Chapter 5 | A Comparative Discussion of the Theories of Becker, Bourdieu and Luhmann

All three sociologists – Howard S. Becker, Pierre Bourdieu and Niklas Luhmann – are classics in the sense that their works had a major impact on sociology in general and prompted a boom in the sociology of arts in particular. Despite varying criticism, many scholars still appreciate the intellectual quality of their oeuvres. It is also appropriate to call them classics because their works have become integral to many sociology curricula.

All three worked on a variety of sociological topics and therefore are not only sociologists of art. Becker (1982, xi) makes it explicit that his "principle of analysis is social organizational," adding that his "approach seems to stand in direct contradiction to the dominant tradition in the sociology of art" and therefore he "would not quarrel" with others if they said "that what I have done here is not the sociology of art at all but rather the sociology of occupations." Bourdieu's predominant interest focused on issues relating to power and the reproduction of social inequalities. So, he was aware of the political dimension of his research – and of his sociology of arts – and strove to integrate scholarship and commitment as a public intellectual in order to achieve *un savoir engagé* (Bourdieu 2002b, 3), that is, a socially and politically engaged knowledge. Luhmann devoted his life's work to formulating a general theory of society, which is functionally fragmented into several societal systems (e.g., legal, economic, political, art systems) and smaller interaction systems (e.g., psychic systems, love relationships). His interest in arts serves his ambition of creating a new post-Parsonian – one might add, postmodern – systems theory and he acknowledges that "art becomes a topic in the first place, not because of a peculiar inclination of the author, but because of the assumption that a social theory claiming universality cannot ignore the existence of art" (Luhmann 2000a, 3).

Coincidentally, all three sociologists were born between 1927 and 1930 and belong to the same generation, though they grew up in quite different social, political, cultural and intellectual environments. It is difficult to argue that all

three have a common subject, but we can identify overlapping interests and commonalities:

- All three scholars set their topics of research within dynamic networks of relationships and interdependencies called either social worlds, fields or systems, which coexist and are situationally coupled with each other. In this sense, Becker, Bourdieu and Luhmann are contextualists and generally argue against essentialist positions[1] (see also our theoretical discussion of "context" in chapter 9).
- All three presuppose social differentiation – Becker focuses more on horizontal, Bourdieu on vertical, and Luhmann on functional differentiation.
- All three highlight distinctions and boundaries between open and closed organizational forms, belonging and nonbelonging, inner and outer spaces in worlds, fields or systems. However, the distinction inner/outer, belonging/not-belonging is less important for Becker,[2] but pivotal for Luhmann and Bourdieu.
- All three clearly distanced themselves from methodological individualism and the dualism between micro and macro. Consequently, they emphasize the collective origin of artistic developments and reject the glorification of artists via the idealistic concept of genius.

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1 Essentialism with reference to sociological theories means that central social categories – for example, class, power, family, gender – refer to stable and unambiguous states, entities, structures or properties. Essentialist claims do not allow for contingent variations among individuals and social categories. Anti-essentialism argues that social categories are volatile because they refer to social entities with certain constitutive conditions that are semantically and situationally ambiguous. Furthermore, social entities undergo temporal changes within dynamic contexts that modify their shape and meaning.

2 Becker (1982, 35) notes: "Art worlds do not have boundaries around them, so that we can say that these people belong to a particular art world while those people do not. I am not concerned with drawing a line separating an art world from other parts of society." However, his emphasis on the role of particular conventions (1982, 40ff.) and his distinction between integrated professionals, mavericks, folk and naïve artists (1982, 226ff.) add relevance to the dimension of belonging and nonbelonging. Therefore, he (1982, 233) states: "Every organized art world produces mavericks." Mavericks are at the margins, and they can only succeed "by circumventing the need for art world institutions" (1982, 235). In an even more exposed outside space, we encounter naïve artists who "do not know the members of the ordinary art world" (1982, 258).

In this chapter we want to compare Becker's, Bourdieu's and Luhmann's sociological models of how contemporary societies organize arts, including their production, distribution, consumption and valuation, and how they structure artistic practices through educational programs, professional specialization, legal regulations, formal organizations and the allocation of resources. Although we have just noted certain commonalities, their sociological oeuvres are based on very different theoretical and methodological approaches. All three sociologists knew the works of the others, and their reciprocal comments (more often in polemical rather than analytical) tend to highlight their differences. Only Becker and Luhmann seem not to have commented on each other – maybe because their differences are indeed very fundamental. Bourdieu and Luhmann are first and foremost theorists of society, whereas Becker focuses on occupational and organizational relationships from the interactionist and the grounded theory perspective. Bourdieu as a critical sociologist aims to reveal art's "function of legitimating social differences" as well as the fundamental logics of artistic fields (Bourdieu 1984, 7; see Zolberg 1990, 156–161). As a radical constructivist, Luhmann does not claim his theories correspond with empirical reality, since he regards concepts like reality and truth as nothing more than products of a system-intrinsic communication (Nassehi 1992, 61f.). From this epistemological perspective, Luhmann developed his work in relative isolation and far removed from empirical research.

