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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

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#### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Engelhardt, A. (2015). The sociology of knowledge approach of discourse analysis in innovation research: evaluation of innovations in contemporary fine art. *Historical Social Research*, 40(3), 130-160. <https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.40.2015.3.130-160>

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# The Sociology of Knowledge Approach of Discourse Analysis in Innovation Research: Evaluation of Innovations in Contemporary Fine Art

Anina Engelhardt\*

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**Abstract:** »Der wissenssoziologische Ansatz der Diskursanalyse in der Innovationsforschung: Beurteilung der Innovationen in der zeitgenössischen Kunst«. The empirical question in this paper addresses problems of institutionalizing inventories of knowledge under conditions of uncertainty. As a focus, negotiations of discursive evaluation of the new or of inventions as innovations lead the empirical approach. This determines the empirical approach to understanding the process of legitimation, and makes patterns as well as variations intelligible. What characterizes this research project is an unconventional theoretically based setting by the sociology of knowledge approach to discourse analysis (from now on SKAD) (Keller 2008) that will be discussed in this paper. An extended comprehension of social innovation is tied to the field of contemporary art where the assembly of novelty is conventional and actors are mainly engaged with the selection and valuation of novelty. In the first section of the article I introduce my methodological and theoretical framework and relate them to questions of how to conduct empirical research on innovations. The case study explores the question how contemporary art is legitimized with reference to Howard S. Becker's theory of art worlds. It builds a bridge between a semantic level of discourse and the level of discursive practices. Section two introduces the field and the case of the study, and how the study is arranged. Section three describes the methods used, discussing the relevant aspects of the study for innovation research, and leads into the conclusion.

**Keywords:** Innovation, SKAD, situation analysis, focused ethnography, interview, process-produced data, legitimation, evaluation.

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## 1. The Discursive Construction of Novelties

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To start with a somewhat paradoxical notion I would like to state that novelties are not new in a self-evident way. They have to be evaluated and contextualized in relation to the already known. But still, as Hubert Knoblauch states,

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there is a lack of ethno-semantic studies (Knoblauch 2014, 2) on how novelties become innovations and the semantic use of the term “innovation” or “new.” What is regarded as an innovation is a complex procedure of signifying novelty and negotiating between producers and other involved actors. In art, not only the artists as producers claim that their works are remarkable novelties, but also curators, gallery owners, or collectors are significantly involved in the process of recognizing an artwork as new.

Evaluating novelties is a central aspect of

what social actors do with regards to knowledge, discourses, actions, social systems, and institutions. Continuous reflections on and about innovation are accompanied by elaborate discourses that justify the new developments based on the interests of specific actors and actor groups. These arguments can involve situational explanations, organizational and institutional rhetoric, and taken-for-granted ideologies (Hutter et al. 2015, 34).

The evaluative process is consolidated into “indisputable and sometimes highly authoritative ‘facts,’ or social imperatives for all actors involved” (ibid.). Thus, discursive struggles about novelties and their meaning are a crucial part of research on innovations (Howaldt and Schwarz 2010, 19).

This leads to the question: Why, when, and in which constellations are specific actors and institutions able to define and successfully assert specific innovations? Methodologically, this reflects the need to be open for the definitions by actors of what an innovation is (Braun-Thürmann 2005, 80ff; Zapf 1989, 177; Howaldt and Schwarz 2010, 49). However, to enable the researcher to introduce theoretically based decisions on what is regarded as an innovation, the conduct of the research process does not follow first order theories of involved actors. Hence, instead of just following ethno-theories of actors within the field to minimize the impact of the researcher, the concept of the situation analysis forms the perspective of this paper. It allows for a reasoned combination of “following the actors” and theory based proceeding (Clarke 2012, 35ff). For Rammert (Rammert 2010, 21) the definition of innovation as a distributed process is set out in three different aspects: A novelty has to be identifiable as a change in time relation, as an objective change, as a modification or recombination, and has to be socially accepted as a relevant difference to the existing. Drawing on this extended understanding, the concept of innovation used in this study weaves in a theoretical resistance in opposition to ethno-theories, but is also sensitive to definitions of novelties by the actors.

According to the SKAD, social reality is a social or communicative construction and, more specifically, a discursive construction (Keller 2008, 272; Keller, Knoblauch and Reichertz 2013, 12). The central aspects in reconstructing discourses are comprehension and explanation. *Comprehension* covers how a discourse emerges as well as the formation of discourses with its rules, content, and the actors of the discourse production. Mechanisms of discourse formation and production are tied to institutionally based structures of speech

positions. How positions of speech are actually filled relies on the interpretation of the actors. The links between actors and speech positions simultaneously constitute the field itself. Context and discursive fields underlie historical changes – courses and effects shape the profile of the discourse in interrelation to other discourses.

On the one hand, researchers formulate explanatory hypotheses via their perspective on causes and relations of the reconstructed discursive formation. On the other hand, discursive effects and outcomes have to be explained. Both perspectives have to consider the following factors (internal or external to the discourse): coherence of production of meaning in utterances, successful stabilization and recognition of the discourse formation, institutional conventions, dynamics of societal fields of practices, social-structural changes, and varying and conflicting interests of the involved actors in regard to their resources in constellation of power and sovereignty (Keller 2008, 275). The SKAD allows one to grasp the fabric of discursive formations empirically, not only in texts but in varying kinds of data.

Although it aims at the typical, the SKAD and the methodological approach of this study are characterized by a proposition of openness. They avoid choosing a restricted access in advance, as sometimes found in quantitative-oriented research or in the older sociology of knowledge where the functionality of knowledge is highlighted. Furthermore, it leads beyond a certain narrowness within ethno-methodological inquiries, which restricts the analysis only to the observed, concrete – often unique – event (Keller 2008, 275). Before the field of research and the case is described, a short introduction to Howard S. Becker's theory (Becker 2008) is given. Becker's field-specific theory shows why the SKAD is an appropriate approach to study evaluations of artistic innovations.

### 1.1 Beckers Approach to Evaluation of Novelties in Art

Speaking with Becker, actors involved in evaluating contemporary art rarely absolutely agree on who is entitled to speak as a representative for the art world. The entitlement is founded on being recognized by the other participants (Becker 2008, 151). This stems from the understanding of the art world as a cooperative activity and the interdependent links between all participants. From this follows that the status of artworks depends on an often unstable consensus among participants in an art world. Agreeing with the institutional tradition, there are no constraints on what can be defined as art. Constraints derive only from a prior consensus on what kinds of standards will be applied and by whom (ibid, 155ff). Becker conceptualizes change in the art world as a constant incremental innovation and rare revolutionary innovations (ibid, 304ff).

Becker's central concepts to comprehend the art world are *collective* (or *cooperative*) activity and *conventions*: "I have used the term [art world] (...) to denote the network of people whose cooperative activity, organized via their joined

knowledge of conventional means of doing things, produces the kind of art works that art world is noted for” (ibid, X). A new artwork does not only exist by the means of the producer; it has to be seen and to be responded to as well. And the activity mentioned by Becker “consists of creating and maintaining the rationale” (ibid, 7), according to which all these other activities make sense.

Hence, he questions the central position of the artist by relating his contribution to social construction of an “artwork” as a novelty. This happens through cooperative links that are executed in shared practices based on a shared knowledge of conventions under conditions of interdependence.

The grammar – the specific rules – of conventionalized criteria is iterated as a communicative form in judgments. Conventions ‘suggest’ the appropriate dimensions of a work and they “regulate the relations between artists and audience, specifying the rights and obligations of both” (ibid.). This conceptualizes the reciprocal adjustment of artistic practices that strive for novelties and innovation, and institutional constraints for novelties that have to be seen and responded to within the distribution process.

