Institutional Spheres: The Macro-Structure and Culture of Social Life

11

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11.1 Introduction

Since Parsons' grand theory fell in disrepute, sociologists have spilled much ink cautioning against reifying aspects of the social world that are invisible, macro, and perhaps invented by sociologists. Yet, as Fine notes, "People reify their life worlds, and do not, for the most part, think like interpretivist microsociologists" (1991:169). To be sure, Fine is thinking about collectives like the government or "big business" as the abstractions people assign exteriority to, and not larger, more abstract spheres of social reality. However, people routinely talk about "law," "religion," and the "economy" as things that act upon them and which others, especially elites, can act on (or use for their benefit). Indeed, even studies of small-scale societies demonstrate that nonliterate peoples cognitively distinguish between the beliefs and practices, underlying value-orientations and norms, and physical, temporal, social, and symbolic spaces of different spheres of reality like law and religion (Malinowski 1959). These spheres, or what I term *institutional spheres*, are the macro-level structural and cultural spheres that delineate the most central aspects of social life. Embedded within them are the various lower-level units of analysis other chapters in this handbook consider: the self (Chap. 17); corporate units like groups, organizations, and communities (Chaps. 13, 14, and 15); and congeries of corporate units, like fields (Chap. 10). *They do not act* in the Parsonsian sense of systems needing things and doing things. Rather, they are constructs that occupy real space and thus have real consequences. Moreover, spheres are not static, but processual; they vary in terms of their influence across time and space (Turner 2003); they have ecological dynamics associated with their level of autonomy and the degree to which an actor finds herself close to the institutional core (Abrutyn 2014b:68–98); but, ultimately, they shape the everyday reality of significant proportions of the population (1) cognitively as we develop identities embedded within relationships embedded within encounters embedded within corporate units that present actors with macro-level elements (see Chap. 6); (2) situationally when a person enters a courtroom for the first time in her life or when one goes to the mall on Black Friday; and (3) ritualistically when people anticipate and frequent religious services on a regular basis or when students take finals every year at the same time with the same preparatory lead up.

The following essay is organized as such: first, we explore the various usages of the term "institution" in sociology, arguing that there is both an historical basis for thinking about them as spheres

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and practical reasons for doing so. Second, the major elements of institutions are elucidated, focusing particularly on the evolutionary, ecological, and entrepreneurial dynamics of institutional spheres. Third, and final, we consider the "frontiers" of institutional analysis. In particular, the temporal and symbolic spaces of institutional domains seem ripe for major advances, while the physical and social dimensions remain important and in need of further consideration.

11.2 The Many Varieties

I have commented elsewhere that the concept *institution* is one of the most commonly used concepts in sociology, yet is perhaps one of the vaguest and least precisely defined (Abrutyn 2009b, 2014b). An exhaustive review is not necessary, though it is worth noting the most common usages before moving on. Colloquially, an institution often refers to an enduring organization or association (e.g., Harvard; a research center), a long-standing member of said organization (e.g., a professor whose existence is synonymous with the department) or a formal position (e.g., the Presidency); it may also refer to an enduring custom (e.g., the handshake) or law. Early social scientists, and many today, used it to refer to enduring, patterned actions (e.g., marriage) or legal relations (e.g., private property), while those like Spencer used it both to refer to broader spheres of social structure like religion or law as well as the interrelated components that shaped social action. More recently, a loosely coupled group of scholars and scholarship, *new* or *neo-institutionalists*, use it in several divergent ways: cultural myths and patterns that generate isomorphism (Meyer and Rowan 1977; DiMaggio and Powell 1983); "rules of the game" that govern economic organizations (North 2005); forces of broad social control with varying levels of normative, regulative, and cognitive-cultural mechanisms (Scott 2001); or, broad organizational forms of modernity like "capitalism," "the State," or the "church" (Friedland and Alford 1991).

The number of uses—many of which stem from the new institutionalist school that is largely concerned with organizations (cf. Powell and DiMaggio 1991; Nee 2005)—is dizzying. That is, if the presidency, the handshake, Harvard, and sexism are all institutions (cf. Jepperson 1991:144), then one must logically ask what is not an institution? Or, perhaps the real question is, "are the differences in these phenomena more important than their similarities?" Besides the criticism surrounding the integration of colloquial vagaries with social scientific precision, we might raise several other issues with the new institutionalism. First, a close examination of the new institutionalist tradition reveals a focus on *organizations* with mostly taken for granted consideration of what the institution is, often pointing to an underexamined environment in which organizations do things (Sutton et al. 1994; Sutton and Dobbin 1996; Edelman and Suchman 1997). Second, like a lot of contemporary sociology, there is an ahistorical bias. Alford and Friedland's (1985) work, for example, is rooted in modernity and things like the "state" or "capitalism," which do not have one-to-one comparisons in other times, unless we take an overly simplistic Marxian view of polity or economy. Third, and closely related, neo-institutionalists have been criticized for overemphasizing convergence and isomorphism, while ignoring the tremendous variation in "state" or "capitalism." At times, the John Meyer "school" seems to assume rationality is *the* master process and all organizations, regardless of local custom or broader inequalities in the world-system, easily conform in lockstep to the basic pattern (Boli et al. 1985; Thomas et al. 1987). And thus it might be tempting to scrap the term itself, yet Durkheim (1895 [1982]:45) once described sociology as the "science of institutions," which both speaks to the centrality of the concept and the necessity in more precisely defining it.

However, rather than try and reinvent the wheel, or even challenge the status quo, this essay avoids the term institution to some degree, and its verb form *institutionalization*, for a more precise concept: *institutional sphere* or *domain*. Doing so affords us several ways to leverage greater swaths of sociological theory and research. First, it allows us to rescue aspects of

functionalism and its close cousins (Shils 1975; Eisenstadt 1964, 1980; Turner 2003; Luhmann 2012) that may shed insights when consider in new light. Second, it moves us away from "system" language that overemphasizes similarities across levels of social reality so that we can talk about meaningful differences, as well as employ wide ranging explanatory frames like networks or social psychology. Third, and perhaps most importantly, we can move beyond the vague cultural theories of Parsons and functionalism (see Chap. 6) and offer a robust cultural theory to better balance the structural dimensions of institutions. This alone allows us to leverage the institutional logics perspective (Thornton et al. 2012) as well as revisit Weber's (1946) social psychological work on worldviews, ideas, and interests surrounding social orders. Fourth, we can introduce and embed the notion of history and evolutionary processes to underscore the ubiquity of institutional spheres, highlight some of the processes of change, and find the points of sociocultural and historic specificity that lend discrete texture to time and place.