1 Sociological models

For Becker, art worlds are networks of interacting people that are formally or informally organized around a shared project. Art worlds as a kind of social formation with varying rules are emergent phenomena (Hughes 2015, 773). In this sense, the term art world, which is embedded in the tradition of the Chicago School, suggests a logical demarcation through participation, although Becker emphasizes that art worlds are related to each other and consequently form a broader web of working and organizational relationships. The original term social world refers to a practical and cognitive community (Unruh 1980). Such a community is built upon a practice domain – one could also call it an occupational collective (Zembylas 2004, 251–263). World is a sociological metaphor with a relatively open meaning and therefore does not suggest spatial boundaries (Hughes 2015, 778f.). In this interpretation, several interrelated art worlds form a sector through different umbrella organizations, such as unions, professional associations and other interest groups. Although Becker does not focus much on this higher level of aggregation – Richard Peterson, Diana Crane,

Paul DiMaggio and other sociologists of the Production of Culture Perspective do (see chapter 6) – this extension is, from his own theoretical perspective, permissible. To sum up, the metaphorical term art worlds highlights social interactions framed by shared beliefs and understandings including conventions, tastes, judgments and practical reasoning. Yet, Becker's approach is not an individualistic one. Structuring elements, like conventions and powerful positions with access to and control of resources are regarded as effective, though not determining in a causal sense. By drawing an analogy to musical improvisation, Becker therefore underlines the openness and contingency of working processes at all stages (production, distribution, presentation and valuation).

Field is a very different metaphor. Bourdieu (1971b [1966], 161) himself refers to magnetic fields that are defined by the effects of magnetic forces on other particles entering the field. This image suggests that there are structuring properties of attraction and repulsion that make one social field distinct from another. To be in a social field means, according to this spatial and physical analogy, to occupy a position and to be affected in a certain determining manner by the particular properties of this field. (We deliberately avoid the idea of causal effects because of the multiplicity of social relationships.) Since there are better or worse positions in a social field (Bourdieu does not regard this valuation as subjective), individuals always fight for better positions. Therefore, *position* has an objective but also a relational meaning, being the result of possessions, quarrels and struggles (Bourdieu 1996, 231). However, Bourdieu (1996, 187, 291, 298) avoids essentialism, since he emphasizes that the structural properties of artistic fields are volatile due to the formation of internal forces and to the possible interferences by other social fields, especially the field of power in a given historical situation. His understanding of social fields is not mechanical, because the nexus of place, time and situation form "a space of possibilities" – Bourdieu refers to Elias's concept of configuration – that prestructure individual action (Bourdieu 2000, 183f.). Yet, the individual does not vanish into an ocean of various social forces. Bourdieu ascribes an individual's potential for agency as framed by the space of possibilities since individuals can strategically act, invest resources, build alliances and acquire dispositions to avoid external domination (Bourdieu 1996, 57ff.; Bourdieu and Haacke 1995, 73f.). Here Bourdieu's theory comes very close to Giddens's (1984) thesis of the duality of structure and agency and is opposed to Foucault's theory of a comprehensively disciplined subject (Bourdieu 1998, 55; Cronin 1996; Kirchberg 2007).

In social science the introduction of the term system, which was already used in modern mathematics, the theory of logic, and biology, can be traced back to Talcott Parsons (1951). Systems, by definition, have precise and un-

ambiguous structural characteristics (e.g., unity and clear demarcation from the outer; consistency, functionality, self-referentiality). Several metaphorical analogies to biology and living organisms can be found in the works of Parsons (who received his bachelor's degree in biology) as well as in the works of Luhmann (Haines 1987; Villanyi and Lübcke 2011). Originally, Parsons used the term system as an epistemic tool that, first, helped bypass the very general term society by emphasizing its differentiation; second, gave sociological concepts such as social order and structure a particular interpretation; and, third, argued that social phenomena are grounded in basic organizing principles. Since then, system as a master concept has evolved further. Luhmann is a post-Parsonian scholar, who formulated systems theory in a constructivist spirit, arguing that it is the observer who conceives of modern society as a functional whole. Consequently, system is not an ontological concept, because Luhmann's theory implies "a radical de-ontologizing of objects as such" (Luhmann 1995 [1984], 177). Luhmann therefore differs from Parsons on several points: his supra-individual systems theory is devoid of any concept of human action or social behavior,[3] is more radical in asserting system-intrinsic codes and operational autonomy, and acknowledges contingency as having an important role in evolutionary processes. All these characteristics also apply to his sociology of art (see Luhmann 1986, 620–671).

Summing up, Bourdieu and Luhmann claim to have formulated a comprehensive account of the social and therefore their theories do not need other social theories to supplement their own theoretical approach. Becker's interactionist approach, on the contrary, is compatible with other approaches for example, with the Production of Culture Perspective (see chapter 6).

2 Understandings of art

As we have already argued, different metaphorical images go hand in hand with different ways of viewing, analyzing and modeling the social organization of arts. In this section, we will explore these differences analytically.

All three are sociologists rather than art philosophers; therefore, they refrain from explicit normative definitions of art or artistic judgments and are more preoccupied with the complex role of arts in contemporary societies.[4]

3 Luhmann deliberately speaks of operations instead of actions, but this technical term is so comprehensive that it may also include mechanical, preprogrammed and algorithmic operations.