One of the important aspects is the classification of art: how actors draw the line between what is acceptable and what is not. Art worlds try to find out “what is and what isn’t art, what is and isn’t their kind of art, and who is and isn’t an artist” (ibid, 36).

In Becker’s view, conventions shared by artists, distributors, and audiences provide a more or less coherent context to classify and evaluate artworks. Since the avant-garde movements, novelty has become a central convention for producing and distributing art. This leads into the quest to constantly balance novelty and the renown.<sup>1</sup>

Becker has a strong focus on production, but this study wants to set the focus on knowledge and legitimation in the sphere of distribution. This serves to provide an understanding of the process of innovation by shifting the attention from the context of creation of novelties and innovations to their evaluation: Becker’s approach completes the SKAD on the level of actors and interaction regarding judgments as communicative form.<sup>2</sup> In the next pages, I will explain why the SKAD is a methodologically reflexive approach that allows one to grasp innovations as discursive phenomena empirically.

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<sup>1</sup> For critical discussions see van Maanen (2009) or Danko (2012).

<sup>2</sup> To compensate Beckers shortcomings theoretical triangulation and pattern matching the theoretical crop of Bourdieu (2001), Zahner (2005), Hennion (2007), Menger (2014), Moulin (1997, 2009) is the solution this study opts for. The same can be said for the institutional based research like DiMaggio (1987), Frey (1997) or Beckert and Roessel (2013).

## 1.2 The Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse Analysis (SKAD)

The main theoretical sources for the research project accentuate knowledge, process, and legitimizing power. This perspective on discourses and their analysis draws on Foucault, Berger and Luckmann within the interpretative paradigm of sociology, including symbolic interactionism. In comparison to the Foucauldian tradition, SKAD (Keller 2011, 45) focuses more on social actors and societal arenas of discursive disputes. With the sociology of knowledge approach to discourse analysis (Keller 2008), the Foucauldian perspective is expanded to acknowledge the impact of actions and participating actors within a discourse. Leaning on Berger and Luckmann (1980), it bases the analysis of societal processes of knowledge construction on institutional contexts. Integrating both, it re-orientates discourse research towards questions of relationships between knowledge and politics of knowledge – following bodies of knowledge, their production, and power effects throughout society. Related to research on the procedures of evaluating, novelties are seen as a part of the distribution process of innovations that are essentially mediated in discourses.

Especially in regard to the discourse being embedded in social structure and interaction understood as discursive practices, it permits one to connect the Foucauldian approach with a strong tradition of qualitative research. In the paradigm of sociological hermeneutics, it shapes discourse as a communicative form of the construction of reality – in this case the discursive construction of novelties. Drawing on the hermeneutic tradition of the sociology of knowledge, SKAD considers actors to be constantly engaged in interpretation. This approach aims at the reconstruction of types of meaning. The construction of novelties is thus an interactive, dynamic process that produces institutions with a legitimizing impact. The institutions inform recursively involved actors and their actions (Keller, Knoblauch and Reichertz 2013, 10).

So, discourse is understood as a distinguished and interrelated practice of statements that are studied in regard to common stabilized patterns of meaning in a collective body of knowledge (Keller 2008, 234). With the concept of an arena of discourse (Keller 2008, 234; Knoblauch 1995, 308ff), even actors that might not seem important at first sight can more easily be accounted for in their impact within the analysis of the discursive field. In this project, the research interest is to reconstruct how and with which knowledge artworks are recognized as novelties. Therefore, the process of judging and evaluating is differentiated between separable heuristic levels. They can be theoretically and methodologically conceptualized on a discursive or semantic level, a pragmatic or communicative interactive level, and a grammatical level concerning rules and resources (Hutter et al. 2015). In the heuristic differentiation between pragmatic, semantic and grammatical levels I put my attention on effects that are articulated as outcomes of the semantic level (ibid, 13).

On the level of semantics, the level of discourse to say, one can find ways of problematization and narrations in form of a shared story line. Problematization happens when several actors engage in a struggle with conflicting views within a discourse. The story line interlaces the miscellaneous repertoires of interpretations within the discourse (Keller 2008, 234). These repertoires are organized in patterns of interpretation (*Deutungsmuster*) that represent collective bodies of knowledge to which actors refer (Keller 2008, 240). By means of reconstructing, the discourse elements of grammar – the rules according to which artworks are recognized – are retraced. The reconstruction is not only based on texts as the only type of data, but also on interviews in combination with ethnographic observations. On the pragmatic level, I will not look for innovative forms of action but for procedures of legitimation in the field as described in the analyzed texts and interviews.

The knowledge regime conceptualizes the relation of knowledge to an institutional setting. Then practices, rules, principles, norms are usually based on a specific area of interaction (Wehling 2007, 704ff). Communicative form means an institutionalized form of meaning. A communicative form structures the communication processes and can be typified (Keller 2008, 227; Knoblauch 1995, 72ff). It therefore provides a reference to discursive practices as “observable, describable and typical ways of interaction through communication” (Keller 2008, 228). The communicative form judgment is embedded in a knowledge regime of evaluation in contemporary art. Herein, the topos “new” is the central analytic category. A topos consists of reiterated argumentative patterns (Knoblauch 2006, 217) that consolidate in objectivations, institutions and legitimations.

With the SKAD, the relation of power and knowledge comes into focus. This relation shapes the dynamics of the negotiation process as well as prevalence of justifications of novelties – as a form of evaluation – within the distributional phase. In this methodological framework, the question how actors and not only statements prove their prevalence corresponds to requirements of research on the evaluation of novelties. The relation of power and knowledge is reconstructed by contextualizing positions of speech in an interaction field where the field position of a speaker determines the impact of their definition power within the discourse.

Hence, the discourse is derived not from individual actors, but from the structuring effect of collective practices under competitive conditions and power relations. By acting on earlier communications, the discourse generates artifacts, objects, interpretative patterns, values, and norms etc. as outcomes and conditions of practices which are mostly only implicitly accessible. By no means do discourses remain static – they equally construe and represent ‘realities’ (Keller, Hirseland, Schneider and Viehöfer 2005).

As for the actors engaged in the discourse, not everything can be said or done. Under the condition of self-reflexivity, this is recursively true for the interpretation within the research process. Researchers cannot avoid judgments

and weighting of elements of the discourse (see Hacking 1999; Clarke 2012, 186). In the course of this interpretative work, the different status of terms coined by actors in the field or everyday life terms and technical terms of sociology have to be taken into account. The part of one's own interpretative work therein is undeceivable.

The SKAD as a link between the perspective on discourse and a perspective informed by the sociology of knowledge allows one to oscillate between basically inductive steps and time-wise deductive phases of working. It is sensitive for the researcher's own constructions within the research process as well as for tacit or implicit knowledge about dealing with unclassified objects like new artworks (Abel 2013, 31). Actors, action, or interaction and objects can be integrated into a discourse analytic framework. In the next section, I will discuss the advantages of the SKAD as an approach of inquiry in innovation studies.

### 1.3 SKAD within the Context of Research on Innovations

The research perspective of the SKAD is primarily focused on reconstructing a knowledge order and knowledge politics, but also considers premises like the institutional setting, social-structural conditions, or artifacts. The view of this paper is informed by a comprehension of social change as a process that is focused on patterns or regularities. This comprehension helps one to pay attention especially to the aspect of the social construction of a legitimate order of knowledge (Keller 2008, 37ff). As this project looks within the phase of the distribution of novelties at evaluations – leading into judgments – an emphasis on actors is unavoidable. Practical and symbolic struggle for interpretation through actors is carried out through knowledge politics within the discourse. The judgments crystallizing in communicative negotiations are the results of legitimizing processes based on institutionalized knowledge and show regular patterns of justification.

