



Hubert Knoblauch

Communicative Action, Reflexivity, and Innovation Society

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Abstract

On the basis of the historical discourse on innovation, the paper argues that the transformation of modern society is related to the rise of innovation (1). Because of the lack of a sociological notion, the paper then proposes (2) a theoretical framework, communicative constructivism, which opens the way to a general sociological notion of innovation. This notion includes the concept of “reflexivity” and, reflexive innovation (3), which forms the basis for the concept of the “innovation society,” which in turn allows us to grasp the increasing significance of innovation and creativity in recent years (4).

Keywords

Innovation, Communicative Action, Communicative Constructivism, Reflexivity, Innovation Society.

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“Di doman‘ non c’è certezza” (Lorenzo di Medici)

Communicative Action, Reflexivity, and Innovation Society¹

0. Introduction

While preparing this paper, I accidentally found an article in one of the Berlin newspapers on a meeting of the “Berlin Innovation Consensus,” a consortium supported by companies such as Shell, Google, Deutsche Bank and the German Ministry of Economics and Technology. Their goal was not just to encourage certain innovations. It was to support innovation as an end in itself. In a sense, it is an example of what this paper is about.

In including this example under the heading of “innovation society”, I am deploying a notion that guides research at the Graduate School “Innovation Society. The Reflexive Creation of the New” at the Technical University of Berlin. As the Graduate School is devoted to conducting specific empirical studies in various societal fields—culture and the arts, science and technology, city and urban planning, and economy and business—this paper aims to provide an initial programmatic clarification of the major categories of our approach to innovation.² In order to get an understanding of innovation across social fields as different as art and science, urban planning and economy, the notions suggested are necessarily quite abstract in nature. Also, it addresses the notion of social innovation which has been the topic of a conference at which this paper was given as a keynote presentation. ³ Finally, as the empirical studies in the different fields undertaken by the Graduate School are still underway, I have to apologize that the theoretical suggestions are also but works in progress.

As terminology is at issue, I will add one last introductory remark on methodology. Innovation is, quite obviously, a word that is not merely part of a scholarly debate in academia. The example mentioned above may give reason to suspect that it is also a much-

¹ Paper presented at the Conference “Struggling with Innovations? Social Innovations and Conflicts in Urban Development and Planning” at the Leibniz Institute for Regional Development and Structural Planning (IRS), Erkner, 7.-8.11. 2013. I am grateful for comments in the argument by Anina Engelhardt, Miira Hill, Werner Rammert and Roisin Cronin for correcting the style of the paper.

² Michael Hutter, Hubert Knoblauch, Werner Rammert and Arnold Windeler, Innovationsgesellschaft heute: Die reflexive Herstellung des Neuen. Technical University Technology Studies Working Papers TUTS-WP-4-2011.

³ In several ways, the paper by Gabriela Christmann (Social Innovation, Space and Conflicts), which was presented at the same conference, takes a similar theoretical position, yet applies it to the specific problems of social innovation.

contested category within the social world itself for “innovation” may give access to purchase objects, money and social status, or, as social innovation may yield recognition, appreciation and the democratic support for society members’ creativity. As the latter notion has been linked to innovation at least since Schumpeter, it seems necessary to clarify “members’” notions of innovation in the way suggested by the sociology of knowledge. This involves taking actors and their orientations as serious matters worthy of study in their own right and therefore retrieving their “first order constructs” (Schutz 1962). In this vein, I shall refer to the various meanings of innovation as used by the actors, including scientists propagating innovation, as first-order category. This paper itself attempts to provide a notion of innovation that allows us to talk about the actors’ use of innovation. This notion is more extensive and builds on the relation of communicative action to newness.

Although some authors suggest analyzing social innovation by using a sociology of actors’ knowledge about innovation (MacCallum, Moulaert, Hillier, Vicari 2009), a study pursuing this goal in a systematic and empirically sound way, i.e., an ethnosemantic study of the current use of “innovation,” is still lacking. Only a systematic study of this kind would allow us to develop an empirically grounded, social scientific notion of innovation that is adequate to the actor’s first-order-construct notion, i.e., what Schutz calls “second order construct”.⁴ But although we lack contemporary analyses of the meaning, social distribution, and order of discourses on innovation, we can at least draw on some historical analyses of the semantics of innovation.⁵ These analyses will allow us to sketch the relation between the transformations of modern society and the most general semantic aspects of innovation (1). In order to compensate for the lack of empirical studies on the meaning of innovation, I want to propose (2) a theoretical framework, communicative constructivism, which opens the way to a general sociological notion of innovation. This notion includes the concept of “reflexivity” and, reflexive innovation (3), which forms the basis for the concept of the “innovation society,” which in turn allows us to grasp the increasing significance of innovation and creativity in recent years (4)