11.3 Institutional Spheres

In essence, institutional spheres are the macro-level structural and cultural milieus in which most lower-order phenomena (e.g., fields; organizations; encounters) are organized and connected (Turner 2010). Though one can imagine a limitless number of potential spheres, ethnographic, historical, and sociological analyses point to a select set of domains that may be deemed institutions. In nearly every society, we find kinship (Fox 1967), political (Johnson and Earle 2000), religious (Radin 1937 [1957]), economic (Sahlins 1972), and legal spheres (Malinowski 1959); as well as, arguably, education (Turner 2003) and, perhaps, military (Collins 1986). In modern societies medicine (Starr 1982), science (Abrutyn 2009a), art (Luhmann 2000), and possibly media and/or sport (Abrutyn 2014b) join this list. Across time and space institutional spheres, and what may be called a society's *institutional complex* (or the total configuration of institutional spheres), vary in terms of their level of differentiation and, more importantly, autonomy (Abrutyn 2009b).

Differentiation occurs along four axes, the first three of which are common whereas the fourth is directly related to autonomy: physical, temporal, social, and symbolic. By physical, we are referring to the act of carving up geographic space and setting it aside for activities related to an institutional sphere; as well as stratifying access to these spaces. This may include buildings, monuments, statues, and the like. Temporal differentiation refers to the act of setting aside distinct time for activities, as well as hierarchicalizing how time shapes action, goals, and decisions. Temporal differentiation may resolve space limitations in so far as a space serves as an arena for two or more institutions, but only during certain times. Social differentiation involves the creation of new roles and status distinctions linked to the emergence of new groups, categories, and organizational units. The earliest form of this may be the growth of patri- and matrilines that signify a person's kinship position, descent, and inheritance (Levi-Strauss 1969). Finally, symbolic differentiation refers to the concomitant generalization and particularization of culture. On the one hand, generalization proceeds as space, time, and social relations grow complex and differentiated, as one mechanism of bringing all of these disparate pieces together (Alexander 1988). On the other hand, each disparate unit can come to "claim" a part of the broader culture as signifying something unique about it.

Thus, returning to institutional spheres, each sphere in a given society varies in terms of its level of physical, temporal, social, and symbolic differentiation. The greater is the degree to which each type of differentiation is higher, the greater is the degree to which the institutional sphere will be distinguishable by a significant proportion of the population vis-à-vis other institutions. Put another way, as polity becomes distinct from kinship around 5,000 years ago, the Palace and other public spaces become distinct from kinship buildings in size and scale—and, to some degree, function; public holidays and rituals are likewise distinct from local, familial rituals; kin relations and rela-

tions between subject and king become cognitively and materially consequential; and, finally, the polity usurps certain symbols that come to signify *power* and *force* as opposed to *loyalty* and *love* found in the family (Abrutyn 2015b). Differentiation, however, does not necessarily mean autonomy, as the Palace in Mesopotamian society was often conceptualized as a kinship domain, but one whose function mattered more than the ordinary house—e.g., the king's principal function was to uphold the secular and sacred order (Yoffee 2005). But autonomy cannot emerge without increasing levels of all four types of differentiation; especially symbolic.

By autonomy, we mean the process by which institutional spheres become discrete cultural spaces in so far as the physical, temporal, social, and symbolic elements come to orient most people's emotions, attitudes, and actions towards the institutional sphere's cultural system and source of authority (Abrutyn 2014b).[1] On your way to work, driving by a church, for instance, comes to signify a distinct set of actors, actions, attitudes and values, goals and preferences, and temporal dimensions. Even if an individual does not belong to the church or the broader religion, she can orient herself towards that building as if it is a microcosm of the religious sphere; and, as we shall see, the closer the actor is to the religious sphere, the more salient the meanings of the church will be when she drives past it. Hence, autonomy matters because institutional spheres come to *penetrate* the everyday lived experience of significant portions of the population such that they come to cognitively understand religion as separate—in the abstract and ideal—from polity or economy (Abrutyn 2014a); or, in the language of some institutional scholars, a unique *logic*, or symbols and practices that give "meaning to [actors] daily activity, organize time and space, and reproduce [actor's] lives and experiences" (Thornton et al. 2012:2), comes to mold the shape and texture of religion vis-à-vis kinship or economy. "How autonomous" is an empirical question revolving around historical factors, a given sphere's relationship to other spheres, and the ease with which resources (people, generalized media, etc.) flow across one sphere to the other signifying the circulation of intra-institutional meanings to other spheres. What matters, for now, is that societies are characterized by institutional spheres having greater or lesser autonomy; and which ones are more autonomous (as well as how many have become relatively autonomous) matters for understanding the underlying *ethos* of a given group of people as well as why cultural realities as expressed in micro-level processes like identities vary across time and space.

11.3.1 Evolutionary Institutionalism

An evolutionary analysis is essential to theorizing about institutional domains and their structural and cultural components; as well as what I call institutional *ecology* (see below). That is, institutions cannot be divorced from the long narrative of human history and the varieties of societal arrangements. Moreover, as Turner (2003) has asserted, neo-evolutionary thought provides us with the foundations for rehabilitating the functionalist trope of needs or requisites in ways that illuminate why humans construct macro-level spaces and why there are delimited numbers of institutional spheres (Abrutyn 2013a, b, 2015a). Thus, an evolutionary perspective sheds light on why the structure and culture of institutional spheres look the way they do.

In the following section, we consider what institutional evolution is by examining (a) the

[1] The concept of autonomy is borrowed from Niklas Luhmann's (2012) neo-system's theory. While Luhmann saw the system autonomy as tantamount to closure and, thus, a solution to the problem of differentiation, our conceptualization moves away from closure to a more Weberian, social phenomenological perspective: autonomy means spheres become *relatively* discrete cultural systems that increase the probability that an actor or set of actions will orient their emotions, attitudes, and actions when physically or cognitively near the institutional sphere. Hence why physical, temporal, social, and symbolic space matters: all four of these dimensions can make salient one institutional sphere's cultural reality vis-à-vis others.

material exigencies commonly driving societal evolution, (b) the universal human concerns that motivate humans, individually and collectively, try to solve problems around under the pressure of one or more of these material exigencies, and (c) the role institutional entrepreneurs play in evolution. Before exploring these three main topics, a brief elucidation of my view on sociocultural evolution is in order.

11.3.1.1 Sociocultural Evolution

Evolutionary thought and/or concepts have been a staple in sociology since Marx, Spencer, and Durkheim, as well as many other now-forgotten sociologists. Much of this thinking occurred before the modern synthesis of Darwinian natural selection and Mendelian genetics (cf. Mayr 2001), and before the types of empirical data necessary to draw good inferences were readily available. For many early sociologists, evolution implicitly or explicitly meant progressive gradual change that unfolded primarily at the macro-level in terms of time and space. It both fit the crude efforts at societal classification (e.g., savages-barbarians-civilized societies), and the growing social scientific efforts to understand colonized peoples. Hence, many of the criticisms of Eurocentrism were at least partially valid. In the 1960s, evolutionism returned in the form of stage models that sought to learn from the past (Bellah 1964; Lenski 1966; Parsons 1966). These too failed to use evolutionary principles and were more about discerning developmental stages and less about theorizing about sociocultural evolution (Blute 2010). In the last 25 years, neo-evolutionary theories have grown exponentially (for a review, see Chap. 24).