4 It is not a coincidence that all three sociologists refer several times to the notorious Marcel Duchamp.

Becker discusses several times the classification of a work as an artwork, arguing that there is no dogmatic answer but only a sociological response to this question. With a critical proximity to Arthur Danto and George Dickie, Becker (1982, 148f.) affirms that art is practically negotiated in existing art worlds. Therefore art is "what an art world ratifies as art" (1982, 156). The analysis of such labeling and justification processes – This is a work of art because ... – should therefore focus on who is claiming what, what the social relationships of people who engage in such negotiations are, what reasons they offer to support their judgments, and how institutions intervene in these processes (1982, 150–162). Additionally, Becker (2006, 23) takes an anti-essentialist stance when he states that "it is impossible, in principle, for sociologists or anyone else to speak of the 'work itself' because there is no such a thing." Artworks appear and are used in very different situations, which in turn aesthetically and socially, formally and semantically infuse the artworks presented or performed there.

Bourdieu would not disagree with Becker's understanding of art, but he would presumably ask what might be the question that precedes the classification of an object as an artwork. Since artistic fields have historically emerged and are characterized by objective social structures, he argues that the artistic field (including its various subfields) generates the space of possibilities with regards to artistic claims and recognition. Classifications and taxonomies reflect social struggles, and consequently Bourdieu (1984, 6) admits that "taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make." The sociological analysis of artistic classification should, according to Bourdieu, uncover policies of inclusion and exclusion, vertical hierarchies and mechanisms of domination, and hence the practical functions of these social acts (see DiMaggio 1987a and chapter 6 in this book). In his later works, Bourdieu (1996, 242) recognized the self-reflexive and critical potential of contemporary art,[5] which, however, cannot be tapped if the viewers do not appreciate the context (see Bourdieu and Haacke 1995, 19f.).

5 The term contemporary art is ambiguous. In its temporal meaning it usually refers to artworks of the last two decades, but it also refers to a particular theoretical concept that demarcates certain kinds of artistic production from other art forms that are oriented toward established forms, for example, classical music, modern painting, the narrative novel in literature, etc. (see Danto 1997, 3ff.; Heinich 1998). Contemporary art in the latter sense is associated with a "trespassing of boundaries" (Heinich 2014, 34). Moreover, it is worth noting that this term is exclusively used for the so-called high arts, but not the popular arts.

Luhmann relates the concept of art to historically changing expectations and explains the observation that nowadays there is no social consensus about aesthetic norms that would differentiate the art system (Luhmann 1992, 372, 376; 2000a, 18). He therefore does not ask What is art? but What does art do? First, art is distinctively different from other social domains (Luhmann 2000a, 21f.), and consequently artworks become media for establishing via a particular code of communication the art system as an autonomous social system. Second, Luhmann believes that in modern societies art transforms sensory experience, which originally occurs in consciousness in a tacit and incommunicable form, into social communication about experiences. Creating and presenting an artwork implies making sensations and aesthetic ideas intelligible in the context of aesthetic communication (see Luhmann 2000a, 95, 109, 137–141). Luhmann (2000a, 148f.) builds this functional analysis of contemporary art upon two assumptions: self-reference and autopoiesis. With the autonomy of the art system, aesthetic judgments such as beautiful/ugly, interesting/boring become self-referential because they are derived from system-internal criteria. Anyway Luhmann ascribes self-referentiality a central position in contemporary arts and he identifies the emergence of conceptual art – "a painting which is not to be seen" (Baldwin, Harrison and Ramsden 1994, 44) or "ideas can be works of art" (Lewitt 1969) – as a significant change. "The art of the past [is] no longer a model, an exemplary standard, or a reservoir of *paradigmata* or examples. Instead it offered the possibility for a hetero-reference that does not interfere with the autonomy of art" (Luhmann 2000a, 303).

Becker (1982, 18f.) and Bourdieu (1996, 187ff.) emphatically reject romanticizing concepts of art and the artist as an exceptionally creative person, a genius with innate talents, who deserves a privileged position in society.[6] Luhmann (2000a, 243, 265, 270) sees the concept of genius as the result of a historical discourse that is related to a particular culture of aesthetic admiration. Interestingly he does not explicitly criticize this concept, perhaps because he rejects the idea of a critical sociology.

6 Although the concept of genius has for the last hundred years been repeatedly criticized as theoretically problematic and misleading, it still (often tacitly) persists within the humanities as well as in a general public discourse that characterizes particular artists as erratic, nonconformist and exceptionally heroic people (often white and male).

3 Understandings of social relations in organizational arrangements

Social relations occur in informal and in formal organizational arrangements, which are sociologically important since they radiate into several areas of society. Therefore, any sociology of art that does not address the social effects of organizational arrangements would be incomplete. Certainly, all three sociologists focus on organizational aspects in different ways, but all three apply a kind of relational thinking when analyzing and modeling such phenomena.

Becker takes a pragmatist stance by focusing not on individuals but rather on situations and social networks. A network of cooperating people represents the basic unit of sociological analysis. Becker (1982, 369f.) sets the focus of such analysis on coordination and interaction, which are shaped by shared conventions. Networks that form art worlds are in some cases informal and temporal, in other cases (e.g., orchestras) formally structured and lasting organizational entities. Furthermore, formal organizations – like art schools, art journals, commercial galleries, music labels, film production companies, museums, theaters, concert halls and clubs – can be complex since they may consist of very different departments and professional specialists.