In contrast to STS studies on innovation and singular thick descriptions of a case (see Geertz 1973; Latour and Woolgar 1986), SKAD uses typecasting as a means to generate a more general theoretical explanation. Singular utterances are put into relation to more general categories like legitimation. The aim is to search for patterns of interpretative evaluations and to look for consistency and implications. Most ethnographic studies of innovation (Latour 2005; Callon and Law 1989; Law 1989) refrain from deducing abstractions from specific processes. As they mostly start from an ethnomethodological background, the case studies are shaped to explicate contingent trajectories towards innovation. Opening the “black box” of the relation between human and non-human actors with as few prerequisites as possible is the aim. The famous claim “follow the actors” then dominantly leads to theoretical arguments of what constitutes the social rather than questions about field specific logics or regularities. This resolves into the problem of studying novelties as unique with the constraint to deduce regulari-



ties or patterns from these case studies. Ethnographies of innovation want to identify innovations by making elements of these processes visible. Daily use or success in the diffusion process<sup>3</sup> results in black-boxed entities that have to be unfurled depending on ethno-theories of the human actors involved.

So, the SKAD approach overcomes the inductive micro-analysis restrictions. A second problem connected to the claim “follow the actors” becomes apparent in the empirical focus on phenomena that are labeled as “innovation” in the field. The reliance on ethno-theories is the reason why there is little theoretical resistance in thick descriptions of unique cases describing the material, spatial embeddedness of innovations.

While the SKAD – like STS Studies – also follows the notion that materiality is a relevant aspect of the social, the approach puts an emphasis on the interpretation by actors and considers objects as part of dispositifs. Thus, working with the SKAD does not mean to work without presumptions on innovation. It means that these presumptions are integrated in a methodically reflexive manner so that prerequisites are considered in the process of inquiry. The goal then is to overcome discourse analysis as content analysis (see Mayring 2007) but to contextualize the analyzed phenomenon in socio-historical hindsight with its constitutive practices. In contrast to rare inquiries on innovation and novelties in discourse analysis, the SKAD approach does not leave the actors and socio-structural implications behind. The main point of critique regarding discourse analysis addresses the exclusive focus on the semantic level of empirical phenomena. These studies work with texts as the only source of data (Godin 2008; Wodak 2009; Bormann 2012, Pronzini, Besio and Schmidt 2012). Despite their rich insights, they thereby ignore the impact of the conditions under which actors participate in discursive practices.

The advantages of the SKAD can be summed up as following: Foremost, the actors do not get lost within the discursive struggles. They play a crucial role when taking positions of speech in an institutional setting. It encloses interaction in the form of discursive practices as a constitutive part of the discourse without constricting practices to parts of dispositifs. Further, it enables a change of perspective between the micro, meso and macro level of a phenomenon in the course of an innovation process. The reconstruction of a discourse aims at the typical, at patterns and how social order is consolidated – but still does not forget the specificity of situations. It is receptive to ongoing processes of social change and especially to phenomena of institutionalized change as it is typical for societal fields that are structured by the search for novelties. How qualitative methods are adopted within the research project will be discussed in the following section.

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<sup>3</sup> Or successful *interessement*, as Latour would say.

#### 1.4 Adaption of Qualitative Methods and Methodological Reasoning

Theoretically the SKAD is predicated on models of symbolic-interactive construction of knowledge and meaning. Reiner Keller suggests gearing the research to the Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM) where comments and memos are a first step of interpretation. While the SKAD does not yet implicate a clear cut proceeding, the GTM provides a variable methodical procedure (Keller 1997, 327; 2004, 2007, 2008; Truschkat, Kaiser and Reinartz 2005).

The principle of comparison is a significant moment of the GTM that equally guides the research process of the sociology approach to discourse analysis. As a research paradigm the GTM aims at condensing codes inductively and systematically into concepts to develop a subject related theory through analytical categories carved out of the data. Throughout the process, a high degree of theoretical sensitivity is necessary to recognize previous knowledge carried into the data (Strauss and Corbin 1990, 75ff).

Already the phase of sampling and the collection of the data corpus is guided by theoretical criteria and is iterated like a pendulum between theory and empirical steps. At the beginning of the research process, the question carried into the data is relatively broad, e.g. how is art legitimized?

Interpretative methodology develops typical generalizations beyond a unique situation or case and lead into a subject related theory (Flick 1995b, 2000; Bohnsack 2003; Lamnek 2005). These are theoretical constructs (second order) in demarcation from ethno-theories (first order). Recent concepts of the “*sozialwissenschaftlichen Hermeneutik*” accentuate the task of comprehending and explicating actors with their practices of constructing reality in order to explicate and elaborate the process of comprehension and interpretation reproducibly along scientific criteria (Soeffner 1989; Hitzler and Honer 1997; Hitzler, Reichertz and Schröer 1999).

Interweaving Foucauldian discourse analysis and the sociology of knowledge according to Berger and Luckmann 1980, the SKAD allows for the adaption of a wide range of qualitative methods following the interpretative paradigm. In the perspective of the SKAD, data like texts, practices, and artifacts are not regarded as an outcome of subjective or objective case structures, but reflect societal knowledge orders and knowledge politics (Keller 2008, 275). Also, the data provide a context – internal or external to the discourse – on different levels for the detailed analysis of single data both as a source of information about the discursive fields and the reconstruction of the discourse as *collective* bodies of knowledge (Berger and Luckmann 1980, 99). The validity of explanations results reciprocally from the analytic categories and the data. Therein lie the differences to other qualitative or interpretative approaches.

The orientation towards collective knowledge orders acts on the assumption of an existent comprehensive relation of the texts. This relation is also applied

to the perspective on actors because their utterances always (sometimes implicitly) relate to something else that is not merely situative or an isolated message. Condensing utterances to typical statements and further to a discourse marks a difference to most of the qualitative approaches. There every text (e.g. each interview) is usually grasped as a closed structure of meaning or a closed case. In opposite to that the SKAD approach highlights the heterogeneity and partiality of elements in the utterances in relation to collective bodies of knowledge while linking it to procedures of reification and objectification according to Berger and Luckmann (Berger and Luckmann 1980, 98ff). In this process bodies of institutionalized knowledge are renewed or altered. This opens a new perspective because the process of evaluating novelty, or innovations, is conceptualized from knowledge and not due to the actor or the innovation as an object.

This concept defines its scope against the predominance of purely quantitative approaches to text analysis that seek to gain greater objectivity by identifying dominant ideas by word counts. In the SKAD, the quantity of usage of words also comes into consideration but it is related to data that contextualizes the words through actors. Additionally, it is triangulated with observances which lead to a more valid reconstruction of the knowledge regime (Wehling 2007, 704ff) which connects the institutional setting of the discourse arena to its bodies of knowledge and power relations. A short introduction into the field of contemporary art and the chosen empirical access will be the subject of the next section.

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## 2. Empirical Field and Case

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### 2.1 The Field of Contemporary Art

The initial point of this project is a problem articulated in publications: There is a lack of clarity as to how to find out what good artworks are. This is formative for the process of institutionalizing the knowledge order of the field. The prevalence of judgments is not primarily legitimated in a textual or generally language based form, but within interaction, e.g. when artworks are displayed. In this these two ways, the field of contemporary art<sup>4</sup> develops permanent solutions for a permanent problem: tenuous judgments. Ethno-Theories set out different origins of the problems with judging contemporary art. "Economization" (trouble with illegitimate profit motive) is the central discursive story line and is so the focus of the inquiry.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Contemporary art means art from living artists since the 1970s.

<sup>5</sup> Often, discursive story lines along a "crisis" provide researchers with orientation in a discourse. In this case there is a "turning point," as, when in 2006, the sales of an auction of contemporary artworks had surpassed the sales for *old masters* or *classical modern* artworks. It showed the significance of economic changes for the whole field and correlated in

The field has to adapt constantly to novelties through evaluations. And there seem to be problems in doing so. Since the Ism-movements starting in the 1890s, the production of *New* has become a dogma within the field. Systematically, artists and their critics search for novelty and innovations (Becker 2008, 308). This happens in an exhibition sphere where artworks are displayed and in a market sphere where artworks are sold. Typically, innovations are retrospectively identifiable, but in the field of contemporary art, the goal is to evaluate innovations in the present. For the purpose of this study, the boundary of the field – equally applied for the demarcation of the discourse – is defined by the involvement of professional actors<sup>6</sup> and a thematic focus on contemporary art.