⁴ As Moulaert suggests in his adaption of the sociology of knowledge (Moulaert, Dyck, in print), one might need even to include planners and scientific consultant’s notions (which themselves draw on scientific concepts) in order to, so to speak, inductively infer a general notion of innovation; in most contexts indicated by him, the goal seems much more to arrive at a consensual idea on the specific contents of what should be new instead of a general notion of social innovation.

⁵ I am drawing on the papers by Godin, which to me seem to methodologically follow the pattern of an historical semantics as suggested by Kossellek (1985).

1. *Discourses and meanings of innovation*

Metaphysics may still debate the question of whether “there is nothing new under the sun,” as Salomon holds in Ecclesiastes, or if “the new happens into being,” as ontological philosophy so mysteriously claims (Badiou 2007: xxvii). As undecidable as these propositions may be, one should stress that, from a sociological point of view, change, and with it the creation of the new, seems to be an issue for all societies. While sociological approaches drawing on evolutionary theory invoke processes of selection and differentiation to explain the necessity for novelty, historicist brands of sociology conceive of society as social construction of order in the face of chaos. In fact, it seems that the classical model of “traditional society”, which dominated over most of human history and which provides the negative foil for “modern society”, is specifically designed to face the perils of chaos. Tradition is established in action because of the need to provide stability (e.g., through institutions) and in order to establish order against the riptide of change. Thus, Auguste Comte, originator of our discipline’s name, focused on “social statics” as the stabilized institutional structure of society that would hold fast against the flux of “social dynamics,” history, and, later, evolution.

However, as you well know, Comte (1830) also used the notion of innovation when praising, for example, the Catholic Church for introducing general education as an “*immense et heureuse innovation sociale*” (n.b.). As Godin (2008) shows, the notion of innovation had quite frequently been used in France and England since early modern times in a very negative sense and even as an accusation. It only acquired a positive connotation after 1789. One may therefore claim that the meaning of innovation underwent a transformation at the turn towards modern society. This change also applies to what later came to be called social innovations *sensu strictu*. In fact, during the 19th century, social reformers came to be called innovators, and this, one should stress, included businessmen (Godin 2012) — long before Schumpeter (1939) praised their decisive contribution to innovation (1939). *Innovation, in this sense, as an explicit topic, is a feature of modernity.*⁶ To the degree that the inner-worldly future became detached from religious interpretation (Minois 1996), to the degree that modernity accepted a view of history as progressing in time (Knoblauch 2005), innovation became an inherent feature of modern society. Because of modernity’s well-known (and sometimes lamented) focus on instrumentality and technology (Weber 2003), it comes to no surprise that the notion of innovation was gradually reduced to the sphere of science, technology, and

⁶ One of the most explicit indications can be seen in the “*Querelle des anciens et des modernes*,” which argued about the value of tradition or novelty in literature, starting in the modern early era in France, Britain, and Germany – and laying the ground for a name for an era of perpetual innovation, i.e. “modernity.”

economy. Thus, it was in the economy that innovation was celebrated as a relevant concept, and it was science and technology that were considered the major contributors to innovation. The discourses of innovation referred to here (and analyzed by Godin) are defined by the explicit reference to the notion of innovation.⁷ Similar to Kosellek's (1985) method of historical semantics, this means that lexical association with the word "innovation" are noted, and basic changes in these associations are considered in order to identify historical changes in "semantics."

