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Novelty: Searching for, Seeing, and Sustaining It

Gino Cattani, Dirk Deichmann, and Simone Ferriani

ABSTRACT

The journey of novelty – from the moment it arises to the time it takes hold – is as fascinating as it is problematic. A new entity, to be recognized as such, needs to be differentiated from what existed before. However, novelty poses cognitive challenges that hamper its appreciation since it is difficult to form expectations about and make sense of something genuinely new. And since novel ideas, products, technologies, or organizational forms often violate existing practices and social structures, they are usually met with skepticism and resistance. In this introductory piece, we take stock of research into the challenges of generating, recognizing, and legitimating novelty. We review each paper in this volume and highlight the new perspectives and insights they offer about how individuals, teams, and organizations *search for novelty*, *see novelty*, and *sustain novelty*. Finally, we outline several research themes that, we believe, are worthy of further scholarly attention.

Keywords:

Novelty; ideas; creativity; innovation; generation; recognition; legitimation

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INTRODUCTION

Where does novelty come from and how does it take root? Scholars looking through the lenses of various disciplines and perspectives – including organizational theory, economics, evolutionary dynamics, sociology, and history of science – have searched for answers to this problematic question. The problem has perhaps most forcefully been dramatized in recent years in Salam Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, where a disembodied voice poses what turns out to be the enduring question of that novel: "How does newness come into the world?" In his impulse to establish how newness comes into the world, the narrator fails to establish that it does indeed "come into the world:" novelty is expected to spring up in the world from some point outside it, as if there were some alternative space with a tank of novelty that from time to time percolates through our space (North, 2013), to evoke a famous metaphor by William James (Bella, 2019).

The metaphor is a reminder of the conceptual difficulty all scholars face when accounting for the manifestation of novelty. Something is not genuinely new if it already exists in our current practice or imagination if it is, in other words, already present in some form or shape in our world. Even in the abstract, of course, novelty depends on something prior, on the very continuity it claims to violate. If what distinguishes new things is their difference from what existed before, then it does not seem possible to establish novelty as such, without reference to a past that did not contain it (North, 2013). As Padgett and Powell (2012b, p. 1) aptly note:

"We [...] have many theories about how to choose alternatives, once these swim into our field of vision. But our theories have little to say about the invention of new alternatives in the first place."

New ideas, projects, practices, identities, and individuals usually make their appearance from off the stage of our imagination – such as in the popular business mantra "to think outside the box" – before our analytical machinery can be put into good use.

This conundrum is compounded by the epistemological difficulty of relying on causal logic to address the "novelty origin" problem: if a logical connection is to hold, then the conclusion is already implied by the premises preceding it. No matter how useful for refinement, improvement, and

optimization, causal logic alone cannot be a fundamental novelty-conducive process “because logic can only use axioms that are already there” (Padgett and Powell, 2012b, p. 1; but see also Crosby, 2009 for an attempt to reconcile novelty and causal continuity). Not surprisingly then, the common sense for the ages seems to have been established for good and all in Ecclesiastes:

“What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; and there is nothing new under the sun. Is there a thing of which it is said, ‘See, this is new’? It has been already, in the ages before us” (Ecclesiastes 1:9).¹

In short, a major component of the conceptual challenge of the new is the origin of its very existence, and yet questions on the genesis of novelty recur, driven by an intellectual curiosity about the sources of the new.

A second crucial difficulty scholarship concerned with explaining novelty has to wrestle with is that novelty is typically evaluated negatively when first encountered (Barber, 1961; Rietzschel et al., 2010; Trapido, 2015; Criscuolo et al., 2017). New styles of music and painting, new ways of structuring our social world, new modes of organization are usually greeted with skepticism if not outright ostracism. For at least two reasons: First, it may well be efficient initially to avoid the novel, for the simple reason that favorable novelty is the improbable outcome of processes that ordinarily yield little, or any, reward (March, 2010). Most of the time, it just does not happen. It is widely accepted that favorable novelty is a quality that emerges from unconventional mixes of elementary components (Uzzi et al., 2013). Yet, as pointed out by Augier et al. (2015, p. 1141), in “the ordinary course of events, unconventional mixes do not occur; if they do occur, the results are more likely to be negative or minor than to be dramatically positive.” Secondly, novelty is likely to elicit confusion because unconventional combinations are usually challenging to categorize, so it is difficult to form expectations and make sense of them (Mueller, 2012; Wang et al., 2017). This is most easily demonstrated in the arts, when the new way of seeing or hearing creates pungent dissonances in the viewer and hearer. Beethoven’s music provides one of many examples.

¹ Bible Gateway. Ecclesiastes 1:9 (New Revised Standard Version), <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ecclesiastes+1:9&version=NRSV>. Accessed 30 April 2021.is

A contemporary critic of the *Eroica* symphony noted that one left the concert hall “crushed by the mass of unconnected and overloaded ideas and a continuing tumult by all the instruments” (cited by Rosen 1971, p. 393).

Thus, on the one hand, creating something genuinely new requires breaking out of existing categories, perhaps by reconfiguring and recombining them in unusual ways. Yet, on the other hand, the outcomes of such recombination are less likely to be positively recognized by relevant audiences, sometimes resulting in false negatives. Creative industries, in particular, seem to abound with cases in which key resource providers passed over or even disparaged highly novel ideas that subsequently proved to be highly valuable. Notorious examples include such smashing hits as *Star Wars* (Elsbach and Kramer, 2003), *Seinfeld* (Elsbach and Kramer, 2003), and *Harry Potter* (Licuanan et al., 2007), which were all turned down multiple times as cultural oddities before gaining recognition. These cases suggest that novelty recognition is challenging and fraught with uncertainty. Yet, novelty recognition is also “the crucial starting point in the long process of putting new ideas generated into good use” (Zhou, Wang, Song, and Wu, 2017, p. 180) as relevant social audiences must come to appreciate those ideas for them to survive and take hold (Adarves-Yorno, Postmes, and Haslam, 2007).