For our purposes, we are interested primarily in how institutions evolve, with autonomy being the principal dimension along which we can measure institutional evolution. Like libraries, institutional spheres become warehouses of material and symbolic elements which are sometimes combined into extant patterns that reflect past solutions, but remain capable of being recombined, forgotten and rediscovered, and manipulated in previously unforeseen ways. They are macro in so far as they contain large inventories of cultural elements that few, if any one person, can know or access. However, these libraries of culture are grafted onto physical, temporal, social, and symbolic spaces that are embodied in a series of encounters (more or less micro). Unlike libraries, institutional spheres are structural spaces with real positions reflective of power and authority, stratification patterns unique to the sphere and also indicative of broader societal patterns, and resource flows (Abrutyn 2014b:147–171). Thus, they do not serve as passive sites of storage, but also as arenas of competition and conflict that further fuel sociocultural evolution. If they are macro in that they contain numerous elements beyond the control of any one person, they are also macro in so far as they contain series of embedded sites of contestation—in many ways, like Fligstein and McAdam's (2011) notion of embedded fields of strategic action (see also Chap. 10)—as well as numerous structural connections like divisions of labor, patterns of exchange, and the like that tenuously link various levels of social reality as well as these embedded sites of contestation.

Because they are macro and collective and highly complex in their substance, institutions do not evolve based on Darwinian principles—though, like all things attached to the biotic world, institutions can be wiped out along with a society in the face of massive environmental change. To draw, then, from Turner (2010), institutional spheres reflect two of our very own theorists' models of evolution: *Spencerian* and *Durkheimian*. The gist of Spencer's model challenges purist Darwinian thinking because it does not rely on competition between species or traits or whatever is the unit of selection. Instead, he posited that societies were always at risk of collapse or conquest because environmental exigencies were not so much a constant, but an inherent risk of population growth and density; under "normal" conditions, existing structural (and I would argue cultural) solutions could be mobilized to resolve exigencies, but often times these were not sufficient and a society faced a "choice": either create new structural (and/or cultural)

arrangements to resolve the problems or risk breaking down.[2] Spencerian evolutionary processes, then, operate by purposive, directed efforts of people in the face of real (and I would add, perceived) problems. As we shall see below, I believe Spencerian evolution also requires thinking about the link between macro-exigencies and micro-level exigencies, which often goes unexamined and assumed.

Durkheimian selection processes are more similar to Darwinian. In essence, Durkheim saw competition between individuals or groups for position and resources as the driving force of sociocultural evolution: some individuals or groups would prove more "fit" for a niche or position, while others would create new specializations, carve out new niches, or die. This model is more of an ecological evolutionism that has been developed extensively by human ecologists (Hawley 1986) and organizational ecologists (Hannan and Freeman 1977). Like Darwinian processes, competition over resources and specialization are key components; unlike Darwinian processes, Durkheim acknowledges that culture has the capacity to overcome the biotic world, expand resource bases, and reduce conflicts—and thus, like Spencer's model, humans can and do act purposively and creatively. Moreover, as strategic action field theorists (Fligstein and McAdams 2011)—who, admittedly, are not evolutionists—would add: competitions, their outcomes, and thereby potential evolutionary change, are not always blind and directionless from a Durkheimian perspective, but do involve strategizing, purposive actors working to improve their position, protect their power, destroy their opponents, and, under other circumstances, increase the collective's (or some segment of it) benefit (cf. Chaps. 25 and 26; also, Abrutyn and Van Ness 2015).

In short, evolutionary processes are real in sociology. Though our focus is on how and why institutions evolve, there are plenty of other levels of evolution under which other principles apply (Blute 2010). By moving towards Spencerian and Durkheimian processes, however, we gain several advantages to strict Darwinian accounts. First, we are freed from using biological concepts as metaphors for sociocultural evolution when they are not really one-to-one fits. Second, they open the door to thinking about who, that is what actual persons, are affecting evolution; as well as when, why, and how. Third, we can bury unidirectional and unilinear stage models for good, acknowledging that evolution is not necessary progressive in terms of growing complexity or differentiation, but in fact, evolution may mean different things across cases. While Bellah (1964), for instance, considers the Protestant reformation a moment of increasing complexity, I would characterize this transformative event as a moment of simplification when comparing the organizational, material, and symbolic elements of Protestantism to Catholicism. Likewise, institutional evolution may be the process by which one or more institutions grow in autonomy, or it may reflect the changing levels of autonomy across a series of institutions including the loss of autonomy in some cases. Finally, as Abrutyn and Lawrence (2010) have argued elsewhere, evolution though often gradual and slow, is sometimes rapid qualitative transformation; it often depends on the case, the historical scale one is interested in, and how we relativize temporality. We turn, now, to the basic material exigencies that seem ubiquitous to all societies.

11.3.1.2 The Material Exigencies

One of the principal critiques of structural-functionalism is that it relies too heavily on needs or requisites for societal equilibria (Parsons 1951); moreover, these needs are often conceptualized as *social* or *collective* needs, which imply a supra-consciousness. Herbert Spencer, for instance, famously argued that all societies had to deal with three basic adaptive problems (Turner 1985):

[2] First, by "choice" I do not believe Spencer literally saw societies as making choices. He was aware that supraorganisms, like societies, are not like organisms because they have myriad "central nervous system" and therefore choices require quotations. Second, Spencer was not naïve to think the process was as simple as create new structures and/or cultures or collapse. His model was recursive, and when solutions were not found or were unsuccessfully implemented, rather than collapse, exigencies likely became amplified or intensified or new exigencies emerged (Turner 2010).

operation (production of resources and reproduction of people); distribution; and, regulation (controlling and coordinating differentiated social units). While other functionalists would provide their own lists, the basic argument was the same: as societies grow larger, social equilibria are upset; in part, new structures with discrete functions emerge to deal with imbalance, but also cause new imbalances that are ultimately reduced by new integrative mechanisms. In short, structural differentiation is *always* the master process in functionalism, with emphasis either on the process of differentiation and its consequences (e.g., Spencer) or on the integrative mechanisms that bring differentiated society back into harmony (e.g., Durkheim).

Several problems emerge with structural-functional logic. First, there is a sense of inevitability and conservativism in most functionalisms. Durkheim, well aware of the competition and conflict found in modern, urban differentiated societies, incessantly searched for the lynchpin that balanced society; Parsons (1951), a worse offender, propagated a version of functionalism that led to studies legitimating inequality as "healthy" for society (Davis and Moore 1945). Second, most "solutions" to the problem of integration were weak or underdeveloped cultural solutions: for Durkheim, it was ritual and collective effervescence; Parsons settled on universal value-patterns; and for Merton, it was norms. In all of these cases, the outlines of a truly cultural solution to the problem of integration is present, yet in functionalism always put structure ahead of culture. Third, there is little room for multilinear, multi-directional, contingent social change. Structural differentiation generally proceeds in a "progressive" direction (cf. Parsons 1966), whether from simple to compound (Spencer 1897), mechanical to organic (Durkheim 1893), or archaic to modern (Bellah 1964).