As Godin (2008; 2012) convincingly argues in his reconstruction of the discourse on innovation and social innovation, the success of innovation in modernity was due to its conceptual contribution. While there was a great tension between the concept of invention and the concept of imitation in the premodern era, innovation subsequently succeeded in overcoming this tension. Indeed, the notion of "invention" and the process linked to it can lay claim to an exceptional novelty that goes far beyond mere imitation, as, for example, the theories of Tarde (2011 [1890]) demonstrate. The notion of innovation, however, makes it possible to bridge the gap between these two concepts and to link both in a linear way: Innovation implies an invention, yet it also means that an invention can and must be followed by imitation, i.e. by the reproduction (and reproducibility) of this very invention. Theories of innovation have successfully conflated the ideas of invention and imitation, for example, Rogers's famous theory of the "diffusion of innovations," developed in the early 1960s (Rogers 1995). The political and economic support for innovations that has continued to the present also took on a specific momentum at this time. One indication for this is the fact that the term innovation had rarely been used in economics before, but took off starting in the 1960s.⁸

Despite its relevance to the economy, as well as the management of science and technology, innovation did not become a major category in sociology or any other fundamental science. This has some consequences for its sociological study, for rather than having been defined sociologically, i.e., in terms of sociological theory and empirical study, it was defined socially by the actors and institutions either interested in or opposed to innovation. Innovation has

⁷ I am grateful to Anina Engelhardt for indicating that Godin's reconstruction may underestimate artistic movements. I need to stress that an empirically sound reconstruction of the discourse on innovation is still a desideratum.

⁸ Interestingly, Peter Drucker was one of the first to dedicate an extended discussion to innovation in 1957—an author who later also triggered the international debate on the "knowledge society" (Drucker 1969). The "Sputnik shock" seems to be only one of the many factors contributing to the explicit attentiveness towards societies future and the international coordination of global projects, such as the "information society" or the knowledge society".

been extensively used by the discourse of institutions devoted (or opposed) to the practice of innovation and thence by an actor category.

2. *Constructing the new*

For those seeking a sociological understanding of innovation, that is, an understanding of innovation in terms of sociological second order categories, it is Roger who offers a useful point of access. To Rogers (1995:11), innovation is any “idea, procedure or object perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption”. Although Rogers presumably did not intend it, this definition is tremendously sociological for it implies, first, that innovation is based on the more general assessment of novelty; second, he assumes that a social relation (and social actions, which are the interactions constituting the social relation) between those who produce whatever is new (an idea, a procedure or an object) are essential to innovation; and, thirdly, his definition implies there is someone who “perceives” something as new, implying that novelty is substantially an intersubjective phenomenon. For these reasons, the definition has strong social constructivist implications: It assumes that what is new is dependent on the other’s perception. One should add that, as a psychological term, “perception” is limited in its capacity to cover not only perception but also the fact that this perception can be perceived by someone else (a phenomenon which, as I will argue below, corresponds much more to communication than perception). Finally, one should stress that, while Schumpeter (1930) mainly focused on products and procedures, Rogers explicitly includes ideas.

Although Rogers did not intend to propose a sociological theory of innovation but rather of the diffusion of innovation, at least three of the features mentioned render his definition a very apt starting point for a sociological theory of innovation. A sociological theory of innovation, then, needs to embrace the differences between thought, action, and objects, it needs to address the intersubjectivity of innovation, and it needs to address the relation between the producers of novelty and their recipients.

Because of its capacity to cover these three aspects, I turn to communicative constructivism as a sociological framework within which we may conceptualize such a notion. As it would exceed the scope of this paper to sketch the approach here *in extenso*, let me just address those aspects that are most pertinent to the notion of innovation.⁹ Suffice it to say that communicative constructivism builds on the theory of the social construction of reality (Berger and Luckmann 1966). Instead of adapting their (Weberian) notion of social action, it

⁹ For some more detailed expositions of this theory in English see Knoblauch 2001; 2013a).

focuses on communicative action. The notion of communicative action this theory uses draws on and deviates from Habermas's famous usage of the term (Habermas 1984): it does not separate the instrumental rationality of the world of objects, work or, for that matter, technological innovation, from the communicative rationality of language use; rather, it implies that communicative action essentially involves some kind of objectivation in order to affect others (thus simultaneously "affecting their common world").

As I have elaborated on communicative constructivism and its notion of communicative action elsewhere in some detail, I only want to mention those aspects relevant to the notion of innovation. In this respect, it is important to mention that the notion of communicative action suggested here includes the embodied performance of social actions, for it is only through their embodiment that social actions can become part of other actors' experiences (or "perceptions"). As communicative actions are oriented towards, designed for, and dependent upon others' responses, they are essentially relational. In addition, the performance of communicative action implies necessarily some kind of objectivation.¹⁰ By objectivation, we refer not only to objects produced but also to the body's performative activities and the corresponding objects addressed, involved or produced, such as sounds, gestures, or facial expressions; they also include objects referred to, objects produced, signs, and technologies. Particularly with respect to innovation, it must be stressed that, as part of communicative *actions*, objectivations always imply a certain meaning. As we are concerned here with innovation, the particular meaning in question is: the new.

