

## CHAPTER I

# Creating Community in an Individualistic Age

**A**rtist activists are re-creating a musician community in Nashville. These visionary peers of a musician community are transforming their community as they enter a risky era of entrepreneurial music production and artist self-promotion. As their careers increasingly unfold outside of the unionized corporate confines of major-label artist rosters, new generations of enterprising artists themselves bear the risks of production and distribution, an instance of Ulrich Beck's "individualization of risk."<sup>1</sup> In this post-bureaucratic moment, artist activism in re-creating peer community is an act of occupational self-determination for new generations of enterprising artists. Their activism is directed at minimizing risk by creating social spaces—such as production companies, studios, and performance venues—and a new arts trade unionism that promote their own and their peers' artistry and livelihoods.

Nashville artist activists have been initiating a wide range of individual and collective actions in re-creating a peer community over the last few decades. For example,

- In a 2011 interview with *Rolling Stone* magazine contributing editor Josh Eells, recording artist Jack White explained how he conceived of the new building for his label Third Man Records, whose Nashville presence had been established two years earlier:<sup>2</sup> "When I found this place ... I was just looking for a place to store my gear. But then I started designing the whole building from scratch." Eells reported in the *New York Times* that the building "[n]ow ... holds a record store, [Jack White's] label offices, a concert venue, a recording booth, a lounge for parties and even a darkroom. 'The whole shebang,' White said. It's a one-stop creativity shop."<sup>3</sup> At Third Man Records, the guitarist-singer-songwriter produces his own and others' music, and has many of the label's vinyl records pressed just a few blocks away at Nashville's legendary United Record Pressing, the nation's largest vinyl record plant located in the emerging Wedgewood-Houston arts district.<sup>4</sup>
- In 1987, recording engineer Mervin Louque partnered with businessman Rick Martin to establish Douglas Corner, "a music venue aimed at showcasing new singers and songwriters in Nashville. It soon grew to become a well-known 'Home Away From Home' for Nashville's top songwriters and future music stars," including the likes of Alan Jackson, Trisha Yearwood,

## 2 | Chapter 1

Marc Collie, The Kentucky Headhunters, Billy Dean, John Berry, Blake Shelton, and Garth Brooks.<sup>5</sup>

- In 2008, insurgent candidate Dave Pomeroy defeated eighteen-year incumbent and iconic Music Row co-founder Harold Bradley in an unusual and hotly contested election for the presidency of Nashville Local 257 of the American Federation of Musicians. Labeling it a “power shift,” *Nashville Scene* writer Brantley Hargrove wrote that “To onlookers on the coasts, Local 257 had become a battleground far larger than Nashville’s city limits, in a sort of proxy grudge match for control. At stake was leadership of the fourth largest local in the world’s largest trade organization for professional musicians. That’s in a town where music, according to a Belmont University study, is a \$6.4 billion industry.”<sup>6</sup> Union leadership change also signaled a new approach for revitalizing Local 257, whose sagging membership, like that of many unions in all economic sectors, had declined over the previous decade.<sup>7</sup>

Artist activists have arisen throughout the post-1980 musician migration to Nashville. By the mid-2000s, Nashville had become the U.S. city with the third highest concentration of musicians and, by 2011, it was proclaimed the nation’s “Best Music Scene” by *Rolling Stone* magazine.<sup>8</sup> Artist activists have arisen as the steady stream of musicians created an increasingly genre-diverse pool of “indie” enterprising artists of diverse social backgrounds in Nashville. Over the last half-century, Nashville’s established musician community had crystallized around a group of “A-team” recording musicians, songwriters, producers, arts trade unions, and recording artists on the rosters of a few corporate major labels that distributed commercial country music through mass broadcasting. The established community, according to music historian Robert Oermann, “was insulated from the pop-music world as well as from mainstream Nashville. As the booking agencies, publishers, and record labels clustered on Music Row in the 1960s, the personalities who populated them became friends as well as competitors.”<sup>9</sup> Contemporary artist activists are re-constituting the musician community as the genre-diversifying musician migration moves Nashville into a post-bureaucratic, entrepreneurial era of music production and artist self-promotion in risky niche consumer markets.

*Beyond the Beat* is about the artist activists themselves. How do individualistic, entrepreneurial artistic peers sustain their occupational community during a competitive phase of what sociologists Richard Peterson and David Berger called the “concentration-competition cycle”<sup>10</sup> of popular-music production? This book, and the new sociological theory of artist activism derived from the Nashville case, address this question of re-socializing risk by re-creating occupational community for an individualistic, diversifying, and entrepreneurial art-making era. I define *artist activism* as an act of occupational self-determination that is directed at minimizing risk by creating social spaces and a new arts trade unionism for promoting artist activists’ and their peers’ artistry and livelihoods.

