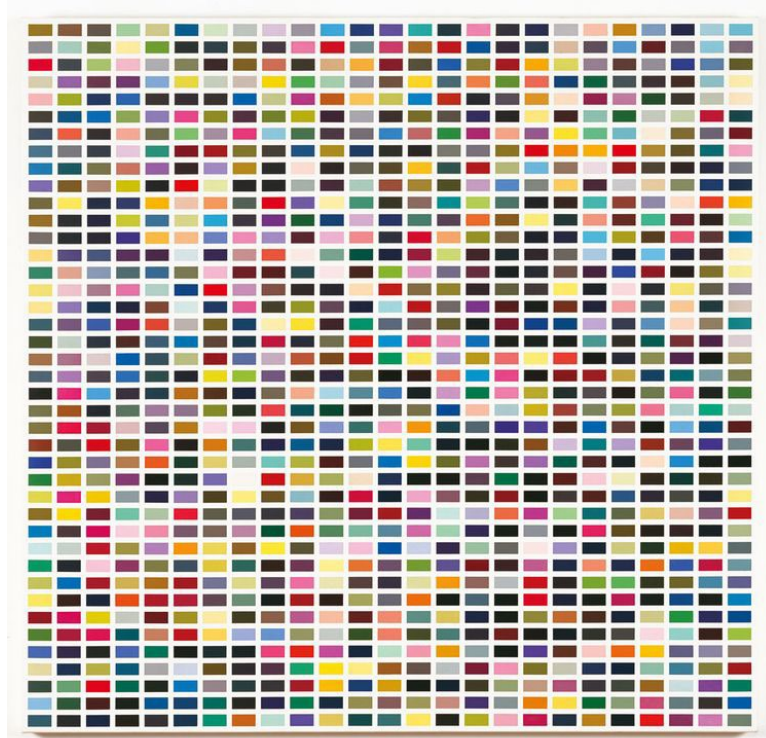


The Social Organization of Arts – A Theoretical Compendium (An Introduction)

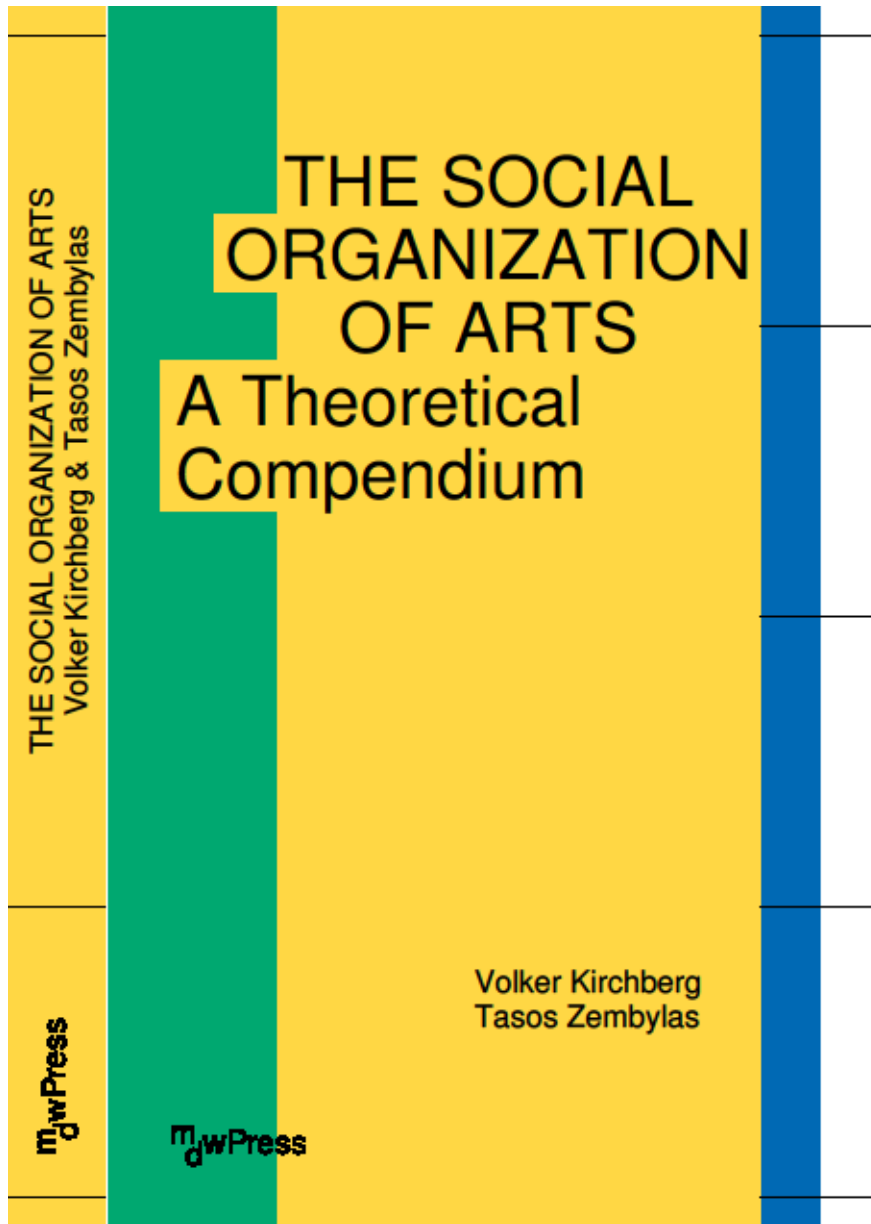
Volker Kirchberg (Leuphana University, Germany) &
Tasos Zembylas (University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna)