Yet, in spite of these criticisms, macro-level sociology must be able to explain and contend with macro-level material exigencies (Hawley 1986; Lenski 1966; Turner 2010). That is, we cannot turn a blind-eye to ubiquitous exigencies like population growth or density, resource scarcity, or heterogeneity that have relatively predictable outcomes. Nor can we adopt the functionalist perspective that often whitewashes (1) the purposive efforts to deal with these pressures—or, to deal with the secondary problems that people perceive like threats to a person or group's standard of living, (2) the proposed solutions that are sometimes beneficial to one group vis-à-vis others, and (3) the maladaptive consequences of short-sighted solutions. One solution Turner (2003) has offered is to focus, instead, on *selection pressures*, or the types of generic forces that, when present, press against a social unit's extant structure and culture in ways that lead to change; whether coerced, unintentional, or intentional. Though an exhaustive list of selection pressures would be preferable, for our purposes we can provide several exogenous and endogenous examples: population growth *or* rapid decline; population and social density; material, human, and/or symbolic resource scarcity; heterogeneity, stratification, and inequality; external threats or internal conflict; ecological degradation or climatic disasters. What links these examples together are several key aspects: (1) they all have the potential to threaten the survival of a given social unit; (2) they can appear, in variable size, scale, and magnitude, across all levels of social reality; (3) they all have short- and long-run structural and cultural solutions that are just as likely to fail or create new secondary pressures, as succeed; (4) more often than not, solutions include reconfiguring the physical, temporal, social, or symbolic spaces in directions of either greater or lesser differentiation.

11.3.1.3 Universal Human Concerns

Despite the importance of these exigencies in explaining sociocultural evolution and institutional change, it is far less common—especially before scientific inquiry became distinct from religious, legal, and philosophic epistemologies—for people to *feel* macro-level exigencies. That is, not many people conceptualize their discomfort and pursuit of individual or collective solutions as coming from, say, "too much population!" Rather, these macro-level exigencies tend to exacerbate concerns that appear to be ubiquitous to humans in both time and space (Abrutyn

2014b). Admittedly, sociologists tend to balk at lists that involve universals, but several caveats should put these fears in abeyance. First, by ubiquitous, I mean that any mentally, physically, and genetically "normal" human is *capable* of feeling these concerns are salient to their well-being. How they are made salient, however, is an empirical question: for instance, it could be a direct feeling, cultivated from the person's actual experiences just as much as it could be a feeling derived from a significant or prestigious other's influence. The point is that some concerns are *universal*, and under the right conditions can be made to feel problematic and in need of correction. Second, just because a concern is made salient does not mean individuals or groups will or can resolve the assumed problem. Technology or culture may not allow resolution; existing power structures may work in opposition to efforts to innovate; individuals or groups may fail to perceive the problem, or simply misperceived the problem or its solutions; finally, solutions have no guarantees over the short, medium, or long haul. Third, some ubiquitous concerns remain undifferentiated in many human societies, conflated or synthesized with other more "important" ones. That is, cultural variation is, in part, a product of the historical and sociocultural contingent nature of selection: one group may define *justice* as salient under the same exact pressures as another that defines *sacredness* and *loyalty* to be most relevant. How these concerns are grafted onto institutional spheres is what gives every society or social unit its unique texture and timbre.

That being said, there are a limited number of concerns and when these concerns become salient, and the production, distribution, and access to their solutions become monopolized by a specialized group, institutional spheres can become autonomous. That is, institutional spheres come to be the central locus for dealing with one or more human concerns. Table 11.1 offers a list of autonomous institutional spheres and the concerns often embedded within them. Of course, this fact does not necessarily lead to the functionalist or old evolutionary notion that structures and cultures are adaptive. Rather, institutional spheres are dominated by collectives who monopolize access to the goods and services associated with dealing with one or more concerns, and under most circumstances, these rights and privileges are unevenly distributed. An institution's autonomy, then, does not depend on objective adaptivity but instead on whether it penetrates the lives and experiences of a significant proportion of the population, while allowing the group and its cultural assemblage to persist over an indefinite period of time. The greater this penetration, (1) the greater the legitimacy granted to those monopolizing the institution's core, (2) the greater the subjective belief that the institution "correctly" distributes and produces solutions, and (3) the

Table 11.1 Ubiquitous human concerns and institutions often involved in their resolution

Biological reproduction	Kinship, polity
Cultural reproduction	Kinship, education, polity, religion, science
Security	Polity, kinship
Communication with the supernatural	Religion, polity, art
Conflict resolution/justice/fairness	Law, kinship, polity
Knowledge of the biotic/social world	Science, education, religion, polity, economy, art
Subsistence	Economy, polity, kinship, science, medicine
Transportation/communication tech.	Polity, economy, science, media
Distinction/status	Polity, economy, sport, religion, art, education
Moral order	Kinship, religion, law, polity
Socioemotional anchorage	Kinship, religion, art
Health	Medicine, kinship, religion

Note: This list is not definitive, but rather suggestive. Other concerns can become salient and, therefore, ubiquitous

greater the likelihood that individuals and collectives will orient their emotions, attitudes, and actions—under the right conditions (which are elucidated in detail below)—towards the cultural and authority system(s) of the institutional core (and the specialists who are granted the right to impose a legitimate vision of reality). Note, some of these concerns are ubiquitous in so far as there are biological and, especially, neurological foundations for them. A strong sense of justice, for example, is found in both our primate kin and across *all* human brains (Gospic et al. 2011)—and, thereby, shapes the microdynamics constraining our everyday experience of social reality (Chap. 18). The specific cultural framework varies, to be sure, but the salience of justice as a human concern appears everywhere, with the earliest expression being in relatively distinct legal mechanisms (Hoebel 1973), but sometimes being grafted onto other concerns like *sacredness*, *loyalty*, and *power*.

A further note, whose full exploration is beyond the scope of this chapter, is the fact that widespread sense of salience is often historically phased (for more, see Abrutyn 2009a, 2014a, 2015a). Thus, while *power* is a concern across all social units across all times and places, its *institutionalization* and, therefore, widespread salience, only occurs when roles like chiefs become differentiated. Its scale and magnitude continues to increase as polity becomes autonomous. That is, when chiefs become kings seeking to *generalize power* across social units and monopolize its production and distribution within the political core—and thereby expropriating it from local kin relations—*power* becomes problematic more frequently and more complexly (Abrutyn 2013a). For instance, on a cognitive, micro/meso-level, political autonomy and the monopolization of *power* meant political goals become perceived as "different from other types of goals or from goals of other spheres [in so far as their] formation, pursuit, and implementation became largely independent of other groups, *and were governed mostly by political criteria and by consideration of political exigency*" (Eisenstadt 1963:19). The same point can be made about religion and the production and distribution of goods and services associated with concerns like *sacredness/piety* during the Axial Age (Abrutyn 2014a, 2015a); law and *conflict resolution/justice* during the Gregorian Reformation (Abrutyn 2009b); or, *health* and medicine during the early twentieth century (Starr 1982).