Unfortunately, the factors that help explain why novelty struggles to gain recognition do not necessarily inform us about the conditions that facilitate its legitimation. This point brings us to a third crucial difficulty that any attempt to account for the successful manifestation of novelty must face. Not only does novelty pose cognitive challenges that hamper its appreciation, but also it is likely to threaten the social structure that is supposed to host it. New ways of doing or seeing by definition are discontinuous with the past; thus, “they will often be seen as destructive of existing values and standards” (Mandler, 1995, p. 22). The artist who breaks new paths, the inventor who spearheads a new technology, or the scientist who creates new theoretical understanding, will all have to challenge habitual schemas and institutional arrangements, thereby eliciting strong, sometimes even vehement, reactions from field incumbents (Barber, 1961; Fligstein and MacAdam, 2012). Indeed, the social structure of the field is

usually highly resistant to novelty claims, especially when the initial settlement that defines the field proves effective in creating an advantageous arena for those who have fashioned it.

This observation underpins a related puzzle in the journey of novelty: that those who are best positioned to make novel contributions – newcomers, outsiders, marginal actors – precisely because of their position are least able to enact it (Cattani and Ferriani, 2008). Weaker embeddedness in the dominant culture enables these types of actors to cross boundaries and import ideas from external domains, while their relative freedom from conformity pressures makes them more prone to novelty claims that threaten the received wisdom (or adopt practices that diverge from it). However, lacking the authority of incumbents and their privileged access to resources, relationships, and other external credibility markers, marginal actors face significant obstacles in marshaling legitimacy around those claims (Cattani, Ferriani, and Lanza, 2017).

“The paradox in this situation is less about how such actors come up with new ideas; rather, it relates to how these peripheral, marginal actors get other field members to adopt them” (Hardy and Maguire, 2008, p. 202).

Under what conditions can then novelty gain momentum and take root?

Of the many pioneering ideas in Stinchcombe’s seminal piece “Social Structure and Organizations” few have become as iconic as “the liability of newness” to convey the puzzling nature of the processes underlying the emergence and legitimation of novelty. Yet, such processes remain undertheorized in the social sciences (Padgett and Powell, 2012). To be true, it seems only natural that social scientists have devoted most of their effort towards slightly more tractable puzzles concerning the dynamics of existing entities and their relation with the social context: such topics are more prone to theoretical generalizations and identification of empirical regularities (Clemens, 2002). But instances of emergence, recognition, and legitimation of novelty recur and although Stinchcombe rightly recognized how organizations bearing the congealed imprint of their history recall the timeless words of King Solomon in Ecclesiastics that there is nothing truly new, from time to time novel exceptions are consequential and merit attention. As these exceptions cumulate and are increasingly documented, questions otherwise unanswerable except in

highly contingent terms become more tractable, and more general claims about the processes and conditions that sustain novelty can be attempted.

Collectively, the scholars we brought together for this unique volume contribute to this effort: they advance arguments and ideas that powerfully illuminate why, how, and when novelty happens. Many of them have been actively involved in a two-year-long period of community-building efforts at the Academy of Management Annual Meeting in Vancouver (2020) and at the European Group of Organization Studies Colloquium in Hamburg (2020) and Amsterdam (2021). Their scholarship spans different levels of analysis (from micro to macro), empirical settings, and methodological orientations. Still, each paper is illustrative of the research that can be conducted to advance our understanding of the fascinating journey of novelty from the moment it arises to when it takes root and propagates.

NOVELTY IN THIS VOLUME

Besides this introductory paper and a coda, the volume contains 12 papers divided into three clusters: the first cluster, *Searching for Novelty*, offers insights into how novelty makes its appearance into an existing field (market or industry), sometimes challenging or even altering its structure. The second cluster, *Seeing Novelty*, switches to the demand side, examining the reception of novelty by social audiences. The third cluster, *Sustaining Novelty*, sheds light on mechanisms and processes underlying the acceptance and legitimation of novelty. Because explaining novelty often requires spanning the conceptual categories of emergence, recognition, and legitimation, many papers of this volume cannot be cleanly separated into just one of these three clusters. Therefore, we group them into the cluster to which we believe they offer the main contribution with the caveat that such grouping is necessarily artificial. Table 1 indicates the link between each paper and the respective categories. While individually each paper offers new insights to our understanding of novelty, collectively, they create a mosaic of ideas that open up exciting avenues for future research. The concluding section summarizes these research avenues highlighting areas that, we believe, are ripe for further scholarship on the topic of novelty from an organizational theory perspective. Below we provide a brief summary of the key arguments of each paper in the hope that this will motivate readers to delve into the rich material that this volume offers.

Table 1. Volume Structure and Contributions

Section	Paper	Novelty Generation	Novelty Recognition	Novelty Legitimation
Searching for Novelty	Davide Bavato	X	X	
	Giacomo Negro, Balázs Kovács, and Glenn R. Carroll	X	X	
	Konstantin Hondros and Lukas Vogelgsang	X		
	Matthew S. Bothner, Frédéric Godart, Noah Askin and Wonjae Lee	X		X
	Friederike Redlbacher, Nale Lehmann-Willenbrock, and Jetta Frost	X		
Seeing Novelty	Brian P. Reschke and Ming D. Leung		X	X
	Denise Falchetti		X	
	Wayne R. Johnson		X	
	Daniel B. Sands		X	X
Sustaining Novelty	André Spicer, Pinar Cankurtaran, and Michael B. Beverland			X
	Leonardo Corbo, Raffaele Corrado and Vincenza Odorici		X	X
	Ignasi Capdevila, Pilar Opazo and Barbara Slavich	X	X	X