Gerhard Richter: "1025 Farben" (1974)



Short Presentation at the Leuphana University
17 January 2025

Master of Arts and Cultural Management MACUMA
Module F2 Theories of Arts Production and Organization



Volker Kirchberg / Tasos Zembylas

The Social Organization of Arts

A Theoretical Compendium

In recent decades, social and economic changes have brought about a growing awareness of the role of art and culture in society. As a result, scholars have turned their attention to a sociological view of arts, developing hermeneutic approaches and conducting empirical research that have led to a wealth of insights into the organization of arts. These studies of the creation, production, distribution, evaluation and consumption of arts are clearly sociological, but they include approaches from other disciplines, notably arts management studies and cultural policy research. Volker Kirchberg and Tasos Zembylas critically discuss seven major theories of the social organization of arts in Western societies, with the aim of encouraging further research and theoretical developments.

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The Social Organization of Arts

Order



- institutionalization
- structuration
- constraints
- faits sociaux (social factors)
- ...

Change



- agency
- empowerment
- situational dynamics
- technologies
- ...

Order and change are complex and indefinite concepts. Since we believe that no single theoretical perspective can do justice to the complexity and varieties of the social organization of arts, we prefer to emphasize the **merits of theoretical plurality**.

The subject of a sociology of organizing the arts

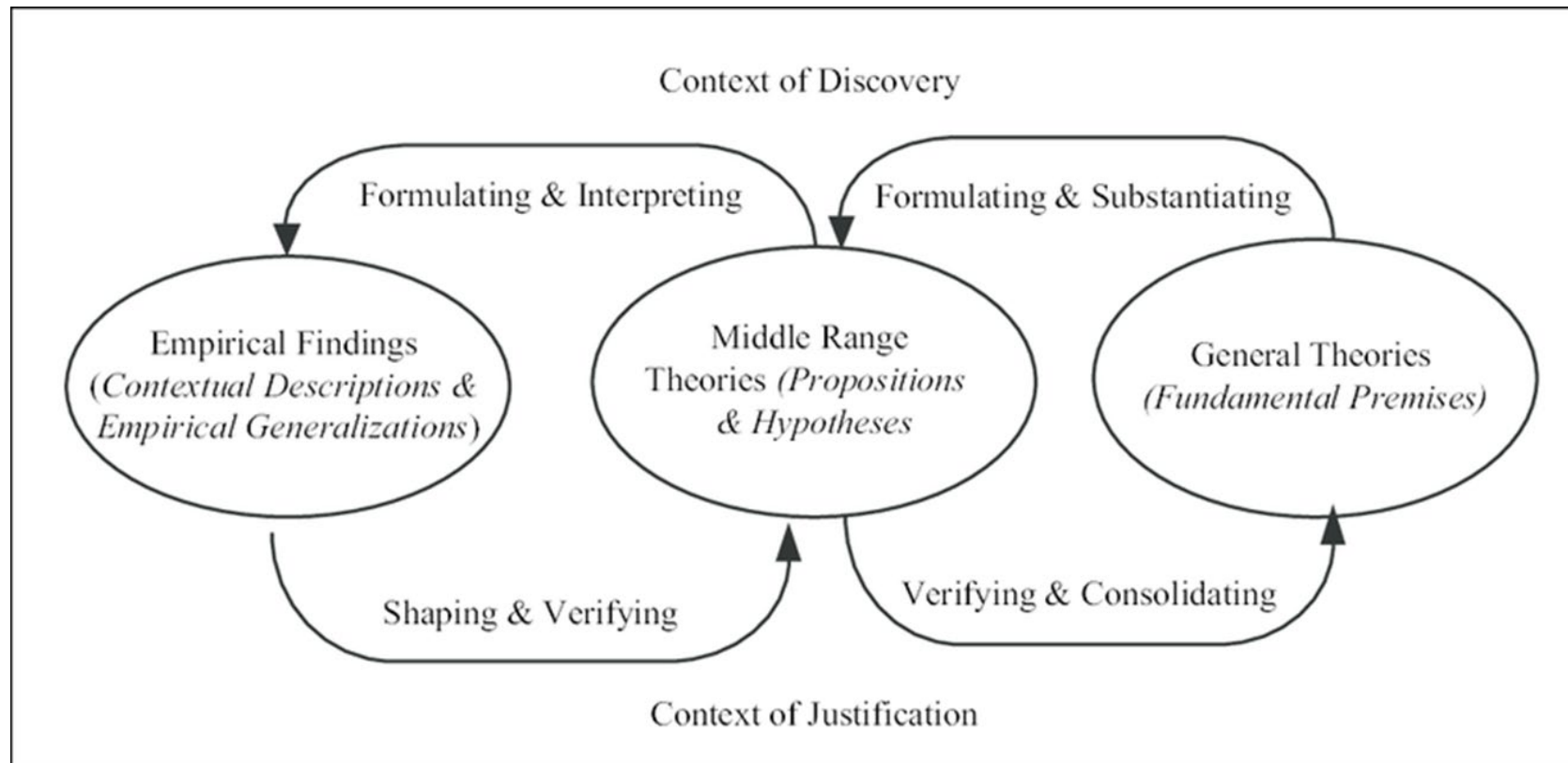
The organization of arts is a consolidation and dynamic interdependence of the **production, dissemination, consumption, (e)valuation, and conservation of artworks.**

This is achieved by a bundle of different **practices, organizations, discourses, materials, symbolic forms, technologies and objects,** always emerging and changing in given social and cultural situations.

Therefore, terms like arts, artwork, artist, and artistic values are ascriptions related to **manifold temporal, spatial, practical and normative arrangements** that shape their situational meanings.

Seven selected sociological theories of the social organization of arts

The seven theories we compile, compare, and consolidate in our book are closely related, on the one hand, with broader paradigmatic social theories, which then have been applied to arts organization analysis. Some of these “grand” theories are sociological classics (e.g. Becker, Bourdieu, Luhmann). On the other hand, we selected “middle range theories” that are outcomes from an intense scholarly, often empirical, engagement with organizing the arts. These theoretical perspectives do not represent “schools”, but consist of various loosely connected scholars.