But what is the new? Of the many answers given to this question, I want to relate to one of the most recent and promising propositions made by the Russian philosopher Boris Groys (2002). In his essay on a "cultural economy of the new" he asserts that the new results from new contextualization and recontextualizations (2002: 50). As true as this may be, one should probably take into account that, from a certain point of view, every communicative action is in a sense a recontextualization of meaning (Knoblauch 2001). This is particularly stressed by Joas's theory on creative action (Joas 1996). According to Joas, all actions require both adaptation to a situation, including others and objects, and also a form of situated creativity within this situation. In a similar vein, Suchman (1987) has suggested the notion of situated action in order to account for the fact that actors account for situative contingencies in and during the performance of their action. As the presumed order does not exist, actors always have to act in a "new" way, even if they are trying to maintain what is considered order. Suchman also takes the role of objects and technologies in situated actions into account. For

¹⁰ Objectivation in the sense used by Berger and Luckmann (1966).

as Latour (2005) rightly stresses that objects serve to stabilize order, it is precisely in the case of novelty that objects are instable elements. How then can we conceive of the new?

Groys argues that, nowadays, the new no longer needs to be utopian in the sense that it does not need to be oriented towards the past and the future. The code “new/old” may indeed be a simple form or orienting innovation. Assuming it is not merely used for legitimacy purposes, the code “old/new” would presuppose a clear and shared understanding of what is old, that is, an “archive” of the stock of existing typifications in a society. As this presupposition is no longer even held in science, which has denounced Popper’s model of the accumulation of knowledge, a more encompassing approach may be more plausible. From the actor’s point of view—both producers and the related “recipients” or users—the new then is characterized by a meaning that is *different* from their typifications and their existing knowledge.¹¹ As these typifications of difference must be relational, this knowledge needs to be shared in such a way as to make the difference explicit or objectified.¹²

As indicated, this objectivation does not have to be made explicit in language alone. We may just recognize in the course of acting that something is new and, consequently, transform our routines. Thus, the meaning of novelty may be “implicit”. However, as “implicit” as novelty may ever be, at the very least it must be perceived and experienced by others as different, that is: it needs to be objectivated and communicated in other ways—even more so if one considers the increasing role of communication technologies in contemporary society.¹³ It is for this reason that we need to also acknowledge the role of communication in the creation of novelty. For a novelty to become social reality, the other needs to be “surprised.” While some notions of communication exclude the possibility that the subjects act and experience we have to stress that novelty requires some form of trans-situative knowledge. “Participants draw on their knowledge to determine the difference a novelty makes. It is the notion of communicative action that accounts for all three aspects: communication, creativity and subjective knowledge.

¹¹ I am drawing here on Schutz’s contribution to a theory of creative action (Knoblauch 2013)

¹² In our study of visions of the future (Knoblauch and Schnettler 2000), we realized that they depend on certain communicative forms: future tense may be the simplest one, visions and utopian narratives more complex. For this reason, it might be better to consider the temporal aspect of novelty as part of a more encompassing capacity for imagination, be it by the actors conceiving of a future state or by the social actors communicating in forms that denote the future or novelty. When we empirically studied how actors have visions of the future, i.e., what is yet nonexistent, we realized that they depend on certain communicative forms: future tense may be the simplest one, visions and utopian narratives more complex. For this reason, it might be better to consider the temporal aspect of novelty as part of a more encompassing capacity for imagination, be it by the actors conceiving of a future state or by the social actors communicating in forms which denote future or novelty.

¹³ This argument is elaborated in Knoblauch, Jacobs and Tuma (in print).

3. *Action and Reflexivity*

Innovation, then, can be defined as the communicative construction of something as new. “As” not only indicates the reflexive relation, it also means that novelty is not “just there,” but is produced in such a way as to be understood by someone else. The need to be understood as new presupposes an act of communication. However, the communication of novelty that accompanies the new does not need to be made explicit, i.e. by labelling the act using the word “innovative”. Innovation may also be implicit in the sense that it does not need to be expressed in words literally.¹⁴ In the course of our actions, we can just tacitly adapt our routines or change them in the face of new ideas, conduct or objects. Unless we accept that the notion of innovation can be used to describe unnoticed changes (i.e., any form of situated action without the intention of doing something different or new), we would need to explain how actions can be innovative without being explicitly designated as oriented towards something new.