The field is organized in a reputation system that is observed vigilantly.<sup>7</sup> The higher the reputation of a person, the greater the impact and power of utterances within the discourse. The art world had been relatively small and clearly laid out up until the 1990s. At this time the reputation of the participants had been widely known. Since then, a significant growth and globalization has occurred (Moulin 1997, 135; Wuggenig 2012, 75), and today the reputation system is challenged.

Actors in the field almost invariably have an art historical training which implies a certain homogeneity of shared knowledge.<sup>8</sup> Only rarely do artists accomplish a consensus during lifetime to gain “art historical significance.” An explicit search for new objects is the aim of all involved actors. The question of which invention becomes an innovation is connected to the perspective of the actors.

Thus, the case describes a process of evaluation and decision (Baur and Lamnek 2005, 243) where actors negotiate classifications of “art” or “not art” and evaluations of quality – relevant or good art – as legitimate art. In this case study, I show who is judging, in what way, and which actors can position themselves effectively in the discourse. As it is a single case study, the research

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time with publications with a shared topic: an art boom and the difficulties of judging contemporary art. As the process is understood as ubiquitous, the theoretical framework of the case study inherits the relevance of influences of economic evaluation processes in the empirical field (Velthuis 2007, 23ff, Graw 2008, 122ff).

<sup>6</sup> The boundary of the field is organized through participation in field-configuring events (Anand and Jones 2008). Artworks serve as boundary objects in *truth spots* (Gieryn 1983, 1999; Star 1989) and play a central role in the process of legitimation within the social world of contemporary art. Similarly, there are boundary events like the *Biannual* in Venice, the *documenta* in Kassel, or the *art basel* (see Gieryn 1983, 791; 2002, 18) as constitutional events for the field and also as extremely important places to acquire the relevant knowledge for a qualified judgment on contemporary art within the art world.

<sup>7</sup> The aspect of invisible colleges (Crane 1972, 52) has an enormous impact. Merlin Carpenter (2008, 76) describes scenes or affinity networks as an important prerequisite for the discourse on quality of contemporary art as they organize power and reputation (Becker 2008, 352-7; Menger 2014, ch. 4).

<sup>8</sup> This distinction is relevant for the case selection because as soon as an artist deceases his or her work is considered under different (Crane 1972, 52) signs. The body of work then is concluded and art historians start classifying the work and it become subject to changed procedures. Up to that point it is perceived as “work in progress.”

concentrates on specific and individual characteristics. Thereby, a clearer understanding of the internal structure of the case and the co-action of different factors in the case are possible (Lamnek 2005, 275) by a theoretically guided case study on evaluation processes. These processes are grasped as innovations in the phase of diffusion.

Problems with contingent bodies of knowledge constitute the core of this case study. This problem is also relevant within other fields of society. So, the case study is engaged with a typical and extreme case (Baur and Lamnek 2005, 245). The orientation towards innovations and the preference of the new characterizes contemporary art as an extreme case on the level of knowledge regimes. This results from a formally relatively little structured interplay of organizations and, compared to other societal fields, a formally unregulated participation in the processes of legitimation (Moulin 1997; Bourdieu 2005; Graw 2007; Velthuis 2007; Becker 2008; Menger 2009).

According to the theoretical and methodological framework of this study (Keller 2008, Clarke 2012, Baur and Lamnek 2005) the case is situated in space and time. So the case lends itself to be localized in a specific site. It does not elaborate the specific features of the local context but takes it as a typical context. The time level is integrated in a reflexive perspective on *contemporary* art. Within the ethno-theories of the field, historical relations in the evaluation process are marginalized and therefore the synchronical aspects are dominant. The discursive field in Frankfurt am Main represents a typical case in a locally situated context that will be introduced in the next section.

## 2.2 The Discursive Arena and the Empirical Field: The Art Scene in Frankfurt am Main

Frankfurt am Main and its lively art scene has been chosen because the city hosts a world wide respected academy for fine arts, the *Städelschule*, as a pivot of discursive threads. Here the most relevant network establishes the relations between actors. Furthermore the city provides home for structurally important institutions for an art field. Two museums for contemporary art – distinguished on a European level at least – reside in Frankfurt:

- The *Städelmuseum* and the MMK (*Museum für Moderne Kunst*)
- The *Frankfurter Kunstverein* and the *Schirn* (without its own collection)
- Several specialized galleries that act on a European level and present on the global market
- “Off-spaces” like the *Ölhalle* or the *Lola Montez* (temporary or permanent show rooms).

Frankfurt am Main has been chosen because it provides a manageable context of communication and interaction and still all in the discourse mentioned struc-

turally relevant positions of speech.<sup>9</sup> This is necessary to get beyond the front stage course of action to the informal coordination practices e.g. informal exchange of distinguished knowledge, interwoven with an informal economy (Velthuis 2007, 118f; Graw 2008, 66f). So, the case study of the Frankfurter scene provides a reference point that complies with all theoretically deduced requirements and makes them empirically accessible. Frankfurt as spacial frame of interaction and of institutions lends itself to a case study due to the presence of all relevant speech positions. Additionally, the city provides a clear scene so actors of high influence within the field interact in a scene comparably little fragmented, e.g. as it is found in other important cities like Berlin.

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### 3. Methods: Document Analysis, Observation, Interview

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Especially process produced data allow for investigation on presently ongoing struggles around novelties or innovations. This is an important sort of data as most of the time innovations are “under construction” until they are distinct innovations. Since it is an advantage that they emerge independent from the research interest, problems of validity and coherence occur. The need to avoid a bias in selecting adequate data is met with the concept of theoretical saturation, which equally enables a delimitation of the discourse (Keller 2008, 274f, Clarke 2012, 116f).

For the empirical access, a case study (see Baur and Lamnek 2005) has been chosen that is embedded in the methodological framework of situational analysis (see Clarke 2012). It adapts to the line of pragmatic theory within the concept of the SKAD and the chosen theoretical base of Howard S. Becker for the art field. The chosen types of comparison are *theoretical comparison* (Baur and Lamnek 2005, 247; Yin 1994, 106ff), *pattern matching*, and the method of *constant comparison* (Baur and Lamnek 2005, 247). In this procedure, intermediary empirical results can be iteratively related to theory and be refined. Triangulation of different types of data avoids blind spots that are inevitably evoked by an empirical field characterized by informal processes. Because of the diverse types of data it is inevitable that the process of analysis is either strictly focused in the depth of the analysis or – according to Clarke – at a certain point a rigorous selection of the empirical material has to be made. For this case, the strategy is to select data theoretically based according to two questions: what criteria are used in judgments on contemporary art, and what knowledge are these judgments based on. Following from that, it has not been the aim to reconstruct the discourse on contemporary art comprehensively.

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<sup>9</sup> Though the obvious objection to this decision is the relevance of a globalized art world these global interconnections also show in a regional based case with globally acting discourse participants.

Following Baur and Lamnek (2005, 249), the covered time span and subject matter of the case study limits the selection of the data. This happens to relate practices, documents and contents to a discourse (Clarke 2012, 569). It also shows in the procedure that determines the steps of interpretation of the data when – in a reciprocal process – the sought range and levels of insight reflected are defined (Clarke 2012, 561). Within the interpretation process, the difference between the discursive field and the globalized discourse are analytically differentiated. The discursive field is represented exemplarily in the interaction field Frankfurt am Main as a defined social world that is conceptualized as a discursive arena (Clarke 2012, 89, 233). In the discursive arena, outcomes of evaluations are perpetuated. These outcomes are *judgments* that constitute the typical communicative form of the evaluation process. The judgments are structurally tied to evaluate the rank of a new artwork. As described above, art works have to be original and new since the avant-garde movements. From this follows the assumption that novelty is a central topos for evaluating contemporary art. So, it is to be expected that references to the topos are found in discursive utterances in every sort of data.