The changing Nashville music scene has spawned three types of artist activists. I refer to these ideal-typical, artist activist roles as “enterprising artists,” “artistic social entrepreneurs,” and “artist advocates.” The sociological theory of artist activism addresses how artist activists fashion their roles as artist activists. Together, the three artist activist roles constitute a repertoire of individual and collective action for re-creating a peer artist community. The theory attributes variations among artist activists in their assumption and enactment of individualistic and collective roles to the artist activist’s subjective orientations toward success, audience, risk, and career inspiration.

Jack White, Douglas Corner, and the power struggle within Local 257 illustrate the emergent ensemble of artist activist roles—“enterprising artists,” “artistic social entrepreneurs,” and “artist advocates,” respectively. I define *artist activists* as those visionary artistic peers and closely aligned impresarios who create inclusive, place-based artist communities in an increasingly entrepreneurial art-making era. John Van Maanen and Stephen Barley define an occupational community as a “group of people who consider themselves to be engaged in the same sort of work; who identify (more or less positively) with their work; who share a set of values, norms, and perspectives that apply to, but extend beyond, work related matters; and whose social relationships meld the realms of work and leisure.”<sup>11</sup> In an otherwise vertically organized rational-bureaucratic economy, occupational communities, for Van Maanen and Barley, are the horizontal communal organization by which workers achieve self-control, collective autonomy, and social solidarity and form their identities.<sup>12</sup>

In Nashville, artist activists are building an inclusive, place-based expressive occupational community among indie musicians in a widening range of popular-music genres. This emerging community consists of a spatial ecology and “loosely coupled”<sup>13</sup> set of local micro-organizational initiatives undertaken by diverse artist activists who are advancing the well-being of their peer community. The community is “expressive” in its focus on the artistic occupation of musician; “place-based” in being co-extensive and thematically linked to the Nashville music scene; and “inclusive” in the diversifying set of artist social identities—race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion—and corresponding widening array of musical genres that are expressed by its members.

Artist activists arise to sustain individual artists and the whole occupation. Their local organizational initiatives constitute a repertoire of individual and collective actions that address the artist-communal functions of artist professional development; networking and job referrals; and the economic interests of the whole occupation.<sup>14</sup> The *typology of artist activist roles* that I derived from my interviews with seventy-five Nashville music professionals consists of *enterprising artists* who produce and distribute their own and others’ work and mentor early-career artists; *artistic social entrepreneurs* whose social enterprises, such as schools, live performance venues, and artist development companies, have the explicit social mission of maintaining social spaces and networks for promoting professional development opportunities and job referrals; and *artist advocates* who, as arts trade union reformers, are creating new guild-like

unions by revamping collective bargaining, contract language, and union organizational functions in order to resonate with a new generation of enterprising artists whose individualism exceeds that of earlier generations of their peers.

The purpose of this book is to develop a sociological theory of artist activism. The theory concerns how artist activists' subjective orientations toward success, audience, risk, and career inspiration shape the array of roles they create, assume, and enact to reconstitute artist community in a post-bureaucratic, entrepreneurial art-making era. In the words of the late sociologist Richard A. Peterson, the advent of an entrepreneurial art-making era was a stage of "competition and creativity" in the "concentration-competition cycle" of cultural production. In this cycle, an artistically competitive, innovative, and genre-diverse era succeeds an era of mounting economic concentration in a bureaucratic culture-producing industry whose increasingly homogeneous content had run its course in the market.<sup>15</sup> Readers who are interested more in the detailed, career-biographical profiles of the artist activists than in the sociological and policy mission of this book may wish to proceed to chapters 3 through 6.

In the terms of ancestral sociologist Emile Durkheim, reconstituting a community of enterprising artists in Nashville is driven by a shift in the occupational division of labor of music professionals. The shift is from vertically organized, occupational specialization toward a horizontal occupational generalism, a shift that has accompanied the advent of independent art-making throughout the arts and entertainment sector in the United States during the last several decades.<sup>16</sup> Over the last quarter-century, the unionized, corporate Nashville music scene based in mass broadcast distribution and an emphasis on country music has been transforming into an entrepreneurial, genre-diverse, de-unionized music scene. In the corporate era, music production is organized around large major labels and publishing companies, large studios, elite producers, and artist advocacy organizations. The complex, occupational division of labor of music specialists includes songwriters, pluggers, A & R reps, producers, engineers, an "A-team" of unionized session musicians, top-charting artists, and music agents, administrators, and executives, all geographically situated in the Music Row neighborhood. In the post-bureaucratic indie era, in contrast, the simple occupational division of labor of music generalists comprises entrepreneurial artists—self-promoting and self-contained bands who perform a wide range of their own artistic, art-production, and art-support functions, often conducted in their homes or small studios throughout multiple neighborhoods of greater Nashville, and directly engage their niche markets of fans and consumers in live venues and over the Internet.