For Beck and Lau (2005), reflexivity relates to the institutions and logics of the first modernity, which themselves have been subjected to modernization: families, the state, or science are part of the process of rationalization by which they lose clear distinctions. In this sense, their notion of reflexivity resembles what Giddens (1990) called the “consequences of modernity,” that is the realization in hindsight that our reality was produced by modernity in the form of organized planned actions. In this sense, reflexivity means that we turn our attention to our own actions, including the experiences that accompany them. It is in this sense that whole societies may become reflexive in that they turn their attention to what is being done and the meaning that is inherent in these actions.

The notion of reflexivity is also used by Archer (2013) as a feature of actors¹⁵, while Giddens (1990: 54) also refers to reflexivity as actions that are observed and monitored (resulting in expert knowledge). Schubert (2013) captures these various meanings quite well by identifying three notions of reflexivity: the consciousness of actions and experiences constitutes the first level, as, for example, analyzed by Husserl; second, the monitored character of the ongoing flow of social life, and third, the reflexivity of consequences. In addition to these notions, I want to add a fourth aspect of reflexivity. In this understanding, reflexivity is a feature of communicative actions themselves. It is by way of their reflexivity that actions turn into communicative action. By reflexivity I mean that in the course of their actions, actors

¹⁴ I have to stress that I find the notion “implicit” or “tacit” utterly misleading since it assumes that explicitness can be only realized linguistically—and disregards other embodied forms of communication.

¹⁵ By reflexivity she means ‘the regular exercise of the mental ability, shared by all normal people, to consider themselves in relation to their (social) contexts’” (Archer 2012: 1).

“indicate” the meaning of their actions and their understanding of prior or parallel actions. For example, the ways by which utterances are produced constitute the methods by which these utterances are made observable, understandable, and accountable to others and to oneself. In this sense, reflexivity is more a feature of action than actors, thus turning action into communicative action.¹⁶

With respect to the new, this means that the new is not just brought about by actors and their knowledge; it is doing innovation in the sense of making the new observable, understandable, and accountable as new. As mentioned, this can happen *in actu*. The fact, however, that the reflexive construction of the new forms part of, and is embedded in, communicative action allows me to explain the very fact that it becomes institutionalized and how this occurs. The new form can be turned into a social form, i.e., the pattern of its recurrent reproduction, and become an innovation and it can be linked to a set of legitimations that make sense of what is new, which make sense of why one needs something new, and which make sense of making the new. It is at this point that we not only hit on evaluations as communicative processes ascribing value criteria to other processes and objectivations (Lamont 2012), but also on valorizations as something new being appreciated *in actu*, i.e., as valorization communication that turns goods into valued goods (Hutter 2014).¹⁷

As innovation needs to be recognized by actors—even in its most inconspicuous forms (as in the case of the “emperor’s new clothes”)—it is never restricted to mere technical or objective conditions; it encompasses codes, frames, or knowledge, institutional paths and structures. If one takes objects and ideas as part of the social reality, one may venture to say that any innovation is a social innovation. (For this reason, social innovations *sensu strictu* are referred to as intentional changes that explicitly address the social and, in addition, often focus on what may be called social structures.¹⁸) The sociality of innovation not only includes the process of evaluation and knowledge about the new knowledge, including the relevant experts and specialized communication; it also presupposes social knowledge about what is not new. The advantage of the notion of communicative action is that it allows us to address innovation not only with respect to the actor’s intentionality but, by virtue of its reflexivity, with respect to the communicative intentionality. Communicative intentions are the shared knowledge of

¹⁶ For a more detailed account of this notion of reflexivity derived from conversation analysis, see Knoblauch (2001).

¹⁷ It was Flichy (1995) who stressed that the knowledge about innovation can be communicated in ways quite different from the explicit categories of languages, such as the “imaginary” produced by images, movies or music.

¹⁸ „Soziale Innovation als „von bestimmten Akteuren ausgehende intentional, zielgerichtete Neukonfiguratioin sozialer Praktiken“ (Howaldt und Schwarz, 2010: 89).

what it is that is being communicated (Levinson 1983: 15ff). In terms of innovation, this means that we can address even those forms of innovation that are not explicitly labeled as such but that are innovations by means of their performance *in actu*, i.e., their pragmatic form.