11.3.1.4 Institutional Entrepreneurship

Currently underexplored, a significant question that faces evolutionary accounts is how the macro-level processes are "translated" into the lived experience of people, motivating them to innovate and invent new organizational, symbolic, or technological elements of culture. One possible answer to this dilemma may derive from the transformation of exigencies into real or perceived threats to individual or groups of individuals' standards of living. That is, in the face of objective or subjective relative deprivation, actors are motivated to identify the source of threat and resolve it by eradicating the threat, adapting to it, stemming it, etc. However, this perspective avoids the possibility of purposive innovation where no perceived threat or exigency is present. Innovation for the sake of innovation as well as out of self-interest or collective benefit must be considered plausible sources of new cultural traits that, once present, can either spread by way of typical mechanisms such as propinquity, prestige-biases, or conformity (Abrutyn and Mueller 2014) or from being imposed from above by power elites (Abrutyn and Van Ness 2015). In both cases—reaction to threat or innovative agency—the primary driving force can be characterized as collective specialized actors who may best be called *institutional entrepreneurs*.

Entrepreneurs are Eisenstadt's (1964, 1980) interpretation of Weber's *charismatic carrier groups*. They are entrepreneurial in so far as they embark on high-risk/high-reward projects that can lead to, in the most extreme cases, their death. When truly successful, they are capable of reconfiguring the physical, temporal, social, and symbolic space and carving out distinct autonomous institutional spheres that encompass those differentiated dimensions of space (Abrutyn 2014b; Abrutyn and Van Ness 2015). From Weber,

Eisenstadt saw these groups as evolutionary when they are capable of convincing others that their project and the very grounds of their group's existence is rooted in the fundamental social, moral, and cosmic order (cf. introduction in Weber 1968). It was their charismatic "fervor" that became the force driving qualitative transformation. I (2014b) have added to this that the fundamental grounds were rooted not in vague notions of moral order, but rather linked to one or more human concerns in that they became the producers and distributors of goods and services associated with substantive or ultimate ends. As the purveyors of these goods and services, like priests dispensing grace or politicians transforming raw power into delimited authority, they are given the right to carve up institutional space. Bourdieu (1989), for instance, recognized the ability to appropriate social and symbolic space and differentiate it however one group sees fit as the ultimate form of symbolic power and violence. Groups, however, also carve up physical and temporal space. What makes entrepreneurship tricky, however, is the fact that entrepreneurial projects are often both self- and collectively-oriented; finding a balance between the two diametrically opposed goal structures matters for success, as too much of the former loses potential members and too much of the latter invites organizational and movement disasters.

Finally, there are different types of entrepreneurs and projects based on their own originating position. DiMaggio (1988), for instance, borrowed the term from Eisenstadt to discuss how existing organizational fields adapt or are modified by purposive innovation. A more Durkheimian, gradualist model of "reform" and quantitative growth underscores this model, as entrepreneurs work from within the existing institutional sphere. Eisenstadt (1964, 1980), conversely, pictured a different embedded entrepreneur: authorized by more powerful individuals to resolve pressing problems, they could leverage their success and monopoly over organizational, technological, and symbolic secrets to balance power differentials between their entrepreneurial unit and the extant power elite. To these two, I have added the "marginal" entrepreneurs, or those who begin to modify institutional reality from a distant position from the core; a process that seems to have occurred in some Axial Age (*c*. 1000–100 BCE) religio-cultural movements (Humphreys 1975; Abrutyn 2014a, 2015a); and, in addition, the *liaison*, or the entrepreneur whose position is at the overlap between two or more autonomous institutional spheres and can draw from both in new, creative ways (Abrutyn 2014b). More on these different types of entrepreneurs will be said shortly. For now, we turn to the ecological dynamics of institutions so that elucidating entrepreneurs and their positions will be anchored in something much more concrete.

11.3.2 Institutional Ecology and the Dynamics of Institutional Space

One of the oldest problems macrosociology has wrestled with is how macro level forces are translated into micro-level dynamics (for more, see Chaps. 7 and 8). Parsons (1951), for instance, posited a model (AGIL) that supposedly worked at all levels of reality, capturing the four basic needs individuals, groups, and societies were required to find structural solutions to. In this section we explore the way institutional domains organize ecological space and the ecological dynamics across levels of social reality. Conceptualizing ecological space allows us to move away from the abstraction present in Parsons or Luhmann, and take purchase of the way macro-reality, through *real physical*, *temporal*, *social*, *and symbolic* space comes to facilitate *and* constrain emotions, actions, and attitudes. Taking as my departure point, Shils' (1975) long-forgotten functionalist ecology, it is possible to visualize how institutional spheres become actualized in everyday reality without reducing the macro to the micro or vice versa. In addition, this strategy further bolsters the role of entrepreneurs who, as we shall see below, become the "fulcrum" between the macro and micro worlds; a strategy that Turner (2011) has long advocated for but which he has not fully elucidated in terms of actual groups doing real things.

11.3.2.1 Macro Ecology

In trying to think about the macro-micro link, Shils (1975) argued that societies have a "center" that penetrates, in varying degrees, the environment surrounding it. Inside the core are the principal institutions (polity; economy; cultural), authority system, and values, which emanated outward into the "mass" society. Besides the functionalist assumption of consensus and stability, Shils' model assumes a single core, offers only vague descriptions of what the center consists of, and has little explanation as to how and why the core form and whether it changes over time. However, I (2013c, 2014b) have made clear that this metaphor can work for understanding institutional autonomy, evolution, and macro-micro linkage.

We begin with a simple proposition: *the greater is the degree to which an institution is autonomous*, *the greater is the degree to which one* (*or more*) *discrete institutional cores form*.[3] The core is a physical and cognitive dimension of macro-reality. On the one hand, with greater autonomy comes the increasing likelihood that physical space—including buildings, pathways, and even people lodged temporarily or full-time in these spaces—will become distinguishable from other types of physical space. At first, physical space becomes differentiated temporally, such as the public "square" of a chiefdom serving as the daily meeting ground and, during the holiest of days, the sacred center once cleansed. Eventually, however, residential zones become bounded vis-à-vis politico-legal zones (e.g., downtown areas with courthouses, town halls, jails, and police stations); and, within a given institutional sphere, multiple cores can take up different or overlapping space such as an economic sphere subdividing into commercial and industrial zones. These spaces are *real* and macro in their totality, scale, size, and ability to impose cultural orientations on those passing through as well as those who spend much of their day working or acting within them. And, so, the core or cores become important not because they do not exist in abstract reality; rather we are embedded in the core when we enter a courthouse, a church, a college campus or building, or a home.

On the other hand, the core is not something only salient in physical reality. A lawyer can imagine and practice her courtroom role-performance at home, while chance encounters at a grocery store between a parishioner and his priest thrust both into an ephemeral religious encounter that is detached from the physical routine location(s). Hence, humans spend time in these places, can see them in real time *and* in their minds, and, as such, can reify religion or polity in ideal typical physical locations (e.g., Jerusalem or Washington D.C. respectively). These reifications and the actual "microcosms" we inhabit like houses or churches *extend*, cognitively, our orientation, encounters we engage in, and groups or other collectives we perform tasks within. By "extend," I mean they enlarge the circumference, in Kenneth Burke's (1989) terminology, or widen the frame, in Goffman's parlance, by which we label our self, sift through emotion/feeling rules, choose lines of action and order preferences, and define the situation.