In Durkheimian terms, reconstituting a post-bureaucratic community of artists entails the development of a new "social solidarity" or sense of togetherness based in a simplifying occupational division of labor. In a community built around a complex division of labor of occupational specialists, "organic social solidarity" was achieved from the interdependence among specialists.

In contrast, “mechanical social solidarity” was achieved in a community based on an occupational sameness that prevailed in a simple occupational division of labor.<sup>17</sup>

In Nashville, artist activists are creating a “mechanically solidary” community of entrepreneurial artists alongside and partly from the ranks of an older, organically solidary corporate-era artist community. Nashville entrepreneurial musicians constitute themselves as a community by producing and performing for one another, showing up to each others’ showcases, and extending mutual aid during trying moments in their lives. According to Ken Paulson, an astute participant-observer of the Nashville musician community, Nashville entrepreneurial artists “cross-promote. And they cross-promote in an unselfconscious way.... [T]he community is largely very supportive of each other’s art.”<sup>18</sup>

From a Durkheimian perspective, however, reconstituting community and achieving a new social solidarity are not a foregone conclusion. Social change is punctuated and interrupted by moments of “anomie,” Durkheim’s term for the destabilizing normlessness that arises with a shift in the inspirational and organizational norms of an occupational community. Anomic historical moments are often accompanied by the marginalization of minority groups and intergenerational group conflict in a changing community,<sup>19</sup> as in the epochal, contested election in Local 257. These anomic moments nonetheless can constitute a “wellspring of innovation,” as Richard Peterson put it in his masterful treatment of the institutionalization of Nashville country music through the 1990s. In a “dialectic of generations,” Peterson contended, “[i]nnovative young artists, that is, those who fabricate a contemporary way of expressing authenticity, commonly feel that they are doing so in opposition to the music they have grown up with.”<sup>20</sup>

As community builders, artist activists are also challenged by anomic historical moments beyond those inherent in their occupational community. In our contemporary neoliberal era of “risk individualization”<sup>21</sup> and “identity politics,”<sup>22</sup> occupational communities are embedded in a societal web of increasingly precarious employment relations and polarized status-group relations.<sup>23</sup> Beyond meeting the Durkheimian challenge of achieving a new social solidarity among occupational generalists, artist activists must also solidify an occupational community composed of “free agents”<sup>24</sup> who hail from diverse social backgrounds.

As community builders, artist activists express an occupational self-determination for managing and minimizing risk in a precarious era of risk individualization. Employment precarity is symptomatic of a regime of casual employment relations. Risk individualization is manifested in declining labor movements, shrinking public commitments to social welfare and social insurance, and the shift from cradle-to-grave organizational careers in large bureaucracies toward casual, post-bureaucratic careers as, in Vicki Smith’s words, “free agents.”<sup>25</sup> Arne Kalleberg shows that the trend toward risk individualization,

as indicated by the advent of flexible, nonstandard employment arrangements such as contingent labor and temporary employment and labor union decline, is linked to the trend of increasing income inequality in the United States throughout the last several decades.<sup>26</sup>

In an era of identity politics, art worlds are imbued with and expressive of artist and consumer social identities.<sup>27</sup> The large post-1990 wave of immigration to the United States is the largest since the great immigration wave of the 1880–1924 era. Steven Tepper argues that, in a democracy, public controversies over artistic expression effectively constitute a public deliberation over community identity, especially during anomic times of rapid social change. The findings of his seventy-city study of cultural conflict in the United States during the 1990s indicate that the level of community conflict over public displays of art and literature in a city was directly associated with the rate of immigrant settlement in a city: the higher the rate of immigrant settlement in a city, the higher was the level of cultural conflict in the city. As a “new-destination” city for a rapidly growing number of immigrants from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East,<sup>28</sup> Nashville, according to Tepper, was a “relatively contentious city.”<sup>29</sup> By sustaining and diffusing their artistic traditions in their co-ethnic communities and throughout the city, immigrant artists are playing an important countervailing role in smoothing immigrant incorporation in Nashville.<sup>30</sup>

As community builders in an era of identity politics, artist activists are challenged to build inclusive occupational communities of socially diverse artists. In doing so, they build genre-diverse occupational communities that are artistically expressive of their diverse social identities in niche markets of fickle, “omnivorous” music consumers.<sup>31</sup> In Nashville, the growing indie music scene, as well as the major-label scene, expresses a widening range of social identities defined by race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and religion.<sup>32</sup> A major-label A & R vice president I interviewed put it this way:

Today I think the biggest competition is everything. Is it possible to have mass success? I don't know. But it is possible to have huge success. So I think the world that we're in right now, it's really about target marketing, about reaching out to your niche and your audience, and how you can speak to a specific group of people. There are the resources to do that. There's the bloggers, there's iTunes, MSN, AOL, there's MySpace and Facebook and live touring, making records and selling them on the road, selling them online, ma and pa stores and maybe traditional retailers, and maybe you'll get on satellite radio and that will only get you so far, maybe if you're lucky you'll get on pop radio because it still actually has some impact. But there's just so many different ways to connect the dots these days, it's not a linear world, and if you can embrace the notion that it's a niche culture and you can find the ways in which to reach, and use all of the resources to reach kids, and hope that the music at the end of the day is good enough that word of mouth is ultimately going to fuel it.

Artist activists envision and build expressive, peer occupational communities in an individualistic age. The communities comprise diverse entrepreneurial artists who thrive in an era of risk individualization and identity politics. The sociological theory of artist activism developed in this book addresses how artistic occupational peers envision, create, assume, and enact their roles as artist activists in an individualistic age. The theory also appears in a corresponding era of the intellectual history of sociology that increasingly privileges strategic human agency as a driving force of social change.<sup>33</sup>

## TOWARD A SOCIOLOGY OF ARTIST ACTIVISM

*Beyond the Beat* treats the enduring theme of building community in an increasingly individualistic society. It also treats the theme of structure and agency in reconstituting occupational community in a post-bureaucratic society that is increasingly inhabited by free agents. Contemporary employment relations are frequently labeled “precarious” and “flexible” and risk is “individualized” in market relations rather than socialized in protective social-welfare institutions. Entrepreneurship now competes with corporate career ladders and trade unionism as a source of community and as a pathway toward upward social mobility.<sup>34</sup> New artist activists emerge to reconstitute peer occupational community and “safety cultures” for enterprising workers who operate in the interstices of bureaucratic institutions.<sup>35</sup>

This book is situated at the nexus of the “new” sociology of work and sociological studies of culture and social movements. The book extends the concept of “worker agency” in the “new” sociology of work by examining the subjective, strategic orientations of artist activists that shape how they create, assume, and enact an array of individual and collective, artist activist roles. It also elaborates on how art worlds change by incorporating the regime of artist activist roles into an analysis of how artist activists usher in an emerging art world. The changing Nashville music scene is a case in point for examining the role of artist activists in ushering in an increasingly entrepreneurial, Internet-driven, and genre-diversifying art world.<sup>36</sup> It is an art world emerging out of and alongside of a predominantly corporate, mass-broadcast-driven, single-genre art world.<sup>37</sup>

## Changing Art Worlds

This book partly extends Howard Becker’s sociology of art worlds.<sup>38</sup> An art world is a socio-spatial arena of vertical and horizontal social networks that coordinate the activities of artists and organizations in the creation, production, distribution, and legitimation of art works. Art worlds can change gradually—“drift”—and abruptly—“revolution”—in response to technological and conceptual changes and changes in the social and demographic characteristics of audiences. For Becker, the “maverick,” in contrast to the “integrated

professional; innovates in the content of art by defying art-world conventions and establishing new techniques, institutions, and audiences for producing and distributing new art.<sup>39</sup> Less attention has been given to the subjective orientations that underlie, animate, and shape the actions and the diverse types of roles and individual- and collective-action mavericks undertake in transforming an art world. Robert Faulkner has described the stable, corporate art worlds of Hollywood musicians, composers, and film-industry independent contractors who feverishly network for project work in a competitive reputational market.<sup>40</sup> Faulkner and Becker have recently examined the sources of occupational community—a phenomenological process of maintaining and gradually expanding “repertoire”—among stable communities of working musicians.<sup>41</sup>

Recent work in cultural sociology has extended Bourdieu’s field theory by examining the impact of cultural entrepreneurs on field transitions.<sup>42</sup> This body of research has addressed the agency of cultural entrepreneurs in instituting new fields of cultural production and cultural content. For example, Andy Bennett’s study of rock heritage shows how a wide range of cultural entrepreneurs—magazine editors and writers, documentary film and television producers, museum curators, webmasters, tribute bands, and the music industry itself—have produced conservative and alternative discourses for preserving and canonizing, as well as re-releasing, both classic live performances and do-it-yourself innovations in the history of rock.<sup>43</sup>