**Table 1:** Appropriate Sampling Strategies to Grasp the Processes of Evaluation of Novelties and Coding

Type of Data/Shows	Books	Ethnographic Observations	Interviews
Semantic	Topos "new"/ "innovative," other criteria of judgments within a innovation oriented knowledge regimes	What criteria are used in conversation	Explication of implicit knowledge
Pragmatic	Reports of how legitimate legitimization is done, illegitimate ways of legitimization	How criteria are used in interaction	Reports of how legitimate legitimization is done, illegitimate ways of legitimization
Grammar	Rules, instituted knowledge (regimes), field structures (status, hierarchy, boundaries), speech positions	Rules of inclusion, patterns of inclusion and hierarchy	Rules, instituted knowledge (regimes), field structures (status, hierarchy, boundaries), speech positions

Type of data in relation to heuristic levels.

Besides the goal of hierarchization, Lamont points out that classification has great importance and can be generated in the beginning of the research on the discourse level from texts. The semantic level also provides implications on the grammar of the field (Lamont 2012, 21.3). Ways of articulating the “problem” in texts both describe and construct the rules related. A specific characteristic

in the field of contemporary art is that the act of classification coincides with the judgment on the hierarchy of quality following the evaluation.

The structure of the investigated phenomenon is firstly carved out by a document analysis of books, then confronted and rechecked through interviews and ethnographic observations. As a third source of data – and the focus of the study – eleven interviews with actors occupying relevant speech positions have been conducted. So, for this project, multi-sited data interweave analytically identified aspects within the process of evaluation of novelties on the levels of interaction, discourse and organizationally embedded actors.

A theoretically guided sampling has been carried out and has been adjusted throughout the research process (Clarke 2012, ch. 4). The selection of data is determined by the reconstruction of discourse arenas according to Adele Clarke (*ibid.*, 228) and the attention to found knowledge regimes (Wehling 2007, 704ff; Rammert 2004). To focus the analytic attention, a broad question at the beginning of the research process is consecutively canalized within the work with the data. Also in this early stage other sources of data are subject to theoretically sensitive coding, generating theoretical strong concepts from the data to explain the phenomenon researched (Kelle 1994, 326). In this case, it was the question of how the involved actors know if a new artwork is good. The first categories are derived from this question, and it becomes apparent according to which criteria the sample has to be broadened. This process follows the concept of theoretical sensitizing (Strauss and Corbin 1990, 75f; Kelle 1994, 313ff).

In the case study, after a first analysis, it became clear what speech positions are present in the discourse on evaluating novelties in contemporary art. But it also became evident that the books dealing with the question of how to recognize good art did not answer the question themselves in an articulate way. Instead, the authors elaborate the problems of doing so. This leads to the decision to interview representatives for positions of speech to collect further explanations. A second peculiarity was repetitive utterances on the significance of informal procedures within the field. This leads to the decision to conduct a focused ethnography in a manageable local interaction field additionally to the exploring visits in the field.

However, compared to other procedures, a case study grasps the theoretical frame more rigidly and allows one to focus on the case in a way that restricts the openness of the Grounded Theory approach. Discourse analysis usually works on large amount of texts, while qualitative methods normally use a rather smaller text corpus. Particularly the combination of theoretically based coding and the selection of key texts or programmatic texts facilitate the reduction of the data corpus: Simultaneously or alternatively, a theory guided reduction of the data corpus following the Grounded Theory Methodology is applied (see Clarke 2012). Previous knowledge in this research project is reflexively pinned in the heuristic frame. It is also challenged by the method mix within the research process. Thereupon adequate data either in form of process pro-



duced data (texts) or specially collected data (thick interviews, descriptions) have been compiled. This ensures more stability throughout the research process, because attention on certain aspects of the case can be constituted earlier in the research process. Through varying methodical perspectives this triangulation of qual-qual methods avoids blind spots and enhances the consistency of the research strategy.<sup>10</sup>

Adele Clarke elaborated the conditional matrices by Strauss und Corbin (1990) into social world/arena maps. Within the axial coding, phase data are related systematically to the phenomenon, and research question regarding systematically following categories: causes of the phenomenon, consequences, practices to cope with the phenomenon and conditional aspects of the context (e.g. time, space, duration and social context (see also Strauss and Corbin 1990, 158ff)). Axial coding follows up conditions, problematizations, and strategic aspects of the phenomenon (Truschkat, Kaiser and Reinartz 2005, 32). Corresponding to Adele Clarke's (2012, 228) approach of situation analysis, this second step leads to axial coding – parallel to the Grounded Theory Methodology – regarding a) causal relations, b) constitution of the phenomenon, c) the context, d) intervening conditions, e) action/interactions and f) consequences (Strauss and Corbin 1996, 75). In following cycles, the codes are the basis to assigning further relevant passages of text until saturation is reached. Subsequently, selective coding comprises assigning passages of the texts that explicate why which categories show to be relevant. In the terminology of the SKAD this corresponds with the reconstruction of the narrative structure, the story line of the discourse.

After the data collection, the components 1. documents, 2. observations and 3. interviews are consolidated for interpretation. At this stage, the collecting of data switched from open sampling to selective sampling. In the course of the analysis, theories from the sociology of art, and the sociology of knowledge were consulted in a problem-focused perspective. This ensured variation and allowed for more general abductions. The question of a possible selectivity of sources plays an important role within the sampling process. Beside the general availability of data, the fitting to the research question has to be provided as accurately as possible (Keller 2004, 84ff; Lamnek 2005, 117). The subsequent sampling then relies on theoretical categories that are applied in a first step of analysis (see Flick 1995). The process of sampling comes to an end when a theoretical saturation is achieved (Clarke 2012, 116f). The variety of perspectives on the events generates a mosaic of the occurrences and generate the explication of tacit and or implicit knowledge and ethno-theories on the process of consecration.

Conclusions from specific data and their relations, as well as generalized hypothesizing, have to be constituted. At this point, problems of demarcation and constituting validity arise. To face these problems, the selected data are related in

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<sup>10</sup> Additionally but only punctually there are process produced data like catalog texts, newspaper articles, homepages, blog entries and likewise included.

the analysis by triangulation of varied kinds of data and ways of analysis aiming at the reconstruction of the discourse. The degree of saturation and course of theoretical abstraction (see Clarke 2012) within the interpretation process pursue an explanatory middle range theory of evaluation of innovations in contemporary fine art. After inspecting the data carefully at the stage of open coding, passages in the text have been coded according to previous theoretical knowledge.

### 3.1 Document Analysis

The starting point to reconstruct patterns of evaluation processes on contemporary art is an analysis of process-produced documents. The approved data to choose here are “introductory” texts because they provide highly legitimate knowledge. From a methodical perspective, a hermeneutic interpretation has to differentiate on the one hand between statements on the texts themselves – e.g. conditions of their origin and form – and on the other hand statements on the social circumstances translated in texts (Soeffner 1989, 91).

The selected textual data<sup>11</sup> contain theories on how the field is functioning, theories of legitimation, and exemplary processes. The books represent a highly legitimate body of knowledge assured by formal status in the field through organizationally embedded positions or professional or academic competence. They also provide ethno-theories on descriptions of legitimate or violating practices of legitimation as a process of inter-subjective recognition (Lamont 2012, 21.6). The books make tacit knowledge explicit since their intended audience is a lay public. This explicated knowledge offers a variety of exegeses of how evaluation is performed: what criteria can or have to be applied and also which may not be applied. Further: how to gain the required knowledge to do so and who represents this competence and knowledge on a professional level in the field. A preliminary view of the field traces the possible speech positions, practices of evaluation and legitimation, and fundamental rules.