Searching for Novelty

Any attempt to establish whether something is new implies substantial agreement on the meaning of novelty and how it can be identified and measured. Yet, there is considerable ambiguity and inconsistency regarding the novelty construct in the scholarly debate, which threatens the comparability and validity of scientific findings. A general lack of agreement on how novelty should be measured and operationalized further compounds scholars' quest for novelty. In *Nothing New under the Sun: Novelty Constructs and Measures in Social Studies*, Davide Bavato synthesizes different conceptualizations and operationalizations of novelty across social, cognitive, and organizational sciences. His review aims to bring clarity to the meaning and

measurement of novelty in scholarly practice. He reveals that in archival and quantitative studies – which form the basis of the review – novelty is often seen from two perspectives. When taking a proximity perspective, scholars operationalize novelty by calculating an idea’s distance to other ideas that populate the same context or sociocultural space. When taking a frequency perspective, on the contrary, scholars measure novelty by counting the number of occurrences of an idea or its constituting components relative to the other ideas populating the same context or sociocultural space. Both conceptualizations are associated with challenges, though. For proximity measures, for instance, it can be challenging to establish when a departure from the past truly implies novelty. Similarly, it can be difficult for frequency measures to establish what counts as the chronologically first instance of a novel insight. While Bavato’s paper does not and cannot resolve all the challenges associated with the different novelty constructs and measures, it provides a stimulating overview and reflection about how we can think about what is novel. It also highlights the need to integrate the role of time or temporal dimensions more explicitly when operationalizing novelty – either from a proximity or a frequency perspective.

Some of these challenges are particularly evident when addressing the question of the origin of novelty because data should be used that allow for a systematic examination of the evolutionary patterns of novelty emergence. The type of data some researchers use in conducting their analysis may indeed reveal higher levels of novelty in contexts where others found the opposite. This, in turn, has obvious implications for how we think of the origins of novelty and its carriers. In their paper *Bustin’ Out: The Evolution of Novelty and Diversity in Recorded Music*, Giacomo Negro, Balázs Kovács, and Glenn R. Carroll address this important question by exploring whether recorded music has become more or less diverse over time. Accordingly, they analyze the differentiation of recorded music in terms of distance of an album from other contemporaneous albums at that time. This approach assesses diversity through the actual existing recordings in a period rather than against some specific classification scheme that may or may not be relevant in the period of interest, or against a small set of successful records only. Distance in this measurement scheme is about relative position of an artist from other artists, a time-invariant, non-historical variable that can be compared across eras and cultural contexts.

Using novel measures based on stylistic and acoustic data on recorded music from 1967 to 2017, they trace trends in the evolution of diversity over time in 125,340 albums, and find that patterns of diversity differ for stylistic and acoustic measures and that musical diversity differs dramatically by genre. Interestingly, Negro, Kovács, and Carroll find that temporal patterns of diversity differ not only for stylistic and acoustic data but also by genre. While some genres, such as blues, jazz, and pop-rock, decrease in diversity over time, most other genres increase in diversity. They further find that results of previous studies that have probed the relationship between industry structure and diversity do not hold beyond the smaller sample of the more popular recordings found in Billboard. In the larger dataset, higher industry concentration shows no statistically significant association with stylistic distance. For acoustic distance, higher concentration even shows positive (instead of negative) coefficients. This lack of support for the association between diversity and industry structure found in prior research suggests that even in concentrated markets novelty can emerge on the fringe of the industry. Here, the homogenizing pressures are less stringent, and greater levels of experimentation are tolerated. Speculating about possible factors responsible for the observed diversity in the music industry, Negro, Kovács, and Carroll suggest that, in addition to exogenous factors (e.g., technological changes and copyright laws), category-spanning and emulation-innovation trade-offs are among the most plausible endogenous factors.

The emulation-innovation trade-off is particularly intriguing here because it seems to suggest that efforts to reproduce what others have done inevitably lead to convergence and lower levels of novelty in the field. Challenging this interpretation, in their paper *Emerging Novelty through Imitation? Discovering Emulation in Processes of Creating Alikeness*, Konstantin Hondros and Lukas Vogelgsang argue that imitation – intentionally creating likeness – can indeed foster the emergence of novelty. In particular, they distinguish between three forms of imitation: copying, where original and imitation need to be exactly alike; echoing, where the imitation can somewhat diverge; and eluding, where original and imitation should be as identical as possible yet also must be distinguishable. These three different processes are examined in two different fields – music and pharmaceuticals – in which pressures to innovate are high

but imitative processes are also frequently observed. Relying on grounded theorizing, they inductively show how the performative enactment implied by imitation processes is an important, yet underexplored, trigger in the emergence of novelty. Although contextual differences may affect the extent to which copying, echoing, and eluding also involve emulation – and, therefore, departure from the original – the paper not only affords a more nuanced understanding of the plurality of processes through which likeness is created, but also elucidates the conditions under which imitation processes can be an important source of novelty. This further implies that in times when homogenizing forces tend to elicit efforts to mimic what others are doing (e.g., mimicking a particular style of music, movie genre, product standard and so on) novelty may result from the same processes that are supposed to inhibit it.

Moving forward, the next paper in this volume shifts the focus again to the social actors and how actors' status may influence the novelty search process. In their paper *What is Social Status and How Does it Impact the Generation of Novel Ideas?*, Matthew Bothner, Frédéric Godart, Noah Askin, and Wonjae Lee propose a typology of status that can be used to resolve some of the conflicting findings on the relationships between status and a variety of performance outcomes – including novelty – discussed in the literature. Defining status as a relational asset possessed by social actors insofar as they are highly regarded by highly-regarded others, they to explore the implications of considering status as either a quality signal or a good and viewing status-conferring ties as either deference- or dominance-based. They then consider the implications of their framework for the generation of novelty. Whereas the status as signal vs. status as good can be related to the innovation vs. creativity conceptual duet, deference and dominance portray various underlying mechanisms that may or may not be at work depending on the context under consideration.