In addition to these "locational" or "spatial" elements, an autonomous core also implies differentiated temporal, social, and symbolic space. For instance, working hours get split apart from family time; political holidays can be carved out vis-à-vis religious ones; and, decisions made in hierarchical space can shape the sequences of action in lower-order spaces. In addition, fields, organizations, groups, and role/status positions become increasingly distinct from each other. In the home, we expect people to be in kinship roles, even though work does not clearly end at the threshold of the doorway; when entering a courtroom, all other roles are temporally constrained, while we immediately assume a status far lower than the judge and, indeed, jurists and lawyers. Finally, symbolic markers emerge to carve up the physical, temporal, and social spaces and make them meaningfully discrete. Building architecture, for instance, stereotype the expectations,

[3] The "core" metaphor is preferable to center if only because a core does not assume centrality, but rather an essential space from which key elements of institutional domains are produced and distributed. Hence, there can be more than one core, and cores do not have to be harmoniously integrated or coupled.

activities, and attitudes inherent in a physical location; "totems" like a status of blind lady justice, a cross, or Latin phrasing cue appropriate role transitions; calendars and other means of demarcating time allow us to anticipate institutional rituals; and, various identity kits like white lab coats, tweed jackets with elbow patches, black robes, or business suits stereotype role expectations and obligations, as well as signify the social milieu in which a person has entered. Thus, the core is active in physical and temporal space, as well as social and symbolic space. More autonomy means more discreteness.

Likewise, surrounding any given institutional core is its environment. The environment and actors located throughout the environment are governed by the *rule of proximity*: the greater is the degree of institutional autonomy and the closer is the degree to which a person, group, of cluster of groups (e.g., field; niche; sector) is located vis-à-vis an institutional core, the greater is the degree to which the core exerts *centripetal* force—that is, draws actors into the orbit of the rules and resources and divisions of labor of the core (e.g., Fig. 11.1). The environment, like the core, is real. It is composed of the various meso-level spaces sociologists often study to avoid the abstraction of macrosociology: fields (Bourdieu 1993; Fligstein and McAdam 2011) or niches (Hannan and Freeman 1977). Some of these meso-level spaces are located within the core, but not all. Figure 11.1 presents an example of an autonomous institutional sphere, its core, and the surrounding environment. Here we see an autonomous legal sphere found in many urban spaces. The core is constituted by the federal and/or state courthouse that is often located in a downtown area. It is both real in the sense that it physically and symbolically marks the legal zone, and cognitive in the sense that it often blends stereotyped architecture (e.g., huge columns) with local flourishes that serve to both mark the generalized and specific elements of the core. Support and liaison actors pockmark the physical landscape near the courthouse. A police headquarters and local jail is often close, as are numerous law offices,

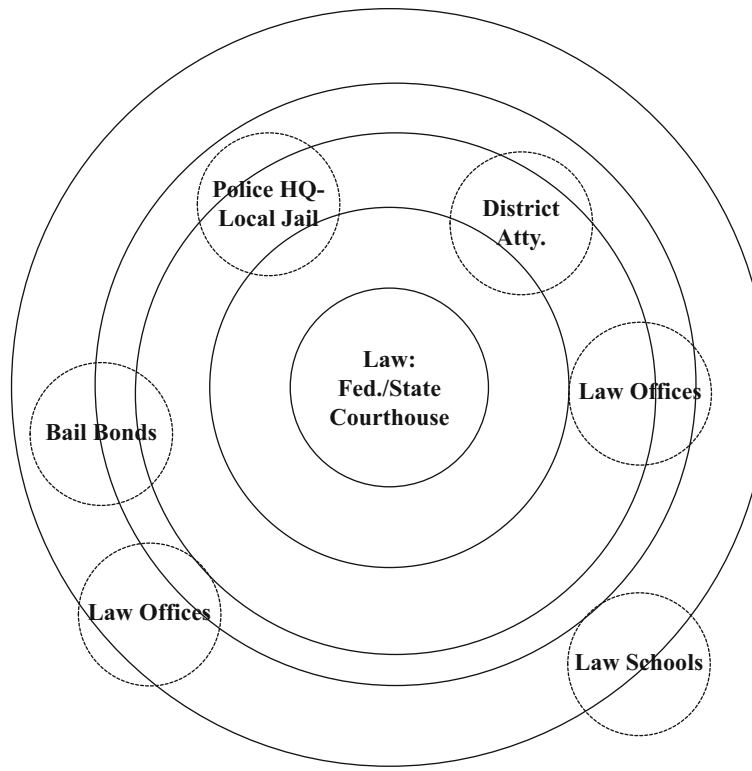

Fig. 11.1 Example of autonomous institutional sphere

bailbondsmen, and, likely, a city hall or city office for the district attorney. Actors entering this zone are inundated with legal symbols cueing their actions and attitudes. And while there are numerous non-legal organizations like restaurants, cafes, convenient stores, apartments, and the like, these are invisible during legal hours as they are filled with legal actors talking "shop" or taking a temporary break from their official roles.

To be sure, no institutional space, no matter how autonomous, is an island unto itself. Figure 11.2 presents a complex, yet simplified, version of the legal example extended beyond its institutional boundaries. Beginning with the institutional core, we see double-sided arrows extending towards every space in the environment, denoting the flow of human, material, and symbolic (e.g., information) resources; additionally, many of these have their own connections with each other as resource flows across units. Some of these units, especially those on the top-right of the legal environment, have direct ties to the political sphere, including, in some cases, the core itself. The legal core, on the one hand, tests legislation, makes decisions that Congress must react to, and also has overlapping social relationships; conversely, on the other hand, legislation shapes court dockets, the President nominates judges that the Senate must approve, and some Congress persons were judges. Similar connections can be drawn between the police (who are an extension of the executive office), the district attorney (who work for the state or justice department), and law offices which are regulated by federal law and where many politicians come from or return to upon retirement or lost elections.

The rest of Fig. 11.2 is focused on the other institutional linkages. Bailbondsmen and lawyers act as *liaisons* between the legal sphere and the kinship sphere; helping shepherd normal people through the labyrinthine legal sphere; law offices,