Related work in urban sociology and the sociology of social movements has examined the actions of cultural agents in creating new art worlds and new genres and mobilizing social movements. Richard Lloyd’s pioneering work on the transformation of Chicago industrial neighborhood Wicker Park into a vibrant art scene examines how a “neo-bohemian” regime of entrepreneurs, design companies and media corporations, artists, aesthetes, and “yuppy” art consumers generated the new art scene.<sup>44</sup> The “cultural turn” in sociological research on social movements has systematically brought cultural agents into examinations of what Larry Isaac refers to as “aesthetic activism” in processes of social change. Building on Paul Dimaggio’s concept of “cultural entrepreneurs,” Isaac develops the concept of a “literary activist,” a novelist whose literary works reflect and facilitate the mobilization and counter-mobilization of social movements.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, in his sociological study of the link between American folk music and the U.S. labor and civil rights movements of the twentieth century, William Roy characterized the Lomax and Seeger families as cultural entrepreneurs who “bridged institutions, playing an entrepreneurial role in the Schumpeterian sense—cobbling programs, building organizations, recombining various elements into new forms, and using a broad range of social and professional contacts to mold American folk music as ... a musical world that itself bridged institutions.”<sup>46</sup>

*Beyond the Beat* extends previous research on cultural agents and art-world change in three ways. First, less attention has been given in previous research to the subjective orientations of artist activists in the process of art-world

change.<sup>47</sup> Rather, research on mavericks, cultural entrepreneurs, and aesthetic agents has emphasized the strategic actions and techniques that are used by these cultural agents. *Beyond the Beat* extends art-world research in its emphasis on the subjective meanings and orientations artist activists apply in creating, assuming, and enacting their roles as artist activists on behalf of their peer communities. Art-world research itself extended the sociology of Everett Hughes on individual and group mobility in occupational social worlds to artistic-occupational social worlds. In the Hughesian occupational social world, the work and status mobility of occupation members were oriented toward and contextualized by the occupational “license” and “mandate.”<sup>48</sup> Previous art-world research has emphasized the patterning and techniques of dynamic networking action and resource mobilization by entrepreneurs, but has given less attention to the subjective meanings and orientations that inspire, guide, shape, and channel these actions. Therefore, the emphasis of *Beyond the Beat* is less on networking technique, structure, and actions, and is primarily on the artist activists’ self-configuration of orientations toward success, audience, and risk, the self-proclaimed sources of their original inspirations for embarking on a musical career, and their visions of new institutional models for advancing artistic expression in the emerging art world.

Second, *Beyond the Beat* extends previous art-world research by shifting the object of inquiry from cultural projects, such as the development of new art genres, to occupational community-building projects. Art-world change entails not only changes in art-making conventions and the production of new cultural products, but also may entail and presume a reorganization of the occupational division of labor, artist professional development, and artist advocacy among the artists and support personnel of an art world. In accounting for art-world change, previous research has tended to focus directly on the art-making process and has underemphasized the influence of the reorganization of the artist peer community. What is more, research on cultural agents has underemphasized the diverse occupational, professional-development, and advocacy roles artist activists create, assume, and enact as they reorganize an artist peer community. Therefore, the emphasis of *Beyond the Beat* is on how the subjective orientations of artist activists shape the diverse roles they assume and play in reconstituting artist community in a changing art world.

Third, *Beyond the Beat* extends previous art-world research by developing a new historically grounded typology of artist activist roles. The typology consists of a set of individual and collective, artist activist roles of the historical-institutional moment from which they were inductively derived. The historical moment is one of a music scene whose corporate-oligopolistic system of production and distribution is increasingly assuming an entrepreneurial-competitive form.<sup>49</sup> The threefold typology of artist activists—enterprising artist, artistic social entrepreneur, and artist advocate—is a set of roles played by artist activists who initiate individual and collective actions to reconstitute their artist community under these specific historical-institutional conditions. *Beyond the Beat*, then, examines the patterns of subjective orientations and

array of roles artist activists play in reconstituting their artist community as they enter an entrepreneurial art-making era.

The Nashville case, as will be described in greater detail, is a case of a transforming art world, one whose logic of production and distribution is changing from a corporate organizational logic to an entrepreneurial organizational logic. This book extends art-world research by deriving empirically and inductively a threefold typology of artist activists from the original interviews with seventy-five Nashville music professionals. Artist activists respond to and facilitate drift and revolution in the conventions and organization of an art world. In the increasingly entrepreneurial Nashville music scene, artist activists pursue individual and collective strategies for creating an expressive and supportive artist community that promotes professional development, economic well-being, and, ultimately, individual artistic expression in the emerging art world.