Bourdieu emphasizes the "objective" (1996, 169, 181) and "competitive" (1996, 168, 181) character of social relations that occur when participants occupy different positions in a social field. The complex synergy of positions, the possession of various forms of capital, habitus and socially inculcated dispositions generate practicable potentialities within the given organizational arrangements (see Botero and Crossley 2011, 102). However, Bourdieu is not an organizational sociologist and he did not offer a deep and systematic analysis of arts organizations.

Luhmann's interest in organizations changed during his career. His early works were situated in the sociology of organizations, and he regards organizations as pivotal.

> If entry into and exit from a social system is assumed to be decidable and rules can be developed for this decision.... Organization presupposes that the role of membership in the system is contingent, i.e., that there is a recruitment field of possible members and that there are exit possibilities for the members. (Luhmann 2003 [1975], 99; our translation)

Since Luhmann deems interaction systems generally as "time-consuming" and unable to effectively cope with "high complexity" (2005 [1975], 11f.), he offers a functionalist explanation of the emergence and necessity of formal organizations. In this spirit, he states that "the more rationally organizational systems

are conceived and constructed with regard to their specific performance, the more difficult it becomes … to also realise interactions" (2005, 17). (Here the differences between Becker's and Luhmann's theoretical perspectives become clear.) Later on, organization plays a subordinate role in his systems theory. Now he conceives of organization as a derived term, "as a case of system formation that uses a conditioning of membership to draw the line between system and environment" (Luhmann 1992, 372; our translation). For Luhmann, the term relation refers to the elements of the art system – not to individuals, but to artworks. Relations are outcomes of systemic functions, like self-reference, generating difference and communication. He acknowledges that the concept of relations "relativizes the concept of element" (Luhmann 1995, 22) and clarifies that "systems are not merely relations among elements. The connections among relations must also somehow be regulated. This regulation employs the basic form of conditioning" (1995, 23). System-intrinsic codes and binary differences are crucial for this regulation.

The role of individuals in various organizational arrangements is discussed in very distinct ways. When Becker (Becker and Pessin 2006, 278) says that "people do not respond automatically to mysterious external forces surrounding them," he explicitly criticizes highly theoretical concepts like field and system. He certainly acknowledges objective constraints such as rules and conventions – he does not consider them as "external structures"[7] – but these must be observable for sociological analysis, and not theoretical derivations and reifications (Becker 1982, 370). Implicitly he argues that the relation of agents to rules and conventions is more a duality than a dualism (Hughes 2015, 775). Furthermore, Becker puts much more emphasis on the abilities of practitioners to negotiate meaning, to persuade others and to build groups for advocating certain matters of interest. From Becker's perspective, Bourdieu fails to fully recognize the practical potentialities and effects of personal interactions, bonds and commitments (Becker and Pessin 2006, 277).

Bourdieu sets individuals in historically emerged "spaces of possibles" (1993 [1983], 64), which are constituted by objective variables. Within a concrete space of possibilities, agents may intelligently act according to their practical understandings and capabilities (Botero and Crossley 2011, 99f.). It worth noting that here the term relations does not primarily refer to personal relationships, but to social categories, like class, gender, race or possessions of various forms of capital that classify individuals and prestructure their position in a social field.

7 Becker (1982, 370) urges us not to forget that the term social structure has been used in "a metaphorical way of referring to those recurring networks and their activities."

Luhmann does not regard people as members of the art system. However, even from this posthumanist perspective, people are not fully negligible entities since they are in certain moments structurally coupled with the art system and irritate its internal communication. Unlike both Becker and Bourdieu, in Luhmann's theory agency is replaced by the concept of autopoiesis.

Interestingly neither Becker nor Luhmann discuss gender as an important category for sociological analysis. Only Bourdieu (2001) has extensively discussed patriarchy as a source of symbolic and physical violence and domination that also affects the social organization of arts. Additionally, we think that a comparison of these three sociologists reveals that Bourdieu's analysis of power is the most differentiated. Readers of Becker's *Art Worlds* will not find much about power, although evaluative distinctions between artists – for example, integrated professionals, mavericks, folk and naïve artists – are interfused by power asymmetries (Becker 1982, 226ff.). Without doubt, Becker is sensitive toward issues of power within art worlds (1982, 100, 171 181), but at the same time he notes that power is regularly contested and fragile (1982, 163) and that people also have the power to oppose and do things "in the way that is, most convenient for them" (Becker, cited in Hughes 2015, 780).

Luhmann (2003 [1975], 11) conceives of power technically as "limiting the partner's scope for selection" (our translation). In formal organizations power is based "on the competence to give instructions, the recognition of which is a condition of membership and can thus be sanctioned by dismissal" (2003, 104, our translation). However, he also recognizes informal kinds of power, which greatly influence career and reputation (2003, xxx). On a societal level, power is a symbolically generalized medium of communication that prevents disorganization. Basic binary codes that distinguish between directive giver/receiver and superior/inferior shape the order of a social system, for example, the education system, legal system or art system (Luhmann 2003 [1975], 16; 1995 [1984], 32, 161). The constitution of political power, which implies a monopoly of some kinds of power, affects all other systems. At the same time, various interdependencies generate politically uncontrollable sources of power in society, so that contingency becomes a concomitant effect of power (Luhmann 2003 [1975], 91–93).

