle is particularly prominent in artist communities that are considered to be avant-garde, experimenting with new and unusual artistic ideas. Through interaction, artists sometimes conceive of a shared artistic vision or style. While some artists may continue to work independently, others may engage in artistic collaborations and collective efforts to disseminate their shared vision. The shared vision or style is evident in members' individual work to different degrees, with the work of core members usually containing almost all of its characteristics and the work of marginal members tending to feature only a few elements. Eventually, a variety of factors, such as differences in prestige among members, divergent artistic visions, membership in other artist communities, and personal conflicts, lead members to individuate from the community, and the group disintegrates. While particular groups are transient, the social fabric of the whole cultural industry is more durable as artists make and continually break some social ties and form others.

Geographical Dispersion

Artists tend to migrate to urban areas in order to access social networks and other resources. Certain cities become known as centers of cultural industries, and as the dynamics change within these industries, the centers sometimes move from one city to another. While cultural industries revolve around large cities, many artists continue to live and work in small cities and in suburban and rural areas. In these “off-center” art worlds, artist communities are often an especially important source of social support, as there are limited opportunities for visibility and selling creative products.

Within the urban centers of cultural industries, artist communities are often geographically localized in particular neighborhoods where, following deindustrialization, manufacturing warehouses could be converted into lofts for artists' living and studio spaces. Artists socialize with others in their neighborhood, and their neighborhood presence can strengthen their sense of collective identity. Artists collaborate to share space and material resources, including cooperative studio space and alternative art spaces, which support both the production and the dissemination of creative products. Rising housing costs, partly due to the artists' own publicity, eventually price most artists out of these neighborhoods, resulting in their continued

migration from one neighborhood to another in search of affordable living and working spaces.

Artist communities have become more geographically and socially dispersed. Cultural industries have become more professionalized, leading to an exponential increase in individuals pursuing advanced degrees in the arts. These professional degree programs often produce artists' primary social network, which extends well beyond graduation. Thus, artist communities are often based around specific academic institutions. Cultural industries have also become more globalized. Creative products can be viewed online from anywhere, and prominent artists, along with distributors and audiences, often travel globally to produce and circulate their work. Artists can foster social and artistic relationships internationally. These changes have rendered artist communities more transient and flexible and have also facilitated the emergence of new urban centers for cultural industries. As cultural industries have undergone enormous growth, particularly in the population of artists, artist communities have become diffused networks of social ties.

See also [Artisanal Production](#); [Cultural Industries](#); [Innovation Diffusion Networks](#); [Music Communities](#); [Network Analysis](#)

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