Bothner, Godart, Askin, and Lee speculate that the key moderator that will play out in the generation or adoption of novelty is the type of social hierarchy that is prevalent in a given context: in highly ambiguous and uncertain contexts such as the creative industries, status as a good and status as a signal may be both promoters of creativity and innovation, but only by way of deference, while it is possible that status as dominance may actually elicit resistance, in particular in fields where creative

autonomy is valued. The study sheds new light on how status affects the generation of novelty and also distinguishes its effect from that of other cognate concepts such as quality, reputation, and legitimacy. The paper by Bothner, Godart, Askin, and Lee also reminds us of the importance of adopting a relational perspective in studying the generation of novelty. This perspective is at the core of a rich scholarship concerned with how macro (Burt, 2004; Cattani and Ferriani, 2008) and micro (Hargadon, 2005; Hargadon and Bechky, 2006) level interactions with others, influence the manifestation of new ideas.

Adding to this relational perspective on creativity, in their paper *How “mms” Trigger Novel Ideas: An Inductive Field Study of Conversational Interaction Dynamics in Agile Meetings*, Friederike Redlbacher, Nale Lehmann-Willenbrock, and Jetta Frost examine the micro-level discursive practices and interaction dynamics within four agile meetings that were organized as part of an innovation initiative by the Ministry of the Interior and Sports of the city-state of Hamburg in Germany. Redlbacher, Lehmann-Willenbrock, and Frost depict the fine-grained conversational interaction dynamics that took place in these meetings by assessing the verbal statements exchanged between attendees of these meetings, including tiny back-channel responses about new ideas.

A key finding is that respectful attention to ideas that had just been voiced is essential to understand how new ideas were generated and developed. Specifically, meeting participants showed respectful attention to ideas by verbalizing positive socio-emotional statements of which active listening (e.g., mentioning a simple ‘mm’) and providing support (e.g., mentioning a simple ‘yes’) were the most important. These statements, in turn, encouraged the idea creator as well as other participants to elaborate and develop the idea further. An important implication of this study is that agile meetings allow for positive interaction dynamics that, even when rooted in tiny back-channel responses and statements, enable people to experience intense and precious moments of creative flow.

Seeing Novelty

Novelty is not an inherent feature of a social object: it needs to be recognized as novel. One important implication of this observation is that an essential determinant of whether novel ideas grab attention is whether the audiences that make up the field (e.g., peers, critics, investors or users) perceive those ideas

as valuable on the basis of cues that matter to them (Csikszentmihályi, 1990). As noted by Cattani, Falchetti, and Ferriani (2020, p. 15) “relevant social audiences must come to appreciate those ideas before they take hold” and possibly achieve success. Yet, the evaluation of novelty is cognitively demanding, especially when novelty consists of atypical combinations of existing elements, like when elements from different product categories are combined. Faced with atypical combinations, even expert evaluators often struggle to resolve the incongruity with their cognitive schemas as any attempt to draw analogies (Gentner, 1983) from a familiar domain (existing artifacts) to the new target domain (the new artifact) becomes increasingly complex, very often resulting in a negative disposition towards novelty. The rarity of particular category combinations, in fact, poses significant challenges to members of the evaluating audience.

In their paper *Variety is the Spice of Life: Heterogeneity in Evaluator Engagement and the Valuation of Atypicality*, Brian P. Reschke and Ming D. Leung tackle this important question by examining how heterogeneity in evaluator engagement in a market may alter their evaluation of atypical candidates. Extant research on market categorization has shown how audiences are not necessarily static and that their evaluations of category combinations are contingent on candidate behaviors. Reschke and Leung extend the idea that different markets may exhibit different theories of value by proposing that under conditions where the market’s prevailing theory of value is to seek out diversification, atypical candidates will likely be generally preferred. However, because atypical candidates are, by definition, rarer than typical ones, increased awareness on the part of the audience is required to identify them. By focusing on markets where diversification in what one ‘consumes’ is valued, they argue and show that atypical candidates are advantaged because they present a distinct and efficient opportunity to diversify. Using data from an online peer-to-peer lending market, Prosper.com, Reschke and Leung found that diversification is the dominant theory of value on this platform and that seeking out atypical investments is a proffered and likely preferred investment strategy. To increase the appeal of lending to strangers over the Internet, Prosper helps prospective borrowers signal social identity through ‘Prosper Group’ affiliations. Reschke and Leung characterize the atypicality of a Prosper Group using the historic

(co)occurrence of group descriptors and examine within-lender variation in the evaluation of atypicality over the course of lenders' experience. The results reveal that the extent to which lenders evaluate positively atypical borrowers depends on their level of market engagement: lenders new to the market devalue atypical candidates, but those who have made many evaluations favor atypicality. Also, while previous research has treated audiences as static, this paper shows how audiences may change as they gain more fluency in a particular market by lending to atypical borrowers. Overall, the paper affords a more nuanced understanding of when boundary spanning behavior does not face a legitimacy discount but is instead valued by identifying market contexts in which evaluators self-propagate theories of diversification that support atypicality.