Bourdieu shares with Michel Foucault a relational understanding of power as a function of social encounters and both focus on strategies rather than on individuals. Bourdieu goes further, relating power to material, social and symbolic resources, that is, with different forms of capital. Exercise of power can occur on the material level by controlling relevant resources and decision-making processes. On this level, power can also become manifest in forms of physical violence and exploitation, as the #MeToo movement has revealed. Power can also occur on a symbolic level by dominating meaning-making and valua-

tion, by discursive surprise and arbitrariness as the symbolic demonstration of power. The correlation between both forms becomes clear when power positions are connected to social reputation, and reputation is reflected not only in higher remuneration but also in the exploitation of others.

Bourdieu acknowledges that power is in principle fragile and therefore needs to be legitimized, which happens not only symbolically through ideologies, but also practically through socially constituted schemes of understanding, meaning-giving and valuation incorporated in the shared *doxa* and habitus (Bourdieu 1977, 164; 1984, 480; 1998, 56f.). Bourdieu's approach to power is therefore embedded in a specific theory of practice that includes his concept of habitus. This makes power tangible for analyses at the micro and the macrolevels of society.

As mentioned above, power exists not only in interpersonal relations in the artistic field, but also in the artistic field, which in modern societies is represented by different state institutions (Bourdieu 1998, 41f.). Domination on various levels is secured by the conformity of state power with the interests of the dominant social class (1998, 34, 56f.). Unlike Foucault, Bourdieu does not overemphasize practices and technologies for disciplining bodies (though such practices are undoubtedly effective), but rather highlights the role of institutions in the normalization, objectification and formalization of preferred practices through symbolic activities (see Cronin 1996, 73). Consequently, Bourdieu thinks that resistance against domination should use the same means, which are primarily symbolic. For this reason, he ascribes social sciences, humanities and arts with a critical potential (see Bourdieu 1975; Bourdieu and Haacke 1995).

4 Conceptions of autonomy

Howard Becker does not discuss the concept of autonomy, because he considers such claims "superficial" and the related arguments "philosophical" (1982, 14, 39). His reluctance is rooted in his understanding of sociology as an empirical and to a great extent value-free science (1982, 369f.; 1986, 37f.) and of arts as a prosaic activity. Although Becker (1982, 15f., 46f.) describes, along with Michael Baxandall (1972), historical artistic developments such as the distinction between art and non-art, artist and craftsman, he does not interpret modern art as occupying a state of higher autonomy. Indeed, the concept of autonomy makes little sense in his approach. Art worlds are largely integrative since they involve not only artists but also supporting personnel. Even if Becker does not use the term gatekeeping in *Art Worlds*, he addresses several times the issue of power holders in the processes of production, distribution, presentation and

evaluation of artworks (Becker 1982, 100, 163, 180ff.). Furthermore, he insists that other non-artistic social worlds affect art worlds and vice versa (1982, 36f., 165ff.). Therefore, his critical distance from the concept of autonomy relates to his understanding of art worlds being "not a functionalist theory which suggests that activities must occur in a particular way or the social system will not survive. The social systems which produce art survive in all sorts of ways, though never exactly as they have in the past." (1982, 6)

Pierre Bourdieu focuses on social inequalities and domination and argues that artistic fields are structured by an unequal distribution of different forms of economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital. Furthermore, fields are characterized by various oppositions, for example, between positions that are situationally defined as orthodox and legitimate versus heretical and illegitimate. Particularly the subfields of small-scale cultural production are to some degree relatively autonomous as long as they can impose their own rules on their participants against the desires and interests of other agents, especially from the economic and political fields (Bourdieu 1996, 103ff., 115ff.).[8] Yet artistic autonomy is evidently fragile since internal and external forces try to increase their influence and promote their own interests on artistic productions and (e)valuations.

Niklas Luhmann takes a different argumentative stance. He regards modern, that is, highly differentiated social systems, in principle, as autonomous functional wholes, provided that they are able to give themselves their own structures according to internal functional operations and to distinguish themselves from other systems and their environment. This understanding of operative autonomy is also expressed in his concept of autopoiesis. Luhmann (2000a, 157) writes: "Autonomy implies that, within its boundaries, autopoiesis functions unconditionally, the only alternative being that the system ceases to exist. Autonomy allows for no half-measures or gradation; there are no relative states, no more or less autonomous systems." He immediately adds in a footnote; "One can certainly reject this conceptual decision [autonomy], but one would then sacrifice almost everything gained by the concept" (2000a, 356). To avoid any misunderstanding, autonomy in Luhmann's systems theory does not refer to agents but only to elements of communication in the art system, in other words, to artworks. Their autopoiesis and self-reference constitute their autonomy. "Modern art is autonomous in an operative sense. No one else does

8 Bourdieu does not associate autonomy with emancipation, but we assume that he would probably agree with Adorno by not defining autonomy individualistically. Resistance needs collective action and consequently it follows, as Adorno (2005 [1951], 173) writes, there is "no emancipation without that of society."

what it does… The societal nature of modern art consists in its operative closure and autonomy, provided that society imposes this form on all functional systems, one of which is art" (2000a,134f.). What exactly does art do that other social systems do not? Luhmann refers to well-established philosophical ideas: art has to find an adequate representation or expression of what is by definition undepictable and unrepresentable,[9] or in Luhmann's words:

> Kant already located the function of art (of the presentation of aesthetic ideas) in its capacity to stimulate thinking in ways that exceed verbal or conceptual comprehension. The art system concedes to its own unique adventure in observing artworks – and yet it makes available as communication the formal selection that triggered the adventure. (2000a, 141)

Bourdieu does not regard autonomy as an essential characteristic of artistic fields, but rather as a historical process located in the 19th century when a shift from the primacy of the instrumental function of arts to the primacy of the artistic form (i.e., art for art's sake) took place. He interprets the emergence of artistic autonomy from a radical rejection of the economic orientation of art production, that is, from the contradiction between artistic and economic logics. To build his argument, he analyzes the emergence of this contradiction by referring to the French literary field around the mid-19th century, noting that other art fields had different developments. He believes that Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867) and Gustave Flaubert (1821–1880) represent the turning point as they resisted subordination to "the forces of power" and insisted on their artistic independence (Bourdieu 1996, 60f.).