The selected books provide information on adjacent discourses and position themselves in relation to competitive positions within the discourse. Gradually varying, they equally aim at professional peers and at lays as an audience. They state an increased interest in contemporary art and simultaneously a confusing

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<sup>11</sup> List of books: Katja Blomberg, 2005, *Wie Kunstwerte entstehen*, Hamburg; Jörg Heiser, 2007, *Und plötzlich diese Übersicht. Was gute zeitgenössische Kunst ausmacht*, Berlin; Hanno Rauterberg, 2007, *Und das ist Kunst?! Eine Qualitätsprüfung*, Frankfurt a. M.; Wolfgang Ullrich, 2007, *Gesucht: Kunst! Phantombild eines Jokers*, Berlin; Piroshka Dossi, 2007, *Hype! Kunst und Geld*, Munich; Isabelle Graw, 2008, *Der große Preis: Kunst zwischen Markt und Celebrity*, Köln; Sarah Thornton, 2009[2008], *Sieben Tage in der Kunstwelt*, Frankfurt a. M.; Wolfram Völcker, 2009, *Was ist gute Kunst?*, Ostfildern; Walter Grasskamp, 2010, *Ein Urlaubstag im Kunstbetrieb: Bilder und Nachbilder*, Hamburg; Christian Demand, 2010, *Wie kommt die Ordnung in die Kunst?*, Springe; Michael Findlay, 2012, *Vom Wert der Kunst. Ein Insider erzählt*, Munich and London.

complexity where criteria do not become easily apparent. This is why the authors choose a significantly more explicatory style of rules and criteria as found in texts written by professionals for professional peers. Neither singular artists nor an art movement are the topic, as in most publications, but “the big picture”: interrelations and formative developments are described, explained and pigeonholed. The authors are professionals with experience and expertise. Another criterion for the selection of this data-corpus is a phenomenon that evoked the text and therefore is reflected in the texts themselves as a motive for writing them: a boom condition for contemporary art since the year 2005. Consequences resulting from the so called “hype” or “bubble” are uncertainty, complexity, or even nebulosity. These are the terms that problematize the occurrences and are the central topic of these texts. The authors lined up to cast light into this impenetrable realm.

In the phase of open coding of the books, the process of evaluation is described in two ways. Firstly, it is conceptualized as taste, a habitualized implicit knowledge of reception. In the vocabulary of the field, it is to have “the eye.” This kind of connoisseurship is credited to all persons that have gone through a sort of training phase where one learns “how to see.” In the texts, it appears that all judgments on art are equally important no matter who does them. On the other side, there is a distinction between lays and professionals where the definition power of the actors is acknowledged. Then, the codes are arranged around descriptions of how art is evaluated and recognized with which criteria and what interpretative patterns (*Deutungsmuster*) show. On the semantic level, this shows the use of the topos *New*. It provides insights on the ways of evaluating and legitimizing art on the pragmatic level and field-specific rules that inform the process of legitimization.

Comparing the outcomes with models of legitimation within the theories of Howard S. Becker (2008), Pierre Bourdieu (2001), and Nina Zahner (2005), constitutional aspects of the discursive field, of the interaction field, positions of speech, referenced bodies of knowledge, reports of rules to investigate, innovations, and evaluations of novelties can be considered.

As the investigation aims at practices and criteria of evaluating artworks as novelties, the first of the eleven books is analyzed by open coding. During the advance of the analysis, selective coding is applied to the other books. This also includes criteria that define what an artwork is not supposed to be, what makes a work bad art, or no art at all. Adjusting those empirically found criteria to the model of levels of justification lifts the findings to a more generalized level. This shows a clear opposition of criteria allotted either to the sphere of “pure art” and the sphere of the “market” according to the story line of “economization.”

The second step is an open analysis to reconstruct speech positions, the repertoire of interpretation used in the discourse, and the interpretative components. In the qualitative content analysis, a focus on the topos “novelty” in the judgments on contemporary art is reconstructed. From the introductory chapters, the imag-

ined audience or readers are reconstructed because this has a remarkable impact on strategies and patterns of legitimation. In the terminal third step, selective coding along the central categories and the identified story line are systematically correlated with other topoi and speech positions (ibid., 94). Here, the procedure of legitimizing artworks with the focus on novelty again guides the interpretation.

Reconstructing relevant positions of speech allows for the identification central story lines of discursive problematization and shows that there are three types of grammatical art-logics: conservative, avant-garde, and neo-liberal (see also Menger 2006, 14). These logics manifest specific relations to the art market and prove the problematization of commodification to be central. Some actors state an economization that leads to increased illegitimate judgments on contemporary art – and some do not. Those narrations contain explanations referring to the autonomy postulate, strength of postmodern theory, the postulate of the “openness” of an artwork and its reception as well as the subject-based mechanisms of judgment and power distribution. Novelty is a frequent topos to rank an artist or work as outstanding but usually implied as self-evident precondition.

From the analysis of the books results the need to conduct interviews with professionals in the field to generate more explicit explanations. Secondly, the authors of the books mention “informal processes” that need a closer examination. That gives reason to conduct a focused ethnography. Reason for this is that in the books, the criteria that were applied in the evaluation process stay vague – contrary to the announcement by the authors. Typically, the authors produce a specific form of recounting where they elaborate what the artwork or the artistic practice is like and if it is interesting, inspiring or moving.

The second type of data is interviews with people that engage in structurally relevant positions in the discourse. Neither the textual data nor the ethnographic observations can substitute the individually gathered knowledge in and about the process of legitimizing artworks.

### 3.2 Interviews

A second type of data includes episodic interviews (Lamnek 2005, 331ff) with persons representing relevant speech positions located in Frankfurt am Main. They occupy positions with definition power (Keller and Hofer 2012, 47) almost identical with the concept of “jurisdiction” (Berger and Luckmann 1980, 125). As every speech position is equipped with specific resources and refers to a position in the “collaborative action” of evaluating artworks, it is likely to reveal typical explanations, opinions, and attitudes. The question here is: What patterns of interpretation can be found or are explicated by the actors? Professional experts were motivated to explicate tacit knowledge (semantic), rules and criteria of evaluating novelties (grammar). Interviews allows for the interrogation of involved actors on discursive practices within the legitimation

process (pragmatic) on what are problems with evaluating art: How do they do it? What are their criteria? What is a bad artwork? Is there a conflict between an art logic and a logic of the art market? Interviews with different positions have been conducted up to the point of theoretical saturation. Therein, interview partners are interrogated about how they gain their information on artists and artworks. Evidence suggests that traveling to various distinguished exhibitions to participate through physical presence and experience is crucial to know “the state of the art.” These bodies of knowledge on courses of events can only be brought to light by interviews (Lamnek 2005, 331, Flick 1995, 125).

The interviews are conducted in an affirmative open attitude to stimulate narrations. Actors in the field are used to tests<sup>12</sup> and tend to produce stereotyped or short answers. Some interviews have been held with persons with little juridic power, not only with the “taste makers,” and thus with persons with a greater pressure of legitimating the own reputation in the field. The advantage here is that the need for legitimation comes to the fore. Interviewed persons<sup>13</sup> include a professor (art academy), a gallery owner, a collector, three curators (*Kunstverein, Kunsthalle, Museum*), two critics (regional art magazine, blog), three artists (active, former artist, recent graduate), an art consultant. As there is no auction house or fair located in Frankfurt am Main, this position stays vacant.