### The “New” Sociology of Work

This book also extends research in the “new” sociology of work. The newness of the new sociology of work refers to the contemporary scholarly treatment of post-bureaucratic and increasingly precarious and polarized social relations within workplaces and between service sector workers and their customers and clients. As the older sociology of work matured in the post-World War II manufacturing era of long-term steady jobs held by “organization men and women” in bureaucratic internal labor markets, and in the wake of the civil rights and women’s movements, it came to analyze social inequality and disparities in career mobility outcomes in socially embedded, stable corporate workplaces. As Arne Kalleberg argues, since the 1970s, globalization, deregulation, the decline of the labor movement, and the advent of an individualistic ethos led to the casualization of corporate employment relationships, outsourcing, the rise of self-employment and “non-standard” freelance employment relations, and increasing disparities in both job quality and income.<sup>50</sup> The new sociology of work has emerged since the 1980s to analyze casual employment relations in all economic sectors, and especially in freelance occupational labor markets in personal and business services, arts, new media, communications, and the knowledge economy.

According to Menger, no labor force sector is more emblematic of enterprising and precarious, freelance employment than artistic labor markets.<sup>51</sup> As Bourdieu put it, the arts field consists of “positions that are relatively un-institutionalized, never legally guaranteed, therefore open to symbolic challenge, and non-hereditary .... it is the arena *par excellence* of struggles over job definition.”<sup>52</sup>

Compared to the older sociology of work, the new sociology of work puts more emphasis on “worker agency” in the shaping of the post-bureaucratic workplace and in determining livelihoods and life chances. According to Randy Hodson, worker agency is “the active and creative performance of as-

signed roles in ways that give meaning and content to those roles beyond what is institutionally scripted.”<sup>53</sup>

Two contemporary versions of the new sociology work—the occupational and institutional versions—address the relative importance of structure and agency in the determination of worker life chances.<sup>54</sup> In the Hughesian, occupational version of the new sociology of work, worker agency tends to be conceived as individual networking action by freelance, independent-contracting workers, such as Barley and Kunda’s “itinerant professionals”; Smith’s post-bureaucratic “free agents” who grapple with risk, uncertainty, and opportunity; Osnowitz’s “freelancers”; and Neff’s “venture labor,” who attempt to secure and retain project work, often with corporate clients.<sup>55</sup> In the “labor market-segmentation” institutional version, worker agency tends to be conceived as the collective action of unionization and collective bargaining.<sup>56</sup>

This book extends and integrates both versions of the new sociology of work by treating an array of individual *and* collective expressions of worker agency as a regime of artist activist roles that are created, assumed, and enacted by artist activists who are reconstituting their peer occupational community. The threefold typology of artist activists presented in this book constitutes a regime of individual and collective roles for creating artist community and promoting individual artistic expression in the emerging entrepreneurial art world. This diverse regime derives empirically from the co-existence in the U.S. entertainment and arts sector and, specifically, the Nashville music scene, of the individual strategies of entrepreneurship and freelancing, on the one hand, and the collective strategy of a new arts trade unionism, on the other hand.<sup>57</sup> What is more, these strategies co-exist within an emerging art world and, as artist activist roles they can be created, assumed, and enacted simultaneously by the same artist activist. Nationally, for example, between 2003 and 2013, the percentage unionized in the U.S. “arts, entertainment, and recreation” industry decreased slightly from 7.0 percent to 6.6 percent.<sup>58</sup> “*Independent* artists, writers, and performers,” in contrast, are projected by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics to increase by 12.4 percent between 2012 and 2022, roughly two to four times the projected growth rate of all—independent and wage and salaried—actors, artists, dancers, musicians, photographers, producers and directors, and writers.<sup>59</sup>

## NASHVILLE AS CASE AND CONTEXT

A national center of popular music recording, the Nashville music scene is representative of a changing art world, one that is transitioning from a corporate logic toward an entrepreneurial logic of production and distribution. The Nashville music scene employs some 8,000 workers who write, publish, perform, produce, record, and distribute music in a range of popular music genres, including country music. In recent decades, the Nashville music recording industry has become increasingly competitive with a growing, non-union

sector of independent (indie) small businesses and solo practitioners rivaling the unionized, increasingly consolidated sector of major-label recording corporations.<sup>60</sup>

The present work examines the subjective orientations of the artist activists who are ushering in an entrepreneurial Nashville art world of country, urban, gospel, jazz, rock, and Americana music.<sup>61</sup> A “contemporary generation” of enterprising artists who produce music in a wide range of genres has emerged in Nashville. They launched their careers during the 1990s and 2000s, carving out an expanding range of niche consumer markets and engaging diverse audiences. For example, Nashville’s alternative weekly the *Nashville Scene* recently hailed Nashville-based jazz composer and saxophonist Rahsaan Barber as:

[a] twenty-first century jazz player unwilling to let others decide his fate. Barber is also a label executive, promoter, producer and broadcaster. He started Jazz Music City Records a year ago, because he felt “it doesn’t make a lot of sense to complain about there not being labels in town willing to record jazz musicians if you’re not going to do something about it.”<sup>62</sup>

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Nashville attracted musicians whose careers unfolded in this growing and diversifying music scene. By 2004, Nashville had the third highest concentration of musicians, after New York and Los Angeles, and it had come to assume the status of the U.S. city with the highest concentration of music business establishments, such as record labels, distributors, recording studios, and music publishers.<sup>63</sup> The increasing concentration of musicians in Nashville has been attributed to the 1990-era migration of Los Angeles musicians to Nashville during the country music boom, partly compelled by the increasing automation of LA recording session work; increasing coastal major-label interest and investment in Nashville’s technological infrastructure and artist development; the rise of a vital sector of independent music labels and artists; and, not least of all, the presence of a talent pool of world-class songwriters and studio musicians. Nashville has also been promoted as an affordable place to reside and work.<sup>64</sup>

An earlier “transformative generation” of enterprising artists embarked on their careers in the 1960s and 1970s in association with the major labels and musician unions and participated in the rise of self-contained bands and artistic production independent of the major labels. Some members of the transformative generation originated in the LA music industry and migrated to Nashville during the 1990-era boom in country music, compelled by the increasing automation of LA recording session work, while others emerged from the Nashville music industry.

The contemporary generation of enterprising artists, often mentored by the earlier transformative generation, launched their careers during the 1990s and 2000s independent of the major labels and musician unions in niche consumer markets that are demographically segmented especially by race,

ethnicity, age, and gender, and by genre. A proliferation of area college music-business degree programs since the 1970s encouraged the growth of the contemporary generation of enterprising artists who are equipped with individual portfolios of artistic and music-business skills.<sup>65</sup>

Furthermore, the rise of the contemporary generation of enterprising artists in Nashville accompanied an increasingly diverse and socially inclusive urban context that was conducive to the production and consumption of an expanding range of demographically segmented musical genres. These contextual changes include the 1960-era Nashville civil rights movement in which Nashville desegregated by 1962, two years before the enactment of the Civil Rights Act of 1964;<sup>66</sup> post-1990 global immigration to Nashville from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East, making Nashville one of the most ethnically diverse and rapidly growing “new destination” cities;<sup>67</sup> the subsequent transformation in 2012 of Nashville city council’s “Black Caucus” into a broader “Minority Caucus” that includes Latinos;<sup>68</sup> and the enactment in 2009 of a Nashville non-discrimination ordinance that banned discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity by city government, placing Nashville in the tiny minority of units of local government in the United States that have enacted such legislation.<sup>69</sup>

The restructuring of the Nashville recording industry is partly depicted in the growing proportion of top country recordings that were distributed on indie labels between 1964 and 2009. My compilation of top-charting music reports in *Billboard* magazine shows that the percentage of top-30 country music albums on indie labels increased from 0.0 percent to 23.3 percent and that the total number of labels with at least one top-30 album increased from seven to nineteen between 1964 and 2009. All in all, the total number of labels distributing top-charted country music, and the percentage of top-charted, indie-label country albums and singles, increased during this forty-five-year period. What is more, the increases in labels and indie-label top-charted music accelerated after the mid-1990s, presumably with the diffusion of home-based production and new-media technology and major-label consolidation.<sup>70</sup>

The socio-spatial decentralization of the Nashville music scene is depicted in the growing number of small and independent music-production and artistic enterprises in Davidson County, Tennessee, aka Nashville, and neighboring, suburban Williamson County, where small-scale music production has diffused for lower real-estate expenses in recent years. According to my compilation of the U.S. Census Bureau’s County Business Patterns<sup>71</sup> data for Davidson-Williamson Counties in the 1998–2009 time period, the number of establishments and the percentage located in Williamson County in “integrated record production/distribution” increased during this time period. Consistent with the *Billboard* trends previously cited in the growing presence of indie labels, the number of integrated record production/distribution establishments—roughly half of which have fewer than five employees—increased from nineteen to thirty-six and the percentage located in Williamson County increased from 0 to 16.7 percent. Consistent with the U.S. Bureau

of Labor Statistics' national forecast, the number of "independent artists, writers and performers"—some 80 percent of which are establishments with fewer than five employees—increased from 116 to 206, but the percentage in Williamson County remained stable during this period. The numbers of establishments in "record production" and "sound recording studios" remained stable, but the percentage located in Williamson County increased between 1998 and 2009. The percentages of establishments in record production and sound recording studios located in Williamson County increased, respectively, from 19.2 percent to 33.3 percent and from 12.7 percent to 24.1 percent. The number and location of "musical groups and artists" and "music publishers" remained stable throughout this period.