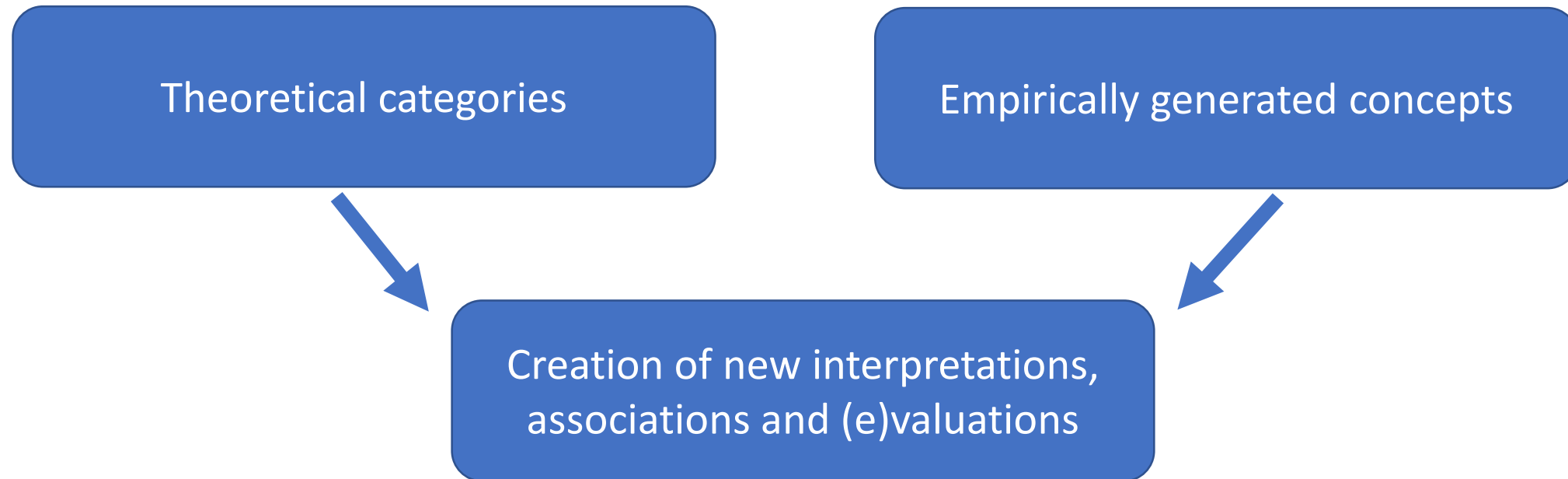


Sociological theories are “ways of seeing” (Wittgenstein) and “ways of worldmaking” (Goodman)

The social organization of arts can be analytically divided in (mostly theoretical) categories like **art worlds, artistic fields, art sectors, and art systems**.

These categories are then combined with (or explained by) (mostly empirically affirmed) concepts like **convention, institution, network, figuration, industry, cluster**.

The merging of categories and concepts has epistemic functions, i.e. generating certain **associations, mediating particular interpretations and allowing valuations**.



Sociological theories and perspectives to the social organization of arts

- (1) **Howard Becker's** art worlds (interactionism theory),
 - (2) **Pierre Bourdieu's** field theory (genetic structuralism theory),
 - (3) **Niklas Luhmann's** art system (systems theory),
-
- (4) Production of Culture Perspective (main reference **Richard Peterson**),
 - (5) Neo-Institutionalism (main reference **Paul DiMaggio** and **Walter Powell**),
 - (6) Cultural Institutions Studies (advancement of production-of-culture approach, with the help of philosophical practice theory and political science ideas),
 - (7) Social Network Analysis (main reference **Harrison White**).

These theories have emerged out of different theoretical backgrounds, address different problems and use different terminologies.

Differences of the selected theories of arts organization

1. The role of **self-organizing processes**, collectives, collaborations and shared conventions
2. The role of **social structures** of the artistic field and relational positions in these fields
3. The role of features characterizing the **autonomous and self-referential** art system
4. The role of factors determining the **production of culture**
5. The role of **taken-for-granted sets** of rules, resources, social pressures
6. The role of artistic and organizing **practices** embedded in institutional arrangements
7. The role of **networks** as drivers of order and change in the arts.