Luhmann develops a purely theoretical argument: if other social systems were to interfere in the art system, then the art system would fail to exist. Autonomy is by definition constitutive to the very existence of the art system. Bourdieu is less categorical and therefore speaks of different degrees of autonomy, but in any case, the field of power, which is "the space of relations of force between agents or between institutions" (1996, 215) is never absent. Therefore, the autonomy of arts organizations can never be absolute. It is also worth noting that Bourdieu articulates a critical and ironic view of the idea of autonomy.

> The evolution of the field of cultural production toward a greater autonomy is thus accompanied by a greater reflexivity, which leads each of the "genres" to a sort of critical turning in on itself, on its own principle, on its

9 See Lyotard's (1984 [1979], 78, 81f.) reference to the crisis of representation and the role of art to witness the "unpresentable" as well as Adorno's (2002 [1970], 196) comments on the "communication of the incommunicable" through artworks.

> own premises: and it becomes more and more frequent that the work of art, a vanitas which betrays itself as such, includes a sort of autoderision. (1996, 242)

5 Conceptions of change

Stability through relative temporality is the motto for every concept of the social organization of arts, whether developed by Becker, Bourdieu or Luhmann. However, stability is fragile and observable only in relation to ongoing changes, either in organized relations or in environments. To argue that stability and change go hand in hand means integrating a complex understanding of social processes. There is no historical doubt that from time to time, societies in general – and art worlds, fields and systems in particular – face disruptive situations that challenge their organizational form. In such moments, they can either (slightly or radically) change themselves to meet new challenges, or they may cease to exist.

For Becker, art worlds are temporarily existing cooperative networks, shaped and stabilized by shared conventions and routines, overlapping purposes and complementary competences, and by intensive interactions including personal bonds. He also speaks of "packages" that create "the inertia that keeps things as they are" (Becker 1995, 306). Art worlds and packages break apart when their members develop significant differences that complicate doing things together, when the need for organizational work is terminated, or when the efforts to control the output of creative work are ineffective (Becker 1982, 310ff., 367ff.; 1995, 309). Changes in art worlds can be induced by internal dynamics, since innovative people may be deliberately engaged in producing unconventional artworks (Becker 1982, 300ff.; 1995, 306). Unconventional projects are risky, but if they receive artistic appreciation then they affect other art worlds too. Changes in art worlds can also be brought about from the outside. Becker (1976, 46ff.; 1982, 226ff.; 1986, 71f.) explicitly mentions mavericks and outsiders who do not participate in mainstream art worlds. Such examples are art brut, the popularization of African-American music and music created by other minorities, the shifting of photography, cartoons and crime novels from so-called low arts to high arts. Materials, new technologies, changing production and distribution chains, new audiences along with societal transformations on the political, economic, cultural and demographic levels also affect the organization of art worlds as well as the development of formal organizations (Becker 1982, 306f., 322ff.).

Becker's analysis of change focuses primarily on artistic conventions. Shared conventions do not guarantee stability since the internal dynamics of artistic practices occur from the very fact that even if people share the same conventions, they may have in a particular situation a different understanding of the rightful implications of a convention. Therefore, negotiations about the work to be done occur frequently because the process of situational meaning-giving and valuing is an intrinsic part of the creative process (Becker 1986, 13f.). Such negotiations – for example, about the organization of the working process and related constraints, about the qualities of the artworks and their aesthetic impact on audiences, about the recognition of individual contributions to the production process – are also sources of change. Negotiations may be settled when individuals agree on what to do and how to proceed. Sometimes however, conflicts appear to be unresolved under a given constellation and this will sooner or later lead to a change or dissolution of a particular art world. Subsequently some of its former members will eventually try to form new art worlds with new conventions (Becker 1982, 310ff.; see Mathieu and Stjerne 2014). Becker (1982, 301ff.) borrows Kuhn's (1962) distinction between continuous and revolutionary change to distinguish this kind of ongoing re-organization, modification and transformation of art worlds from other revolutionary changes that take place when the character of artworks significantly alters. Becker (1982, 305) refers to impressionism and cubism in painting, and to Schönberg and his circle who used the twelve-tone system in composing.[10] However, in a revolutionary transformation not all conventions are washed away (1982, 307). Only very rarely are there changes so profound that an entirely new form of art emerges.