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The empirical basis of this book rests on the 2,500 pages of transcripts of interviews that my research team and I conducted with an original semi-structured interview schedule with seventy-five Nashville music professionals. Half of the interviewees were employed in artistic occupations—musicians and songwriters, and half work in music-industry occupations, including producers, audio engineers, publishers, artist managers, club managers, trade union officers, and A & R reps. In light of the trend toward entrepreneurship, occupational generalism, and "hyphenated" occupations like singer-songwriter, the occupations of many of the interviewees defied conventional occupational classifications. The median age of the interviewees is forty-five. Twenty-one percent of the interviewees are women and 17.1 percent are people of color. The snowball sample was generated through referrals from a purposive, occupationally and demographically diverse, root sample.

Interviews addressed individual career and personal biographies, orientations toward inspiration, aspiration, success, risk, audience, advocacy, professionalism, and entrepreneurship, employment and work attitudes, and changes in the artistic, social, organizational, and technological characteristics of the Nashville music scene. Interviews were granted on the condition of anonymity, and were conducted privately in the office of the researcher or the respondent between September 2006 and September 2013. Ninety-five percent of the interviews were conducted by January 2008. They were voice-recorded and ranged in length from 2 hours to 4.5 hours. The full interview schedule is presented in the appendix.

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In the chapters that follow, I develop a new sociological theory of artist activism and derive a research agenda for a new sociology of artist activism, as well as assess community-building policy implications for artist activists. The theory, which I present in chapter 2, addresses how individual subjective orientations shape the repertoire of individual and collective, community-building

actions among a group of artistic occupational peers. Specifically, the theory addresses individual variations in how visionary artist peers configure their orientations toward success, audience, risk, and career inspiration to fashion their roles as artist activists and the new initiatives they undertake to strengthen their peer community. The chapter presents new, inductively derived typologies of an artist activist's orientations toward success, audience, risk, and career inspiration, as well as propositions linking these orientations to her creation, assumption, and enactment of any part or all of the regime of individual and collective artist activist roles.

In chapters 3 through 6, the theory is evidenced with a cascading examination of the three artist activist roles during the post-1980 musician migration to Nashville. Each of these chapters presents in-depth profiles of representatives of one of the three artist activist roles. They proceed in ascending order of the extent of collective action embodied in each artist activist role. The chapters also proceed in the approximate historical sequence of the appearance of the artist activist roles in Nashville, culminating with the new arts trade unionism of the mid-2000s in chapter 6. Two generations of the most individualistic “enterprising artists”—the early transformative and the contemporary generations—are covered in chapters 3 and 4, respectively. “Artistic social entrepreneurs” have appeared throughout the period and are discussed in chapter 5. “Artist advocates,” the artist activist role most engaged in collective action, is treated in chapter 6.

A total of sixteen artist activists—four per chapter—are profiled pseudonymously in terms of their visions, strategic orientations, risk orientations, and career-biographical pathways to becoming an artist activist. I refer to a *vision* as the artist activist's concept of a local organizational initiative he envisions for building an artist community; a *strategic orientation* as an individual orientation toward success and audience; and a *risk orientation* as one's attribution of the sources of risk to impersonal market and institutional forces, interpersonal relations and networks, or to oneself, defined and typologized in chapter 2. Following Kathleen Blee's work on grassroots activism, I adopt her definition of a *pathway* as “human actions ... that move through social institutions or *projects*. As people travel through society, they are continually confronted with new influences, information, and feelings that lead them toward certain actions ... They still make choices, but these are constrained by the earlier decisions.”<sup>72</sup>

In chapter 7, the concluding chapter, I present a new, post-bureaucratic research agenda in the new sociology of work derived from the sociological theory of artist activism. The agenda consists of three themes for future research. First is the generalizability of the Nashville model of artist activism across cities that differ in terms of their mix of art-production and -consumption activity and their levels and history of arts trade unionism. The second theme pertains to the influence of biographical pathways, risk orientations, and occupational socialization through intergenerational peer mentoring on the formation of the next generation of artist activists. The third theme is an assessment

of the effectiveness of the several prevailing models of guild-like labor organizations for freelancers and artists on advancing individual and occupational professional and economic interests. I conclude with policy implications for building and strengthening inclusive and expressive, urban occupational communities in an era of risk individualization and identity politics.