Further differences with respect to specific topics:

8. The role of **power and resources** in the artistic realm, e.g. evaluative regimes, artistic autonomy
9. The role of **artistic materials and technologies**, driving organizational change
10. The role of **small-scale** (micro) vs. **large-scale** (macro) phenomena
11. The role of **intersectional concepts** like gender, race, age etc.
12. The role of **methodological issues** and empirical methods

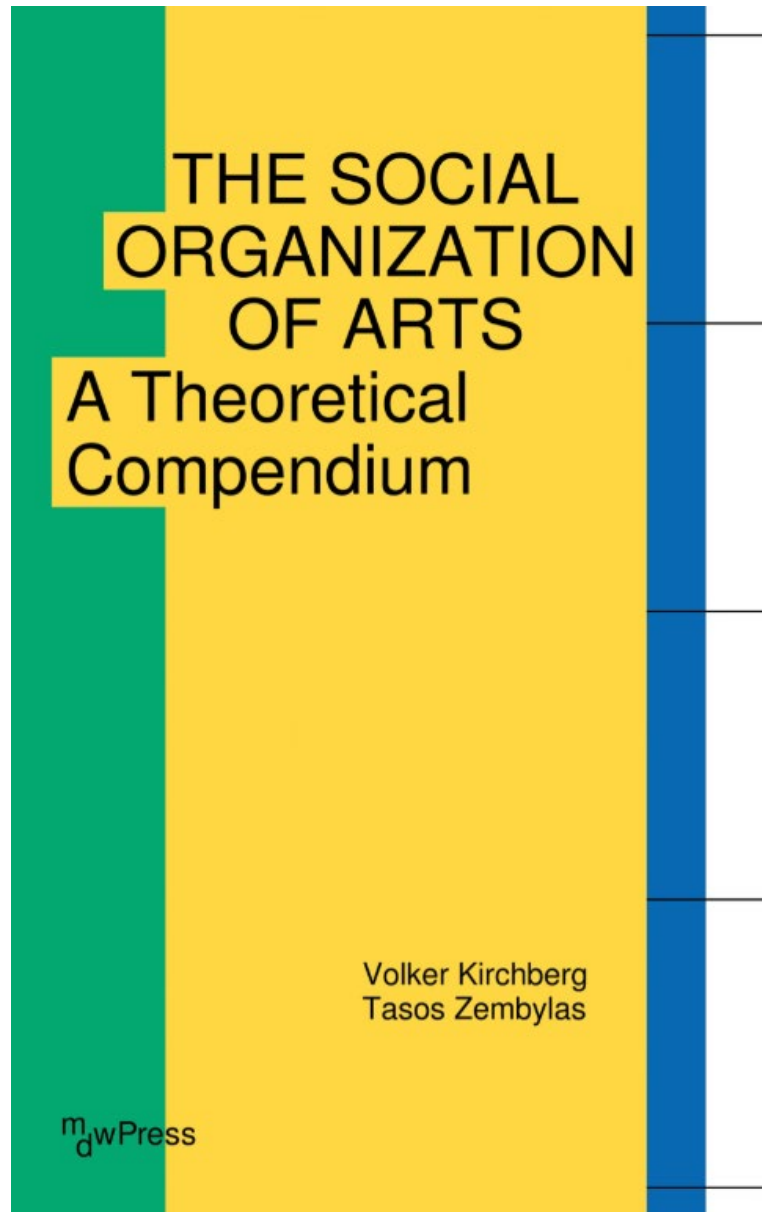
Conclusion - Outlook

Is it **inspiring** for not only the sociology of arts but also for cultural policy, cultural economy and arts management to study theories of the social organization of arts?

- By presenting different theories and perspectives of the social organization of arts, we hope to offer a rich picture on how **sociological eyes** understand this topic.
- A multiple-theoretical view might avoid unnecessary **idiosyncrasies, fragmentations and dogmatic exclusions** when studying the social organization of arts.
- However, sociology, as we experience it, has blurred boundaries. Taking the **diversity of sociological perspectives** seriously means acknowledging the genuine values and contributions to the development of scholarly thinking.

And, **what should be done next** when studying and developing theories of the social organization of arts?

- Due to the scholarly **underexposure of the irregular**, the untypical and the unpredictable at the margins of arts, we recommend that **future attempts to develop theory** should not refrain from messiness.
- Ambiguities, indeterminacies, fuzziness, liquidity and contingency are characteristics of societies. Sociological theories have their **epistemic value**, not in foreseeing social phenomena of organizing arts but in **positing alternative ways** of meaning-making in the arts.



Thank you for your attention!

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