In addition to the specific theory of value audience members embrace and their level of market engagement, several other factors could explain why they vary in their disposition towards atypicality and, in general, novelty. Previous research has treated audiences as monolithic entities, downplaying possible sources of heterogeneity among its members. A micro-level analysis of how audience members vary along important cognitive variables sheds light on when novelty (whether incremental or radical) has a higher chance of being recognized and why. In her paper *How a Strong Present Focus Fosters Radical Idea Recognition*, Denise Falchetti builds on research showing the influence of temporal focus on decision-making to argue that the propensity to invest in and support radically novel ideas depends on the degree to which the members of the evaluating audience focus on the present time. She conducted a series of experiments to study how a disposition to think more about the present shifts audience members' evaluative responses to novelty. Her findings reveal that audience members with a strong focus on the present are more willing to support radical than incremental ideas. She further probes the underlying cognitive process by unveiling the mediating role of idea uncertainty. Focusing on audience members' subjective experience of time and integrating it with novelty recognition, she offers valuable contributions for the research on novelty recognition. The effect of individual temporal dispositions in novelty recognition is one of the key factors explaining why certain individuals are more or less open to new ideas, even those that deviate significantly from the status quo. The paper confirms the promise of adopting a micro-level approach in

studying which individual-level characteristics are more likely to influence how audience members evaluate novelty and make value judgments.

The paper *Bias in Creative Adoption Decision Points*, Wayne R. Johnson further explores the impact of individual-level characteristics on the evaluation and reception of novelty. When individuals or a collective of individuals evaluate novelty, they may accept, reject, or refine it. During these creative adoption decision points, individuals often make decisions based on biases unrelated to the quality of the object under evaluation. These biases can be motivational, cognitive, or affective. First, those who evaluate ideas are often not motivated to consider new ideas (e.g., due to psychological inertia). Second, idea evaluators may find it cognitively more challenging to assess new ideas (e.g., due to information gaps). Finally, evaluators often experience negative affect when evaluating new ideas (e.g., due to higher uncertainty in forecasting outcomes of novel ideas). Johnson explains how all these different motivational, cognitive, and affective biases affect when and why receivers or evaluators of ideas accept or reject novelty. By recognizing and categorizing individual-level biases in novelty evaluation, the paper advances our understanding of why audience members may express a desire for novelty but, at the same time, end up rejecting it.

One way by which evaluators may reduce the uncertainty surrounding the evaluation of novel objects is to adjust their valuations of a novel object based on how others are valuing it. In his paper *Seeing Value Through the Eyes of Others: Perception of Value and Rebidding in Online Auctions* Daniel Sands proposes a constructionist perspective of markets that highlights how market actors in auctions update the way they determine the value of new objects by observing the bidding behavior of others. Focusing on online auctions, he shows how the interaction of market participants in auctions provides valuation information for other market actors to reference when constructing their own valuations. Rebidding is a manifestation of individuals using the valuation activities of other actors (i.e., the bids of others) to update their beliefs about the value of a given object: the process of value construction is not happening in isolation. An important finding is that an individual, who inherently knows what he or she would be willing to pay for something, is less likely to rebid in a given auction. On the contrary, inexperienced

bidders rely more heavily on social interaction to construct their value beliefs. Indeed, rebidding reflects the value of an object being judged through the lens of other bidders within an auction. Instead of operating in isolation, economic actors are embedded in social relations within a larger socio-economic environment that underpins beliefs about value and price. This paper contributes to the body of research examining how audience members recognize novelty by revealing that value perceptions are malleable and shaped through social interaction.

Sustaining Novelty

As the previous contributions suggest, there is a fairly comprehensive tradition of scholarship that exposes the reasons why new ideas struggle to gain attention by alternatively stressing how they lack a clear link with extant evaluative frameworks; trigger resistance from audiences whose interests are threatened by their introduction; or emanate from the outskirts of the field and hence have limited ability to catalyze the material and symbolic resources they need to survive. Yet, the reasons underlying the struggle of novelty for attention do not always illuminate the factors explaining its legitimization. Unfortunately, as Greenwood, Suddaby and Hinings (2002, p. 61) already noted some time ago, most writers “have largely ignored how new ideas become legitimated.” As a result, we do not know much about the (often tortuous) journey by which the new comes to be accepted, particularly the dynamics of political contestation that often accompany such process.

The wax and wane of a social object’s legitimization is precisely at the center of André Spicer, Pinar Cankurtaran, and Michael B. Beverland’s attempt to map the consecrating journey of iconic artist Phil Collins. Consecration is especially interesting in the context of an analysis of novelty legitimization because it is a type of distinction whereby actors or works are considered legitimate and unique (Delacour and Leca, 2017). While extant research has shed important light on the individual characteristics and contextual factors that make certain producers more likely to be chosen by consecrating institutions, our understanding of the underlying creative trajectories and distinct career patterns that may give rise to enduring impact and success is still rather fragmentary (Formilan, Ferriani, and Cattani, 2020). In *Take a Look at Me Now: Consecration and the Phil Collins Effect*, Spicer, Cankurtaran, and Beverland, examine the

changing fortunes of Phil Collins by studying his changing public image and commercial success between 1980 and 2020 from the perspective of three core audiences: peers, critics, and the wider public. Relying on a broad combination of archival sources, the authors dissect the social evaluative work performed by different audiences, exposing their interplay in shaping Phil Collins' legitimation journey over several decades. The analysis uncovers various activities with which audiences engage in order to maintain, undermine, and restore the status of a particular cultural product or producer, thereby offering a rich and informative illustration of how the legitimation journey may evolve and change over time. Broadly, the study alerts us on the importance of placing individual efforts at novelty within the broader cultural and historical milieu in order to appreciate why the same efforts may be opposed and ostracized at one time, or in one particular location of the field, but praised and even consecrated at another.