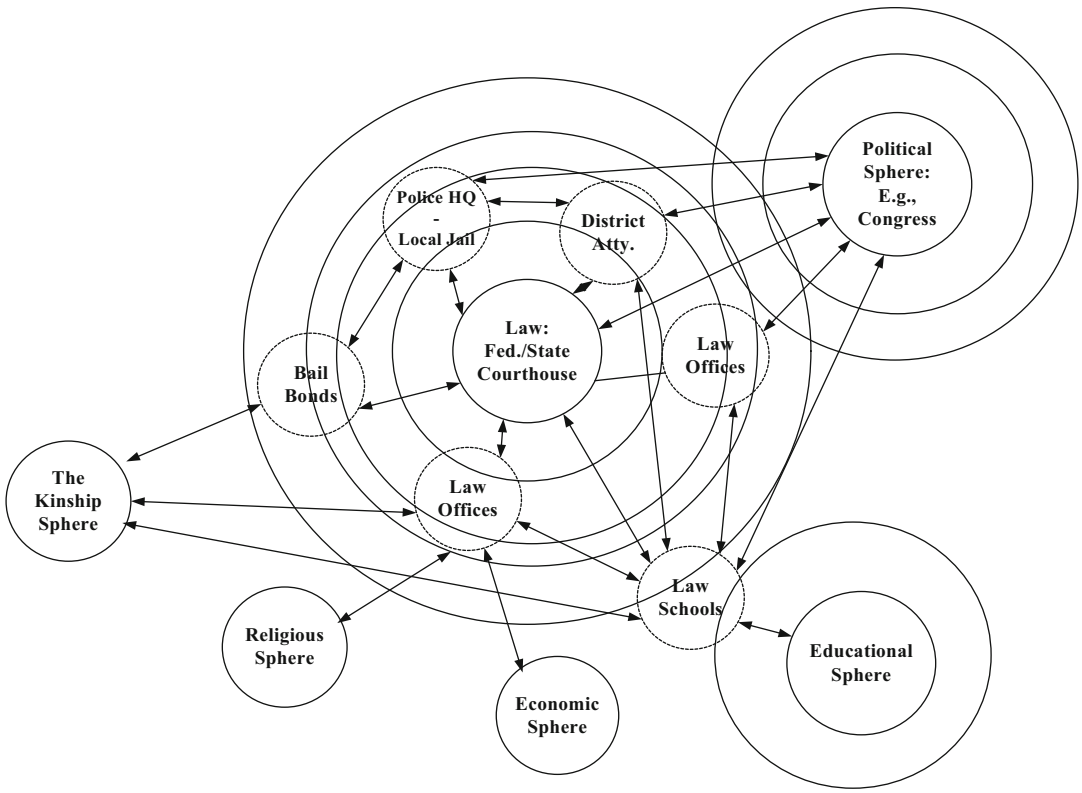

Fig. 11.2 Example of autonomous institutional sphere in institutional context

of course, also do the same for religious and economic actors, though in many cases, individual organizations have their own lawyers on retainer or entire legal departments devoted to interacting with the legal core. Law schools also act as liaisons, and key traffickers of human and symbolic resource mobility. Linking the educational sphere to the legal sphere, law schools produce lawyers for law offices and district attorneys; judges who have been professionalized within a legal sphere (who, like high profile lawyers, often return to their alma mater or some other prestigious school to teach later in their careers); and, of course, are shaped by federal laws for higher education, but also which produce clerks, campaign advisors, interns, and the like for politicians. To be sure, this model oversimplifies the much more complex social reality, and necessarily omits numerous "arrows" or resource flows for the sake of parsimony, while also highlighting the complex interplay between autonomous institutional spheres.

11.3.2.2 Micro Reality

At its most basic level, this briefest of ecological accounts matters at the micro-level. We can present several different propositions capturing how and why it manifests or translates into everyday, phenomenological reality (Abrutyn 2014b). First, being physically and/or cognitively closer to an autonomous institutional core means that actors are more likely to inhabit relationships, groups, and networks in which institution-specific roles and status positions will be routinely activated by intensive and/or extensive ties within institution-specific encounters; institution-specific resources act as means and ends of interaction patterns in said encounters; and, external mechanisms of control are visible, known, and easily administered. In short, the rule of proximity predicts probabilities with which actors will be repeatedly subject to the people, resources (as both things to pursue and things that are used in everyday life), and rules (both in terms of agents of control and sanctions) of a given institution and thus, their level of habituation, normative commitment, and the salience of their institutional identity.

Second, being closer and routinely subject to the institutional core's structural and cultural reality increases the likelihood that our feelings, thoughts, and actions will increasingly become aligned with those prescribed by entrepreneurs or the cultural system we internalize (Abrutyn 2014b; Abrutyn and Mueller 2015). At the social psychological level, this means that our self is more likely to merge with the role/status-position we find ourselves within the institutional sphere because of the intensive and extensive commitments, as well as the recurring rewards and punishments we earn (Turner 1978). As such, our institution-specific role-identity is more likely to be (a) *prominent* (McCall and Simmons 1978), (b) *salient* (Stryker 1980), (c) socioemotionally anchored to individuals, groups, and even systems (Chap. 8; also, Lawler et al. 2009), (d) restricted in its access to alternative institutional cores, (e) governed by institution-specific status beliefs (see Chap. 16) rooted in the institution-specific status hierarchy (Abrutyn 2014b), and, finally, (f) the central identity by which we measure our global self-esteem, efficacy, and worth (see Chap. 17).

Third, there is no need to turn to a Parsonsian (1951) view of the self and action that overemphasizes structure and underemphasizes culture. Indeed, the divisions of labor and other structural mechanisms of control are essential to understanding certain dynamics of core-environment ecology. Yet, I (2015b; also 2014b:121–146) have argued elsewhere that we can return to and rehabilitate the concept *generalized symbolic media* first present in Simmel's (1907) work on money and most prominent in Parsons' (1963) systems theory to explain how culture from the core comes to be an independent force in institutional life. Media are, in essence, the symbolic and material resources that denote institutional value and which constrain and facilitate feeling, thinking, and doing by acting as both means and ends deemed appropriate. Primarily, media manifest themselves in three ways: as (a) language and, more specifically, in the form of *themes of discourse* (Luhmann 2012) as well as the "forms" of actual talk (Abrutyn and Turner 2011)

governing institutional communication; (b) the normative and cognitive-cultural framework and routines of social exchange—e.g., instrumental vs. moral; and (c) as external referents of value (Abrutyn 2015b), or the objects that signify to the possessor, user, pursuant, and audience the competence (Goffman 1967), authenticity (Alexander 2004), and status (Bourdieu 1991) institutionally prescribed. Taken together, these three axes allow for the embodiment of the macro-level into daily routines, mundane and ceremonial performances and rituals, and general encounters. Moreover, as Goffman's body of work suggests, as actors work to be better performers they increasingly become attached and committed to their roles as well as the situational spaces that allow them to "shine" the most. Hence, a professor who derives much of her self-esteem and worth from academic settings will be more likely to orient her emotions, attitudes, and actions to the educational-scientific spheres on a daily basis, while a legal actor will be more oriented towards the legal sphere. The more access to a particular generalized medium a person has access to, the more "fluent" and active he or she will be in the institution's cultural reality. Table 11.2 provides a list of common media and the institutional spheres they generally circulate within.