Bourdieu also emphasizes the fluidity and dynamic nature of artistic fields. His discussion of the tensions between orthodox and heterodox positions is similar to Becker's analysis of the relations between integrated professionals on one side and mavericks and other outsiders on the other. Bourdieu reformulates Heraclitus' quotation that "war is father of all" and sees the struggle be-

10 Impressionism and cubism challenged the concept of pictorial representation in European painting, which was based on perspective, light and shadow contrasts, and volume. Schönberg, especially, introduced a new way of composing by treating all 12 notes of the chromatic scale as equal and therefore used them equally often. A twelve-tone composition is atonal in the sense that it does not have an order in a key. This contrasts to the established tradition of European music, which is characterized by the idea of harmonic tonality. For Becker, these changes in Western arts are analogous to Thomas Kuhn's (1962) concept of scientific revolution.

tween "antagonistic positions – dominant/dominated, consecrated/novice, orthodox/heretic, old/young, etc." (Bourdieu 1996, 239) – as the engine of change.

> The principle of change in works resides … in the struggles among agents and institutions whose strategies depend on the interest they have.... But the stakes of the struggle among the dominants and the pretenders, between orthodoxy and heresy, and the very content of the strategies they can put into effect to advance their interests, depend on the space of position-takings already brought about. This, functioning as a problematic, tends to define the space of possible position-takings, and thus to shape the search for solutions and, consequently, the evolution of production. (1996, 239)

Struggles are structured by the "space of position-takings" and by habitus (1996, 235), although the outcome of such struggles is not predetermined. Struggles develop in a dynamic way and although dominant positions can mobilize more power resources, the space of corresponding possibilities provides particular opportunities for a weaker position.

Bourdieu applies relational thinking to social events, so he links artistic revolutions to changes in the social space and especially in the field of power. "The internal struggles always depend, in outcome, on the correspondence that they maintain with the external struggles – whether struggles at the core of the field of power or at the core of the social field as a whole" (1996, 127). Consequently, his analysis of artistic change goes against formalist interpretations of artistic developments (1996, 198f.). He generalizes his argument beyond the literary field: "In effect, the interplay of homologies between the literary field and the field of power or the social field in its entirety means that most literary strategies are overdetermined and a number of 'choices' hit two targets at once, aesthetic and political, internal and external" (1996, 207). A careful reading shows that Bourdieu does not formulate a causal argument. On the contrary, his term homology aims at avoiding determination. Therefore, he specifies that:

> Changes continuously taking place at the center of the field of restricted production are largely independent in their source from the external changes which may seem to determine them because they accompany them chronologically (and this is so even if these changes owe part of their ultimate success to this "miraculous" intersection of causal series which are – highly – independent). (1996, 239)

The openness of the art system to artistic novelty that occurred in the late 18th century – Luhmann (2000a, 203ff.) refers several times to Immanuel Kant – was a precondition for the development of a dynamic art system in the 20th

century. If, and only if, arts can successfully implement self-programming,[11] which requires the operational closure of the art system, can change then occur as the mode of a system's existence (2000a, 207f.). This evolutionary approach operates with the concepts of variation, selection and restabilization (2000a, 214f.). Luhmann therefore interprets changes as necessary outcomes of the system's self-organization and internal differentiation. Since artworks have to make themselves distinct from other artworks and create irritations to stimulate communication, they evoke artistic change. Here Luhmann uses the term distinction, mostly referring to formal and stylistic aspects. Irritation has a different meaning since it appears when artworks introduce typically non-artistic materials, forms, and references to the art system. Therefore, irritation relates to the "unmarked space" of the art system (2000a, 31). Collages, ready-mades, noise music, certain types of body performances are examples of artworks, which when they first appeared triggered irritation and public scandals.

Operational closure and autopoiesis are accompanied by structural couplings, which increase the system's dynamics and adaptability. In the development of Luhmann's systems theory we can observe a successive distancing from Parsons' version of systems theory. The term coupling replaced the Parsonian idea of the interpenetration of culture, society and personality (Parsons 1959; Luhmann 1978). In order to respond to the tension between the postulated autopoiesis and structural couplings, Luhmann insists that other social systems and environmental aspects cannot directly influence the art system. Couplings occur alongside situational observations and can affect the art system only if such observations can be translated into the art system's intrinsic communication. Therefore, external influence is situational and most importantly indirect. Autopoiesis "implies that any specification of structures (here any determination of artistic form) is produced by the system itself; it cannot be imported from the outside" (Luhmann 2000a, 50f.). This is also true conversely. According to Luhmann, art cannot directly influence people or communities:

> The autopoiesis of life and the autopoiesis of consciousness come about without art, although they may be influenced by art (the brain, for example, or the fingers of a piano player).... The same is true for the communication system of society. We can certainly consider the structural consequences of a society without art. (2000a, 51)

11 Luhmann (2000a, 203) understands self-programming in Kantian terms: "The Kantian formulation conceives the artworks self-programming as the freedom of the observer to let his cognitive faculties play without being guided by concepts. The point in speaking of an 'end in itself' or of a purpose without purpose—for Kant, at any rate—is to distinguish art from a conceptually fixed cognition."

From this perspective, Luhmann interprets modern art as the historical situation when "art can orient itself–and in this sense, art becomes historical–only in its own history, the history of an individual work's production and reception, be it the history of styles, or the intertextuality of the art system itself" (2000a, 204f.). Clearly, Luhmann's interpretation of artistic change differs significantly from Becker's and Bourdieu's.