4. Reflexive Innovation

Having addressed the “meaning of innovation,” i.e., its semantics, in the first part of the paper and its pragmatic dimension in the part just finished, we may turn to what we call the “grammar” of innovation. This is the dimension to which most actor categories in the discourse of innovation refer. Innovation, *sensu strictu*, relates to the social organization of communicative actions constructing the new. This dimension of innovation is characterized by the institutionalized and socially organized forms of the social coproduction of the new. Organized forms should be analytically seen as constituted by communicative actions; in fact, while action and knowledge may be seen as general presupposition of the construction of novelty, formal organizations are more specific historical requirements for explaining the novelty construction that came to be known as innovation (Windeler 2003). It is the formal structures governing the social organization of innovation that we refer to as its “grammar.” In fact, it seems that it was the growing role of formal organization that historically transformed the regime of invention into innovation. As technological innovation has been measured via patents since the 1910s, the idea of innovation has become particularly prominent in science policy. Science policy started with scientific research aiming to produce technological innovation as the expected output. Some of the most impressive institutions were created in the 1980s as part of the national innovation systems. This was followed by the OECD’s National Innovation Systems Program in the 1990s and the Oslo Manual. While invention had dominated modern concepts of the production of novelty, i.e., by means of the establishment of the patent system and industrial research laboratories and their rapid expansion between 1920 and 1960, the term innovation inherited the meaning of invention. As Godin (2008) argues, this kind of institutionalization led to a situation where innovation was increasingly defined by and restricted to its technological meaning and its economic contribution.

With this in mind, innovation in this narrow sense should be specified as “organized innovation.” As is the case for any form of institutionalization, organized innovation also requires legitimations that make sense of innovation for various societal actors. In terms of communicative action, legitimations take the form of discourses in which the meanings of innovation become socially negotiated, socially obligatory, and disputed. As we used the term

innovation with reference to general discourses in the first part, here we refer also to discourses that either make sense of any specific innovation, evaluate it, or valorize it.

Methodically, at this point, one must extend the method of historical semantics in two ways. On the one hand, one needs to look for categories that are related to “innovation,” i.e. words in the “semantic field” of innovation, such as “creation,” “renewal,” or “novelty”.¹⁹ The semantic field, I would argue, is defined by the broader notion defined as the communicative construction of the new (above). For sociological purposes one needs, secondly, to consider differences not only from a diachronic perspective but also from a synchronic perspective (i.e., the association of innovation and similar words in different institutional spheres, social groups, professions etc.). In a more subtle way, one could also consider words which relate to the “semantic field” of the word innovation. The semantic field typically covers various lexical items that may be synonymous with or only partly overlap with the word innovation.²⁰

Discourses are explicit forms of codified communication about a certain topic (i.e. the new); they are, therefore, “legitimatory.”²¹ The discourses addressing innovation in particular mostly include the “consequences” of any innovation (as well as the consequences of modernity in general). As legitimatory discourses differ analytically from the pragmatic processes in which innovations emerge²², they constitute a distinct form of reflexivity, which we may call discursive reflexivity.

It is through discursive reflexivity, then, that organized innovation becomes reflexive, with a reflexivity that differs from the reflexivity of the pragmatics of innovation. To give an example: in his studies of regional planning, Ibert (2003: 23, my translation) observes, “innovation in planning has been quite frequent; innovation, however, as an explicit goal of planning is a groundbreaking new phenomenon.” Discourses of innovation, as, for example, in the academic field of innovation management, include the legitimations about the relevance of innovation to society and its parts, the definition of what innovation is and how it is measured, and the demarcation, boundary work, and adaption of organization devoted to innovation and its discourse in relation to other concepts and their social representatives.

However, the meaning of reflexive organized innovation is neither restricted to explicit discursivation nor to its implicit situative performance *in actu*. As a form of institutionalization, organized innovation is objectified in certain structural forms: it may be achieved by heterogeneous organizations or hierarchical organizations *per decretum* in a way

¹⁹ It is worthwhile reflecting if discourses may visually consist of iconographic signs. See Traue (2013).

²⁰ As Jones and Massa (2013) show, this can also be pursued by content analysis.

²¹ For a more elaborate discussion of the relation between discourse and legitimation see Knoblauch (2011).