So, the speech positions vary in age, gender, profession, career status, and relation to exhibition sphere and market sphere. Complimentary interviews with the curator of a museum and two gallery owners have been conducted in Amsterdam: a city with features comparable to Frankfurt am Main. This kind of data discloses ethno-theories on the evaluation process and criteria and also amends the other data sources.

The analysis of the interviews is based on Gläser and Laudel (2009) which constricts the process because previous steps of analysis secured the knowledge about the field and relevant practices. So, here the view of the actors within the process of evaluation and legitimation is put forward. The analysis of the process produced documents, again, leans on theoretically guided categories according to the qualitative content analysis (Gläser and Laudel 2009) to reduce the amount of data.

The interviews show that the estimation of an “economization” depends primarily on the basic art-logic the actors affiliate themselves with and not the profession they carry out. Interrogated about the importance of novelty within the evaluation process, the interviewees mark it as a self-evident precondition even

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<sup>12</sup> In the sense of *épreuve* developed by Boltanski and Thévenot (2006). In the relevance orders of justification evaluations are created around broad topoi actors can draw upon in the process of legitimizing.

<sup>13</sup> A peculiarity of the field is that actors often occupy more than one professional position at a time; this entails an empirical problem. Particularly in regard to the interpretation of the material this has to be taken into account when innovations are considered as a distributed process.

more distinctively than the analyzed books. Thence the topos “new” was not a central category in this sort of data. When asked for evaluative practices, a considerable rejection is the reaction. Instead the interviewees refer to the tentativeness of judgments and to their subjectivity. The constraints of the prevalence of judgments are elaborated in detail by most of the interviewees. Tentativeness is by no means a problem for the interviewees but an acknowledged quality that is deduced from the autonomy principle and therefore seen to contribute to the freedom of art. These reactions are the more dismissive the closer the person feels affiliated to an art-logic based on autonomy. As basically all actors are trained art historians, this fits to the basic assumption that the art works “real” legitimation happens over a long period of time and can thus only be preliminary.

There the art-logic (time will tell) and the market logic (decision now) oppose each other in clear contrast as the market logic allows for a clear ranking by prices. “Economization” in form of a market boom is then assessed in diverse ways. These range from ignorance or amused observance to reserved critique or benevolence (finally more people can make more money) to equanimous declaration of well-known cycles that will pass as they always do.

However, the statements converge in the common indication that the exhibition sphere and the market sphere are distinct and problems will resolve by themselves. So, the ethno-theories appear as “organized irresponsibility,” where the Matthew-effect explains the *the winner takes it all-principle* for discourse participants with high reputation. That the actor’s own decisions have an impact is ignored or denied. Only the museum curator states his personal definition power with satisfaction.

### 3.3 Focused Ethnography

Within this research project, thick descriptions from the ethnographic observations are supposed to be a supplementary source of data. They support the outcomes of the document analysis as they are used to double check the descriptions given in the texts and interviews about evaluative practices, informal processes, and how conversations about qualities of art works occur. They perpetuate the outcomes of the document analysis from the semantic level to the pragmatic level.

In ethnographic studies, participating observation aims at diving into realms of experience to understand them. Then the locale knowledge is appropriated and fixed in ‘thick descriptions’ (Geertz 1987). Such descriptions are thus outcome and material of reflection.<sup>14</sup>

Focused ethnography (see Knoblauch 2001) represents a specific version of ethnography with which it shares the basic presuppositions. The most signifi-

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<sup>14</sup> The restricted access to the “right” understanding cannot be secured, a fact which is reflected in the choice to use a method mix and different data sources to prevent blind spots.

cant difference to conventional concepts lies in the rules on how observances should be conducted. The focused ethnography is intended for short-term residences in the field of research. This leads to the premise that researchers already possess relevant knowledge about the field and consecutively are less likely to be participant observers. In relation to the process of collecting data, “focused” means that only a comparably small amount of data is collected since the collection is guided by theoretical sampling. Still, the attitude is open and not native, and is intended to create complexity in the step of interpretation in form of transcriptions or notes. In contrast to a classical ethnography where the large amounts of data have to be condensed, data – technical recordings or impressions – in this approach is subject to extensive interpretation.<sup>15</sup> Methodologically, the aim is to capture insider-knowledge and background knowledge with an analytic focus on communicative activities in social fields.

A focused ethnography (Knoblauch 2001) conceptualizes discursive practices – like object relations, interaction and rules – of legitimation in regard to “novelty” and “innovation.” Observations are the data that serve to understand the pragmatic level of discursive practices. To grasp the evaluation process in contemporary art this covers aspects of understanding innovation as a distributed process and its spatial and material embeddedness.

Ethnographic observations are integrated in the study to challenge the established procedure of using texts as the only data source within discourse analysis. They generate knowledge about context that exceeds secondary literature or general knowledge. Through observations, preliminary hypotheses from the document analysis are tested. To gain knowledge and access to the field of contemporary art and the local site in Frankfurt am Main, several events have been attended and memos and field notes are kept.<sup>16</sup> The observations cover variations of public, reputation of the exhibiting space, exhibited artists, and the constellation of evaluating actors.

The focused ethnography is conducted at the preparation and opening of the exhibition “the next artist” in the *Ölhalle* (Frankfurt and Offenbach 24.-30. August 2013).<sup>17</sup> Questions within the focused ethnography are: How is the

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<sup>15</sup> The interpretation is not only performed by a singular researcher, but by group-interpretation where the coding and contextualization happens.

<sup>16</sup> Two “*Saisonstarts*” in September 2012 and 2013, a coordinated opening of Frankfurt galleries; 3 Vernissagen at the off space “Kunstverein Lola Montez”; Frankfurter Stadtgespräch IX of the excellence cluster “normative orders,” “Was macht die Kunst?” talk with Christoph Menke (philosopher) and Bernd Hegemann (artist) 8.3.2012; talk and exhibition in the Deutschen Bank, “Cao Fei – A Three Days Treatment” in the course of “Globe – Art, Music & Performance” in the Deutsche Bank Towers with artists and curators 30.4.2011; two *Städelerundgang*, July 2011 and 2012 – annual exhibition of students from the Städel Academy; visits to the documenta 12 und 13.

<sup>17</sup> Due to problems entering the field a participant observation with a role as “PR person” is made. However, in conversations I had to introduce myself also as a researcher which was then accepted as several occupations are common in the field.

selection process of the art works (practical legitimation by displaying artworks)? What is the informal that was described in the books and interviews? How do the actors talk about art and artworks and evaluate them? Is novelty a topic in conversation during the preparation or at the vernissage of the exhibition? Are there any conflicts between an art-logic and a market-logic? Can indications for the unexplained “informal” practices be found? The outcomes of the observations again are compared in iterative slopes with theoretical explanations, the accounts of the textual data corpus, and later on with interviews on the semantic, pragmatic, and grammatical level. This relates abstraction levels from oral reports onto the interaction level, organizational setting, and discursive contextualization and provides information on the social structure and constitution of the field. The focus of the attention therefore is on situations of negotiating the qualities and quality of the exhibited artworks in conversations<sup>18</sup> and non-verbal interaction.