6 Epistemic potentials and inherent limitations of the three theories

We have seen that Becker's theory of art worlds, Bourdieu's field theory and Luhmann's theory of art system display some similarities but also significant differences due to their different sociological understandings and research practices. By comparing their views on the social organization of art, we are not trying to judge which theory is best – this would be dogmatic – even if our comparison surely contains evaluative moments.

Let us begin with a contextual appreciation. Their empirical and historical references are geographically limited – Becker mainly highlights art worlds in the United States, Bourdieu the French artistic field with a historical focus on the second half of the 19th century, and finally Luhmann, although he did not work empirically, discusses certain historical developments mostly located in continental Europe. Critical reflections on these limitations are legitimate. Yet there are some additional limitations: from the 1960s and 1970s onwards we have experienced, in Western countries and a few decades later on a global level, significant transformations:

- First, we have seen a global growth in the cultural economy that accelerated in the 1990s after the collapse of the Soviet Union; China's development into a global economic power; and the global reach of the internet.
- Second, from the 1990s onwards, the effects of digitization on the social organization of arts (the production, presentation, distribution, consumption and conservation) have been overwhelming.
- Third, the world overall, as well as individual societies, are on the threshold of profound change. The ecological crisis affects us all, and its disastrous effects have led to a new awareness of global inequalities, postcolonial domination and cultural hegemonies. Furthermore, while new global players emerge (states like China and India; new companies such as Apple, Alphabet, Amazon and Microsoft), established powers are going through systemic crises that generate uncontrolled situations.

All these transformations have directly or indirectly affected arts (artforms, artworks, artistic topics, materials, means) and related organizational activities. It is therefore reasonable to ask whether Becker's, Bourdieu's or Luhmann's sociologies of art can still be intelligibly applied to an understanding of these new constellations.

Becker considers his theory of art worlds as a middle-range theory. Interestingly, his concept of an art world as a cooperative network of people doing things together on the basis of shared conventions is modest and can easily be applied to analyzing the organization of artistic production in varying centuries and countries, for example, the studio of an Italian sculptor in the 15th century, the work of a French composer in the 17th century or of a Japanese painter in the 19th century, the organization of a Russian ballet company in the 20th century, and the creative efforts and constraints of contemporary musicians in Argentina, Nigeria or Indonesia. Sociological analysis would then have to identify the people interacting, analyze their cooperation and resources, underline their shared conventions, highlight their relationships to other art worlds and display the different "occasions on which a work appears" (Becker 2006, 23) with the final aim of understanding how a particular constellation led to such a form of organization. This approach has the potential to create a comprehensive picture of how social and cultural parameters shape occupational competences, cooperation, formal and informal organizations, types of valuation and remuneration. Becker did not focus much on the materialities of art production, distribution and consumption, but other sociologists can, drawing on Becker's approach, extend their research perspective and investigate, for instance, the effects of digitization on contemporary art worlds.

Bourdieu and Luhmann claim that their theories can be generalized. But can they? Both base their own theories on other theories of social differentiation and argue that artistic fields and art systems are the results of a historically particular societal transformation. Historians who look at art production, presentation, distribution, consumption and conservation up to the 18th century can obviously not use concepts from the theories of Bourdieu and Luhmann. Moreover, it is worth noting that social differentiation did not simultaneously occur on a global level, nor did it take on the same intensity and shape in all societies. Therefore, one may ask whether Bourdieu's and Luhmann's theories are tacitly Eurocentric, as they take European societies as models for analyzing the social organization of arts. We believe that this criticism applies particularly to Luhmann's systems theory rather than to Bourdieu's field theory. Bourdieu extended his nondeterministic structuralist view with an ethnological understanding of practice (e.g., habitus, practical sense, disposition, strategies), which can also be applied to different premodern historical contexts as well as non-

European ones. However, this objection does not undermine the centrality of Bourdieu's and Luhmann's works, whose systematic view of the internal functions, mechanisms and dynamics of the social organization of arts advanced general sociological understanding.

Technology and especially digitization are beyond the scope of these three sociological theories, and we think there are some plausible explanations for this. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, when Becker wrote his *Art Worlds*, digitization was not yet a part of everyday life. So he acknowledged that technological means affect labor division and specializations (Becker 1982, 10f.), that sound and recording technology changed musical performances, distribution and consumption (1982, 17f., 314f., 330f.), but admittedly his analysis of these aspects remains weak. Sociologists who are involved in the Production of Culture Perspective, for example, Richard Peterson, who also acknowledges an affinity to Becker,[12] investigated more extensively and as early as the 1980s the role of technology in arts. This subject is absent in all of Bourdieu's and Luhmann's publications. This could be partly explained by their focus on historical cases from the 19th century, but we must also criticize this decision, since technologies were significant for art production and art distribution even in the 19th century. For example, new printing technologies emerged that facilitated the production of cheap pocketbooks and increased consumption figures, or the invention of new instruments and apparatus happened that enabled the emergence of new art forms.

12 In an interview Richard Peterson (in Santoro 2008b, 48) states that he first met Becker in 1968 and "by the late 1970s we both had come to see his emerging 'art world' perspective as complementary to, not as competing with, the Production of Culture Perspective." While Becker focuses on interactions and collaborative situations, sociologists from the Production of Culture Approach concentrate their analytical explorations on organizational structures and constraints. Consequently, Peterson does not speak of different approaches, but rather of "different levels of analysis" (2008b, 48).