²² And, as aesthetic theory arduously demonstrates, this even holds for plain “communicative inventions,” such as spoken word, writings, or painting.

that makes novelty the “*idée directrice*”. Take, for example, science. Here, we rarely explicitly ponder on what makes for novelty (and how it is brought about)—unless we are members of a committee on innovation. Nevertheless, innovation is built into the institutional structure as an *idée directrice*. The same holds for other institutions dedicated to the transfer of “new products” or “new knowledge.” Even if they are not labelled “innovation centers” or “start-ups” and even if they do not refer explicitly to the discourse on innovation, sociologically they can come to constitute institutions of reflexive innovations.

Currently, it seems to me, we are witnessing the emergence of a division of labor between innovation and the discourse of innovation. In fact, the discourse of innovation is specializing in terms of specific gatherings of persons doing innovation by communicating what they do, but also in terms of institutions specialized on innovation and new institutional forms of communication intended to yield innovations. Particularly in the last few decades, a plethora of organizations have emerged specializing in innovation discourses in general. In Berlin alone, there are a growing number of specialized centers of technological innovation (Siemens, Telekom, Google etc.) as well as centers of ecological, cultural, and social innovation. These centers are characterized by a focus on specific action problems; their distinctive feature is that they aim to support innovation in general in the search for specific action problems. Moreover, they seek to produce innovation by means of special communicative forms, such as “future talks,” “productive confrontation,” and “experiment days”).²³

5. *Creativity and the Innovation Society*

Whitehead stated that the greatest invention of the nineteenth century was the “invention of the method of invention” (Godin 2008: 22). If one takes invention as the principle of the first modernity, the institutionalization of innovation can be considered as the unfolding of modernity; its contemporary form, however, is innovation that is reflexive in terms of action, organization, and legitimation. Or, as Steve Fuller (2007: 103) remarks critically: “Innovation is the first global policy craze of the twenty-first century.” Fuller attacks this “innovation ideology.” If one uses this word in a less “ideological critical manner” and remembers Mannheim’s (1985) famous studies on ideology, one might realize that, in an interesting way,

²³ I should add that the communicative forms of innovation are little studied so far although they may constitute the link between the pragmatics of innovation and its grammar. As a first example consider the work of Esguerra (2013) who analyzed the constitutional meeting of the Forest Stewardship Council by means of audiotapes as constituting the innovative form of governance for all private transnational certification organizations based on a heterogeneous, antagonistic stakeholder body.

the notion of innovation much more closely resembles what he calls utopia, i.e., an order not yet realized in time, rather than an ideology, i.e., something transcending reality in general. However, in comparison to Mannheim's ideal types of utopia, innovation, differs significantly from radical utopias attempting to reverse or convert reality; rather, they are akin to the liberal humanitarian idea of utopia. Unlike revolutionary transformations oriented towards achieving utopias (such as socialist revolutions), innovations seem to be oriented towards the liberal model of modest progress in "small steps" instead of claiming to bring about a different world order—an issue that, after the fall of the Berlin wall, the "end of ideologies," and the ensuing crisis of political utopias, is more plausible than ever. Still, this model may imply quite diverse concepts with quite clear differences. Thus, the Schumpeterian "destruction of the old" would be reduced, according to the liberal model, to certain areas, objects, technologies, or thoughts (and not the whole system, society, mode of production etc.). One may even doubt whether the rhetoric of destruction nowadays is still accepted, but, again, it seems that there are few studies on these variations. A more likely version of liberal progress seems to me to be the idea of improvement, correction, or adaptation (e.g., in terms of evolutionary theory). At this point, we find an interesting overlap with conservative ideas (as is exemplified by the idea of sustainability, which emerged from the 18th century German forestry movement). As mentioned, at this point one has to speculate, since an analysis of what Mannheim calls the "thought style" of innovation is still needed. The very notion of ideology, however, does not negate the social reality of innovation; to the contrary, it seems a rather powerful tool for effectuating and, therefore, realizing reflexive innovation. The global dissemination of innovation, therefore, rather leads to the question of how we can conceive of societies in which innovation has become a guiding principle. By way of conclusion, I want to sketch two different *ideal-typical models of such innovation societies*.