The temporary art space *Ölhalle* is the focus of the ethnography because it is a place that as itself is under legitimation pressure. So, the *Ölhalle* serves as a context where the “not yet established” are more explicitly in need of legitimation. But meanwhile it has a big attraction because it fits into the scheme of showing undiscovered talents and being at the beginning of something new that the field is always looking out for. The show “the next artist” is a small scale boundary event in the context of Frankfurt am Main. It is an event to access the relevant knowledge for a qualified judgment on what is going on in the art scene of the city, the region and beyond. Further, the event provides a platform for coordinating activities, the legendary networking for aspiring or established actors in the field. On the level of collective action, actors of the field identify collaborators. So, the *Ölhalle* is exactly the place where the question of this project is negotiated. A strategy one often finds in “off-places” is that a lack of curatorial experience and intellectual training is compensated for by a strong personal network to powerful people and gifted artists. This is also the case with “the next artist.” The strategy of mixing upcoming talents, even still learning at the academies, with already well-known artists via personal networks is a clever and promising strategy. Part of the exhibited artists are friends of the curator from the time of studies at the art academy who succeeded to establish themselves especially in the exhibition sphere but mostly also on the art market. Others are promising art students from several academies in the region that can achieve a higher reputation and luster through the more recognized participants. To select those students, the curator attended end-term exhibitions of academies and asked professors who they would recommend for the exhibition “next artist.” A third rather small group are also friends of the curator from the time of studies at the art academy that have not been successful in selling or getting art works exhibited

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<sup>18</sup> For conversational analysis see Bergmann (1990); for non-verbal communication, see Schwarz (2013).



for a while.<sup>19</sup> Personal communication is formative for the selective dissemination of insider-knowledge. One has to prove “the eye” and sound judgments which lead to reputation and discursive definition power. The definition power of speakers within the discourse is also constituted by their affiliation to institutions of high reputation they are seen to represent, e.g. a professor or a curator of a well-known museum. During the vernissage, the art works are evaluated as “interesting,” it is discussed whether one likes them, or people talk about how things were done by the artists. Novelty is not a topic in conversation during the preparation or at the vernissage or the exhibition.

A distinctive feature of the exhibition is that art works can be bought from the curator with commission. That violates a basic rule of the field which regulates a quite rigid division of exhibition and sales. By that, so the assumption, the autonomy of art is respected and conflicts deriving from colliding interest can be prevented. What sells well is not necessarily congruent with good art. The motivation to sell art is deceived as not compatible with choosing art works for an exhibition. This points to the central conflict between the art-logic and the market-logic. Both have a great demand for novelties but aesthetic criteria can be violated by market criteria.

Central outcomes of this type of data are that field configuring events (Anand and Watson 2004) are not only constitutional events for the field but also extremely important to get access to the relevant knowledge for a qualified judgment on contemporary art within the art world as *places of display* (Gieryn 2002, 130). Novelty appears not to be an explicated criteria in this sort of data.

### 3.4 How to See More with Different Data: Relation of Documents, Interviews and Observances

Usually discourse analyses are based on textual data only. In this case, books promise highly legitimate knowledge and detailed explanations. From the books result the relevant positions of speech, most rules constituting the discourse, and the story line problematizing the judgment on contemporary art as “challenged by market effects.” However, crucial criteria applied in the process of evaluating artworks stayed vague, as well as the relevance of involved actors within the process that institutionalized the judgments. Early on, it became clear that this sort of data alone would not meet the requirements of the research question.<sup>20</sup> Their intended audience is art peers and connoisseurs, or they consider only one single artist. Programmatic texts with a more general approach like art

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<sup>19</sup> This shows the importance of personal ties organized in invisible colleges (Crane 1972, 52). See footnote 7.

<sup>20</sup> Alternative textual data like opening speeches of exhibitions or catalogs of exhibitions, articles in art magazines like *artforum*, *art*, *frieze*, *texte zur kunst* or *monopol* show even less explicability.

historic introductions pay only a very small amount of attention to contemporary art. So, the relevant knowledge actors refer to judge contemporary artworks and their institutionalization has to pass through other channels. Instead the chosen books themselves give reference to aspects decisive for judgments on contemporary art.

Within the eleven analyzed books, noteworthy descriptions of widespread informal personal exchanges crucial to the process of evaluation appear. The authors of the books mention “informal processes” that need a closer examination to look for situations of production and reproduction of judgments. From the analysis of the books results the need to conduct interviews with professionals of the field to generate more explicit explanations why the criteria used to evaluate artworks stay vague. Interviews stimulate actors to produce more elaborate explanations on the role and relevance of criteria in the process of evaluation. By this, distinguishable styles of thought become apparent that are related to the story line of “economization” and produce proceeding ethnotheories about the problems in judging contemporary art and their solution.

These accounts of a backstage lead to a demand for focused ethnographic observations. Complimentary ethnographic observances show how judgments are institutionalized mostly in reference to preceding judgments by actors of high reputation. Thus it becomes apparent how definition power is enacted and comes into effect. How significant the participation in field configuring events is becomes clear during the observations and through the interviews. These events provide a decisive source of knowledge for judging contemporary artworks. They simultaneously are the main framework for legitimacy in the process of evaluation.

Interviews and observances are used to double-check descriptions given in the texts regarding the reports on evaluative practices, informal processes, and how conversations about qualities of artworks occur. They support the outcomes of the document analysis in a complimentary way (pattern matching) and a procedure of comparison to reconstruct the process of institutionalizing judgments.

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## 4. Conclusion

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Studying innovations as a distributed, ubiquitous process in time with its material and spatial embeddedness is a challenging task. During the first observations within the field, it became apparent that while there is a string of the discourse in written form – the most frequently used type of data for discourse analysis – which discusses what legitimate contemporary art is, the level of interaction is at least as important for judgments on artworks. This aspect already became evident in the analysis of the eleven books and gave cause to conduct interviews and verify those descriptions by a focused ethnography. The method-mix allows one to compensate for blind spots that originate from specific types of data. Continuous reflections on and about innovation are accompanied by elaborate

discourses that justify the new developments based on the interests of specific actors and actor groups. “These arguments can involve situational explanations, organizational and institutional rhetoric, and taken-for-granted ideologies” (Hutter et al. 2015, 34). Knowledge is a central category for research that wants to retrace what actors do in the phase of diffusion of novelties.

The introduced case study presents a highly reflexive procedure which especially considers the aspects of distributed action and knowledge in an informally structured field. It shows how solutions to specific problems of tenuous judgments on novelties in contemporary art can serve as an example of ways to deal with precarious knowledge in the distribution phase of innovations. The SKAD approach enables researchers to also consider involved actors with their socio-structural context. Because the reconstruction of a discourse aims at the typical, at patterns and at the question how social order is consolidated – but still does not forget the specificity of situations – it enables researchers to formulate middle range theories. It is receptive to ongoing processes of social change and especially to phenomena of institutionalized change, which are typical for societal fields that are structured by the search for novelties. So, it can also be applied in the phase of creation and development of innovations.

Working multi-sited (Lamnek 2005, 313, 320) means that the selection of data has to be reproducible and it must be comprehensible why they are relatable regarding their similarities or contrasts. One problem remains in aligning to the interpretative paradigm: the material remains “partial” and it has to be reasoned why it serves to reconstruct typical patterns. So, ethnographic observations and interviews are used to meet the tenuous situation of knowledge beyond a content analysis of texts which is possible due to the methodical connectivity of the SKAD approach. Further, the approach goes beyond common discourse analysis as it provides theoretically based reasons to find out if the saturation of data is accomplished. Theoretical decisions allow for a reasoned selection of data within a discourse on quality in contemporary art with a focus on evaluating patterns. This is a significant criterion to overcome problems of partiality of data and enables the researcher to give a comprehensible explanation regarding the composition of the data corpus and demarcate a discourse.

Hence, the data of discourse analysis cannot consist only of documents or texts closely related to the semantic level of vocabularies or topoi. The study shows that the heuristics of semantic, pragmatic and grammatical level are useful for decisions to consolidate the research design.

To adjust the collection of data and the data analysis according to preliminary insights while conducting the research, the situation analysis has been a useful guideline. The approach enables researchers to link macro aspects of semantics and grammar to micro aspects of negotiation and interaction of the speakers. It captures how actors contribute to a discourse on quality of contemporary art as a means of producing novelties. As a theoretical approach to the process of innovation, the SKAD proves to be sensitive for ongoing negotiations.

The case shows in a specific context how problems of institutionalized change of a knowledge order are organized in a discourse and its constituting practices.

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