Conceptually, the puzzling nature of this journey lies in the observation that the same social position that helps marginal actors to envision imaginative projects that depart from prevailing social norms also constrains their ability to obtain support for their efforts at novelty, a conundrum that some scholars have recently referred to as 'the paradox of peripheral influence.' In their paper *The Legitimation of Peripheral Producers' Novelty by External Audiences: The Contingent Role of Consultants*, Leonardo Corbo, Raffaele Corrado, and Vincenza Odorici shed light on this conundrum by analyzing the mechanisms underlying peripheral winemakers' appeal to critics. Borrowing from literature on audience heterogeneity that emphasizes variation between audiences as a key determinant of whether a novel is supported idea (Pontikes, 2012; Cattani, Ferriani, and Allison, 2014; Goldberg, Hannan, and Kovács, 2016) and relying on longitudinal data covering critical evaluation of 26,000 Italian wines, they expound the role of external non-peer-based audiences in legitimating novel practices. The findings indicate that critics play an important role in supporting novelty through favorable ratings and that these ratings tend to favor peripheral producers disproportionately, but only when the peripheral producers are associated to expert intermediaries who serve as added markers of credibility through their consulting services. These findings help extend recent work on the legitimation of novelty and in particular, they offer fresh insights into the role that third parties may play in structuring the audience-producer evaluative interface.

The two previous papers make the traditional distinction between audiences as agents of legitimation and producers as carriers of novelty. The case in which the same actors are both creators and evaluators – such as when organizations evaluate the creative potential of internally developed novel ideas for implementation – has received much less attention. In their paper *The Role of Materiality in the Evaluation of Novel Ideas: Evidence from Gastronomy and Performing Arts*, Ignasi Capdevila, Pilar Opazo, and Barbara Slavich explore the role that artifacts play in identifying and sustaining the creative potential of an idea versus another one. Indeed, artifacts are tools that help to bridge the conceptual world and the material world and, therefore, are very useful to evaluate and refine new ideas: they enable individuals and groups to construct new understandings and facilitate the transition from individual to collective cognition. On the premise that novelty evaluation is a fuzzy activity that unfolds over different stages of the creative process (from inspiration to framing, prototyping, and validating), Capdevila, Opazo, and Slavich examine how artifacts can facilitate collective sensemaking in fields where the final products are ephemeral in character, such as the creation of unique experiences instead of selling physical products. The use of artifacts contributes to developing a joint base of cognition that is used for the collective assessment and legitimation of new ideas. The paper focuses on the evaluation of novelty in the form of new experiences and builds on the analysis of two highly creative organizations: elBulli restaurant led by chef Ferran Adrià and the Italian Drama Academy Nico Pepe. The authors find that these two organizations implement three distinct processes to evaluate and support novelty: analyzing, structuring, and formalizing. Since the evaluation of novelty occurs iteratively in all phases of the idea journey, the use of artifacts is particularly important in making novel ideas more tangible, anticipating audiences' reactions, integrating novelty into an organizational corpus of knowledge, and consolidating novel ideas for future applications. The study fills an important gap in the literature on novelty by shedding new light into the materiality of creative processes through an in-depth examination of the practices and artifacts used to evaluate and legitimate novel ideas in organizations. One implication of bridging the conceptual and the material world is to overcome, or at least attenuate, some of the biases that may affect audience members' disposition toward novelty, whether or not such members are also the creators of this novelty.

THE WAY AHEAD

From the previous discussion, it is evident that the journey of novelty has been center stage in the organizational literature, spurring an array of contributions that span a wide range of issues and topics. These contributions also emphasize the need to further probe the conditions that shape the generation of novelty and the factors that help explain when, how, and why novelty is more or less likely to gain recognition and legitimacy. Here we want to outline a few themes that, we believe, are worthy of further investigation. It is not our intention to offer an exhaustive list of relevant themes, but instead to briefly discuss those that, in our opinion, are particularly promising and on which some fresh scholarly work has begun to emerge.

Moving Ahead in Searching for Novelty

At the heart of the “novelty origin” problem is how novelty makes its appearance. While substantial progress has been made in studying the sources from which novelty originates, future research should also focus more on what motivates individuals to generate novel ideas. Individuals are the primary source of novel ideas, so understanding why they are willing to generate them should become even more central to research on creativity and innovation. Prior research has shown how employees submit many novel ideas at the start of an innovation program, but their motivation to engage in such programs often decreases over time (Deichmann and Jensen, 2018; Deichmann and Van den Ende, 2014). Declining motivation, in turn, can harm the generation and development of new ideas (Axtell et al., 2000; Frese et al., 1999). One of the factors that have been found to affect individuals’ motivation to participate in innovation programs is whether an organization accepts or rejects their previous ideas. For instance, Deichmann and Van den Ende (2014) found that, surprisingly, proponents whose ideas were accepted often did not return with more ideas. One possible explanation is that they were busy implementing their ideas or found it especially challenging to repeat their feat. Unpacking what causes some individuals to continually generate novel ideas while others fail to do so deserves further investigation in future research.

As the paper by Capdevila, Opazo, and Slavich (this volume) reminds us, “[r]eferences to past creative endeavors and reflecting through artifacts” may trigger the development of new ideas (p. xxx). Indeed, by evaluating and formalizing former creative activities, organizations build up a structured knowledge repository that can serve as a critical input for the generation of new ideas – by both agents within and outside the organization. Besides these organizational efforts to encourage creativity, individual factors could also be of critical importance to explain the development of new ideas over time. For instance, individuals who adopt a learning orientation may be more likely to come back with more ideas since they have an innate desire to constantly improve their skills and to solve problems (Miron-Spektor et al., 2021). Focusing on the dynamic nature of creativity, scholars could unveil the unfolding of creativity trajectories, thus exposing the factors that may explain why individuals vary in their ability to produce novelty over time.