If, instead of stressing its "ideology", one stresses the institutional aspects of innovation—as most actors in the field of innovation do—at least one ideal typical (yet "contrafactual") possibility for an innovation society would consist in the constitution of a societal "subsystem" of innovation with its own "symbolically generalized medium," "codes," and "programs." In this view, innovation society could be, to paraphrase Luhmann (1997), the "society of innovation." As this option is quite unlikely to become an empirical reality, it is more plausible to assume that the institutions of reflexive innovation could become what Münch (1984) calls an interpenetrational system²⁴ constituted by the interaction of other

²⁴ As Münch recent studies on science demonstrate, the Parsonsian notion of system can be adapted to Bourdieu's notion of fields.

major systems, such as economics, science, and politics. It seems that Rammert (2008; 2010) follows this argument by assuming that innovation, while being defined by technology, science, and economics, is becoming part of other institutional areas, while the demands of these areas also make themselves felt in science, technology, and the economy, which become multireferential. While systems or institutional spheres are therefore subject to an increased fragmentation, he assumes that innovation is one of the references that are transgressing the boundaries of the field of science and technology. In doing so, he assumes that the innovation is changing its legitimacy reference²⁵; it is, so to speak, being translated into the “logics” of a different sub-system (thus contributing to its fragmentation). In this respect, the more recent upsurge of the notion of creativity may be seen as a kind of translation of innovation into the code of other fields such as arts, education, or the media.

While this idea of innovation assumes that innovation starts from and is created by the rationality of science, technology, and the economy, one could imagine a contrasting model of the innovation society based on some principle omnipresent in actions, knowledge, and social institutions. Since creativity, as Reckwitz (2012) stresses, transcends the boundaries of institutional spheres and even systems, it is certainly a possible alternative to the notion of innovation, particularly since its rapid rise and dissemination (cf. Florida 2004) seems to parallel the trend towards a reflexive innovation society. In fact, on a global level creativity is present in most societies’ educational systems (which are built on a Rousseauist model of human nature) to such a degree that one may assume it affects virtually every subject and the very notion of subjectivity. Hypothetically, one could dare to say that creativity is the code by which subjects are integrated in the innovation society.²⁶ This implies, secondly, that creativity transcends the boundaries of institutional spheres and becomes a code that complements innovation. Thirdly, although innovation may remain dominant in the core of some institutional spheres, there may even be a chance for creativity to replace innovation.

If creativity did in fact play such an important role, it would have serious effects on what used to be innovation in modernity. In contrast to innovation, which is minimally geared to a temporal distinction between the old and the new, creativity stresses another difference: Instead of a liberal and linear temporal model of innovation, creativity builds on the difference individuals make by way of their subjectivity. What is new, then, is not to be assessed on what may have “really” existed. Novelty, in this view, consists in the very

²⁵ The notion of legitimation can also be adapted to the concepts developed by Boltanski and Thévenot who, however, rarely relate to other institutional theories.

²⁶ See Nowotny (1995: 210f.) “Innovation, as the social side of creativity, means that it is a process through which individual creativity is communicated and thereby negotiated, transmitted and ultimately accepted or rejected.”

difference subjects make (and are whatever makes subjects objective²⁷). It would be the diversity of subjects (and any aspect of diversity they exhibit) that would account for the new, invention being put, so to say, into the subjective perspective. It is not only the creation of the new that changes. Following Esposito (2011), one could compare the model for the dissemination of innovation in modern times to imitation. Imitation, however, presupposes the model of mass media, which makes simulation in a standardized and industrially recurrent manner possible. The transformation of the technologies of communication and the corresponding mediatization of communicative actions (Krotz and Hepp 2012) affects the very idea of imitation. Now, the mere subjective appropriation of any novelty can be considered an innovation. Like children who play an instrument for the first time and who are assumed to make a difference because of their personality, character, creativity, every subject is thought to make a difference. Within a more encompassing perspective, for example, in the communicative construction of social innovation in space (Christmann, in print), the adaptation of a new urban social patterns in different urban setting may be contextualized by the actors as innovation (Noack 2014).

To end, let me reiterate that both models, far from making any exegetical claims, are only idealizations based on two different concepts. They are not intended to be opposing diagnoses of our time nor can they be deemed mutually exclusive in any sense. In fact, one could assume that both models apply at the same time, and no reasons as to why there should not be additional types have emerged thus far. The models merely aim to provide a general framework for the analytical concepts presented; these concepts should allow us not only to clarify empirically if we live in an innovation society; they should also enable us to address the question of what we mean by innovation, how and to what degree innovation has become reflexive, and how innovation comes about.

²⁷ It is this reduced notion of objectivation as realization of the subject that accounts for the very “unsocial” “reflexivity” of this kind of innovation or creativity.

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