While adopting an individual-level perspective is useful to better understand the origin of new ideas, some of the main developments in novelty can also be triggered by exogenous shocks or other dramatic events that suddenly alter existing relations in the field, setting in motion “a period of prolonged and widespread crisis in which actors struggle to reconstitute all aspects of social life” (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012, p. 32). Indeed, historically, radical novelty has often resulted from responses to the dramatic breakdown of established orders. The Black Death in the 1300s broke the long-ingrained feudal system in Europe, facilitating the emergence of the modern employment contract. A mere three centuries later, a deep economic recession following the 100-year war between England and France kick-started major novelties in farming that led to radically improved agricultural productivity. Fast forward to more recent times, the SARS pandemic of 2002-2004 catalyzed the meteoric ascent of Ali Baba and helped establish it at the forefront of retail in Asia. This growth was fueled by underlying anxiety around traveling and human contact (Clark, 2016). The financial crisis of 2008 also produced its own disruptive side effects by fostering the entry into the market of a variety of new “sharing economy” business models such as Airbnb and Uber that grew by empowering people to find new revenue streams. Supporting this anecdotal evidence, a rich tradition of organizational scholarship has documented how exogenous jolts

cause indeterminacy and hence create impetus for advancing new lines of action (Meyer, 1982; Davis, Diekmann, and Tinsley, 1994), opening the way for the entry of new actors into the field (Corbo, Corrado, and Ferriani, 2016). This scholarship has contributed to our understanding of how dominant logics can be subverted, thus helping to shed light on the distinctive, albeit neglected role of the margins as a locus of experimentation (Corbo et al., this volume), novelty (Cattani, et al., 2017), and transformation (Sgourev, 2013). But it has also alerted us on many promising research questions for novelty-oriented organizational scholars. What are the underlying mechanisms that link shocks to novelty emergence? What kind of shocks are more likely to be conducive to the manifestation of new practices, projects, or identities? Under what conditions does an exogenous shock render the topology of the field a less hostile landscape for the acceptance of “foreign” ideas? How exactly do carriers of novelty coming from the margins of a given field become embedded into it in the aftermath of a shock?

Negro, Kovács, and Carroll (this volume) argue that exogenous factors such as technological changes (e.g., the shifts from vinyl, CD, online, subscription, etc.) or regulatory shifts (e.g., copyright laws) could explain the evolution of novelty and diversity in the recorded music. However, because these macro-level changes tend to apply generally “it is not clear how they can account for dissimilar trajectories that emerge from the data” (p. 89). This implies that the influence that exogenous shocks are presumed to have on innovators’ ability to advance their ideas may be misspecified if the micro and/or meso level mechanisms that filter – i.e., contribute to amplifying or attenuating – such an influence are not properly attended to. As pointed out by Croidieu and Kim’s (2018, p. 34) the occurrence of external shocks “does not always reveal the exact mechanism through which change unfolds in society.” More research is therefore needed to unpack these mechanisms and appreciate their role in shaping the dynamics of novelty entry and diffusion into a given field.

Moving Ahead in Seeing Novelty

Several papers in this volume add nuance to the “novelty recognition” problem. Johnson examines a host of factors that influence and bias the recognition of novelty – especially when novelty is radical. Sands further shows how these factors are often shaped through social interaction, like in the case of rebidding

in auctions when individuals use the valuation activities of others to update their beliefs about the value of a novel object. Corbo, Corrado, and Odorici emphasize the enabling role of social audiences more attuned to the characteristics of the novelty introduced into the field. Falchetti further corroborates this insight by showing that the disposition to think about the present or the future may shift audience members' evaluative responses to novelty.

These audience-based accounts provide valuable insights into the processes underlying the recognition of novelty, yet they are limited in their ability to offer actionable insights to innovators because audiences are typically exogenous to the evaluative process. Besides, innovators have usually no power over the audiences, and are unlikely to have detailed and accurate knowledge about the audiences' preexisting prototypic expectations. On the premise that a novel idea can be strategically construed to facilitate its recognition, researchers have recently started to explore the interplay between the framing strategy innovators choose to further their novel ideas and audience members' cognitive schema (Chi, 2006; Dane, 2010). Integrating a rhetorical with an audience-mediated perspective is important because novelty recognition "is as much the result of an innovator's agentic (micro-level) efforts [...], as it is the result of audience features that do not fall under an innovator's direct control but can render fields more or less permeable to the reception of novel ideas" (Cattani et al., 2020, p. 15).

A number of scholars have emphasized how innovators acquire symbolic and material resources by using narratives that borrow terms and categories from dominant discourses that will help them persuade the audiences that control those resources (e.g., Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001; Navis and Glynn, 2011; Garud, Schildt, and Lant, 2014; Vossen and Ihl, 2020). Yet more systematic research on the structural properties of these rhetorical approaches and their impact on audience evaluative responses is still needed. It would be interesting, for instance, to investigate the extent to which the narrative supporting a particular novelty claim can be modified to appeal to the desires of specific audiences. For example, within the context of entrepreneurship, audiences may respond differently to new ventures that develop a radically innovative product or service. Whereas some may be skeptical of committing to such ventures, others may exhibit a strong affective congruence to newness (Choi and Shepherd, 2005, p. 579).

It may therefore be that entrepreneurs adapt their narratives according to the audiences that they address. Another interesting line of inquiry is to examine the interactive effects of both the content and the source of novelty claims. We suspect that in certain situations, particularly face-to-face interactions, specific characteristics of the storytellers (e.g., their appearance or social skills) may be just as influential as the stories they tell to couch their innovations.

The rapid advancements in computational social sciences (Edelmann et al., 2020) provide great opportunities to inform scholarship on novelty recognition. Novelty detection based on clustering is one example. Using a distance measure based on similarity, data can be clustered into classes so that items in a class are “close” to one another and not close to items in the other clusters. Novelty here means that an item is not close enough to the mean of an already existing cluster, so that a new cluster needs to be formed. Although there are many methods for determining when a new cluster should be added (Markou and Singh, 2003), a particularly promising domain of application is the use of topic models to discern novel ideas in textual sources (i.e., patents). For instance, to the extent that describing a novel idea requires using a new vocabulary (Kaplan and Vakili, 2015), one can detect the level of novelty in a document by measuring how much it conforms to or deviates from previously established topics and their vocabularies in the corresponding corpus (Hannigan et al., 2019). Similarly, Deichmann and colleagues (2020) studied an idea’s connectivity in a so-called “content network” by examining the semantic connections between ideas – looking into which of the given ideas shared title words with other ideas in the dataset. In so doing, they were able to assess the similarity of ideas and to identify ideas that served as bridges between knowledge domains.

If there are good reasons to assume that an observation is novel insofar as it differs significantly from other members of the sample from which it is drawn, then methods for detecting statistical outsiders also have much to offer to the study of novelty recognition. One area where this notion of novelty plays a prominent role is machine learning. For example, learning a classification rule by supervised learning involves adjusting a classifier’s parameters on the basis of training examples drawn from a corpus of labeled examples (Barto et al., 2013). Here novelty detection is accomplished by modeling the probability

density function of possible observations and treating an observation as new if it falls in a region of low enough estimated density (according to a given threshold). The recent scholarship on the search trajectories leading to outlier inventions is indicative of the theoretical benefits that the analysis of outliers can yield in the context of innovation-oriented organizational research (Kneeland et al., 2020)

Moving Ahead in Sustaining Novelty

Audiences do not simply evaluate the novelty dimension but, in some cases, can also contribute to it when an idea is implemented. The publishing process of academic articles serves as an illustrative example in this regard. Editors and reviewers provide feedback and recommendations on manuscripts prior to the publication process in order to help the authors to revise their work and develop more novel, and hopefully better, contributions to the literature. In this case, editors and reviewers become co-creators of authors and sustain them in developing a novel article which significantly advances the literature in a certain domain. Following this example, it is worth further exploring the factors that enable people to engage in the co-creation of novelty. In situations where more people commit to the idea and therefore believe in it, they are also more likely to become supportive co-creators. Co-creation allows for the pooling of expertise and knowledge that make new combinations possible (Deichmann et al., 2020; Kurtzberg and Amabile, 2001; Singh and Fleming, 2010). In addition, a collective participatory process enabled through co-creation may also facilitate the legitimization of novel ideas.

Individuals who are normally excluded from the innovation process can engage with those ideas, and bring in their perspective (Bilton, 2015) and voice to sustain their implementation. The work by Redlbacher, Lehmann-Willenbrock, and Frost (this volume) is a first attempt to unpack the interaction dynamics that are critical to make co-creation successful. In fact, co-creation works best when the idea creators and the members of the evaluating audience have the opportunity to “think aloud together.” Future research may seek to shed further light on the interdependence between the interaction dynamics observed in the paper by Redlbacher and colleagues and other factors likely to facilitate the generation and the legitimization of novelty. To this end, research on collaborative circles offers a unique perspective to explore when, through prolonged and intensely intimate interactions, individuals form groups that

“generate the requisite emotional, cognitive, and material resources and support to develop and attempt to win acceptance” (Parker and Corte, 2017, p. 275; see also Farrell 2001) of their (at times radically) novel work. Understanding these dynamics seems especially relevant in light of the increasing number of initiatives launched by companies to foster forms of collaborative creativity.

Evidence from prior research shows that, over time, individuals generate more incrementally novel follow-up ideas (Audia and Goncalo, 2007; Bayus, 2013). One reason why this might happen is that producers of exceptional creative work often get consecrated. As Spicer, Cankurtaran, and Beverland (this volume) explain, consecration “happens when an individual is elevated from the normal status as a jobbing cultural producer to someone who has unique qualities that deserve veneration” (p. 254). Examining what occurs to individuals in the post-consecration period, they suggest that the legitimization of creative products and producers may change over time: consecrated work may in fact get deconsecrated and then reconsecrated. Future research may seek to examine the factors that enable previously consecrated individuals to retain their creative edge or to regain it if they have suffered from de-consecration. Addressing this question would also shed light on the consequences that legitimization and consecration have for the continuous generation of ideas that are not simply novel but radically different from what already exists.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

A large and growing body of academic work seeks to examine how novelty emerges, gains recognition and legitimization. The papers included in this volume are a testament to the centrality of this topic across a variety of settings and levels of analysis. Some of these papers add nuance to old questions by leveraging new data or embracing new theoretical perspectives that highlight the impact of mechanisms that have remained underexplored; other papers, on the contrary, address questions that have received only scant scholarly attention. Taken together, the papers in this volume offer a multifaceted notion of novelty that ranges from novel ideas to newly recorded music, novel artifacts, and atypical candidates. There are, of course, many other forms of novelty not covered here, such as new product categories, organizational forms, business models or even entirely new industries (see, in particular, Padgett and Powell, 2012;

Garud, Simpson, Langley and Tsoukas, 2015; Seidel and Greve, 2017; Durand, Granqvist, and Tyllström, 2017). Our ambition, however, was not to offer a comprehensive account of novelty across its many manifestations but, perhaps more modestly, to show the utility of articulating three different lenses that are evident in contemporary organizational scholarship on novelty: generation, recognition, and legitimation. These three processes, as Raghu Garud reminds us in his concluding coda, are often intimately intertwined, and any effort at theory building should take their interdependence into account. We hope our fellow travelers in novelty scholarship will find in this volume a wealth of ideas and tools to sustain their further explorations of this fascinating area of inquiry.

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