In many ways, this approach has strong parallels to the institutional logic perspective (Thornton et al. 2012), but we add several key wrinkles. First, while institutional logics remains rooted in the systems of modernity like capitalism, church, and state (Friedland and Alford 1991; Thornton et al. 2012), I take an evolutionary and historical view of economy, religion, and polity. Second, the model presented above remains committed to seeing institutions as real beyond just the beliefs and practices that folks adopt, conceptualizing their external presence in

Table 11.2 Generalized symbolic media of institutionalized domains

Kinship	**Love/loyalty**: language and external objects facilitating and constraining actions, exchanges, and communication rooted in positive affective states that build and denote commitments to others
Economy	**Money**: language and external objects related to actions, exchanges, and communication regarding the production and distribution of goods and services
Polity	**Power**: language and external objects facilitating and constraining actions, exchanges, and communication oriented towards making, enforcing, and securing assent for collective binding decisions and controlling emotions, actions, and attitudes of others
Law	**Justice/conflict resolution**: language and external objects facilitating and constraining actions, exchanges, and communication oriented towards mediating impersonal social relationships and invoking norms of fairness and morality
Religion	**Sacredness/piety**: language and external objects related to actions, exchanges, and communication with a non-observable supernatural realm
Education	**Learning/intelligence**: language and external objects related to actions, exchanges, and communication regarding the acquisition and transmission of material and cultural knowledge
Science	**Applied knowledge/truth**: language and external objects related to actions, exchanges, and communication founded on standards for gaining and using verified knowledge about all dimensions of the social, biotic, and physio-chemical universes
Medicine	**Health**: language and external objects related to actions, exchanges, and communication rooted in the concern about the commitment to sustaining the normal functioning of the body and mind
Sport	**Competitiveness**: language and external objects related to actions, exchanges, and communication embedded in regulated conflicts that produce winners and losers based on respective efforts of teams and players
Art	**Beauty**: language and external objects related to actions, exchanges, and communication founded on standards for gaining and using knowledge about beauty, affect, and pleasure

Note: These and other generalized symbolic media are employed in discourse among actors, in articulating themes, and in developing ideologies about what should and ought to transpire in an institutional domain. They tend to circulate within a domain, but all of the symbolic media can circulate in other domains, although some media are more likely to do so than others

physical, temporal, social, and symbolic space. Third, as external referents or objects media allow us to recognize a very key aspect of culture: tangible things are as important as internalized values, embodied practices, or habituated norms because they are "out there" and can be touched, tasted, smelled, and seen. Humans are visual creatures and use objects to understand the universe. Culture externalized means culture that can be hoarded, pursued relentlessly, used deftly or clumsily, and sacralized into the totems Durkheim saw as so essential to group life.

11.3.3 Meso-Level Entrepreneurs

We are now in a position to return to the concept of entrepreneurship. Like most things in life, the macro and micro levels of social reality become realized in meso-level social units like groups, networks, and so forth. More specifically, it is at the meso-level within the ecological dynamics described above, that institutional change occurs. Some basic principles underscore this assertion. First, once autonomous, institutional spheres are subject to external and internal exigencies no different from any other group. While institutional spheres are by no means self-contained environments, the actors who derive the majority of their material and symbolic resources become subject to the same types of pressures associated with resource scarcity or challenges and threats to power and legitimacy. Entrepreneurs who carve out cores gain privilege and power and, like any interest group, work hard to protect and, in many cases, expand their influence over the institutional environment and across institutional boundaries (Abrutyn and Van Ness 2015). Second, while Weber's charismatic authority has been identified with individual traits, he (1968) was clear that the lasting consequences of an individual's impact on social structure and/or culture came not from the individual, but from the charismatic group charged with either propagating his ideas or succeeding him—see, for instance, Akhenaten's failed monotheistic revolution in the mid-second millennium BCE; institutional change, therefore, is driven by the routinization of charisma. Third, entrepreneurship does not come from nothing; it reflects relatively predictable patterns of ecological dynamics and how interests compete and conflict with each other based on positioning. Three particular sets of locations and entrepreneurs warrant our attention and deserve more systematic empirical elucidation.

11.3.3.1 Secondary Entrepreneurs

Weber's ideal type of bureaucracy rests on the tacit assumption of bounded rationality, stability, and taken for granted authority; characteristics reinforced by Michels' (1911 [1962]) "iron rule of oligarchy" and the tendency towards conservativism in bureaucracy and organization. Yet, contrary to these idyllic visions, history is littered with examples of "secondary" entrepreneurs, or actors close to the core—such as the district attorney's office in Fig. 11.1 above—whose primary function is to interact with non-core actors and core actors, facilitating the flow of resources both directions (Eisenstadt 1980). Thus, on the one hand these actors serve to support and reinforce the core and its entrepreneurs, yet on the other hand some fascinating institutional dynamics of contestation, conflict, and change are rooted in secondary elites.

Rueschemeyer (1986), for instance, cogently argued that most political change and instability came from secondary actors, as bureaucratic units do not always march in lockstep with their superiors; the latter of which come to depend on the former, and thus cede some power and authority. Moreover, secondary actors develop goals that transcend simple support: as a distinct corporate unit, they too become interested in survival as well as expansion of their influence. Hence, these ancillary goals are not always commensurate with efficiency or productivity. Furthermore, their unique position encourages the development of new worldviews, as well as positions them to resolve major or minor problems to further their interests (DiMaggio 1988), or because extant elites authorize them to resolve these problems and, therefore, increase their dependency on the secondary actors (Abrutyn 2014a).

11.3.3.2 Interstitial Liaisons

Arguably, the position with the greatest potential for future research is that of the *liaison*—see, for instance, lawyers and law schools in Figs. 11.1 and 11.2. In Luhmann's (2004) phenomenal work on the legal system, he argued that modern autonomous law resolved a key problem: by slowing down the adjudication of conflicts between parties, law used temporal differentiation to reduce the immediate passions on injustice and subject them to the rationalization found in procedural, formal justice. Reading this, I realized that lawyers were ideal types of liaisons. On the one hand, lawyers in autonomous legal spheres are professionalized and trained to be legal actors (Carlin 1980). As such, they "serve" the interest of the legal core in that they feel, think, and act in pursuit of *justice* and *conflict resolution* (Abrutyn 2009b). On the other hand, many lawyers serve the interests of non-legal actors, such as those who are either on retainer for particular religious or economic actors or, even more extreme, those who spend their careers serving a specific corporation (Dobbin and Sutton 1998). Hence, they are the actual collectives translating the problems and conflicts non-legal actors have into legal discourse in order to transform these religious or economic problems into legal problems that can be subjected to formal, procedural rationality and then they re-translate them into religious or economic language—that is, they explain the pragmatic impact judicial decisions have.

Liaisons, like secondary entrepreneurs, can become powerful forces of change or stasis. Because of their unique location, and ability to appeal to actors across varied institutional spheres, they can leverage their positions to innovate and carve out their own institutional space. Legal entrepreneurs during the Gregorian Reformation and leading up to the Protestant Reformation, played the Church and the various other classes (royal; aristocratic; urban; mercantile) against each other, and became an indispensable fulcrum with which these groups struggled against each other (Berman 1983). As such, they may be as responsible, if not more so, for the rise of the peculiar forms of western polity, religion, and economy that sociologists have spent so much time studying (Abrutyn 2009b, 2014b). Yet, they are also often stuck between two worlds, with little leverage, trying to protect their interests, and thus, acting conservatively. In Timmermans' (2006) ethnography of medical examiners, he brilliantly showed how the intersection of medicine (especially, the field deeply overlapping with science) and law constrained the decisions and thoughts of liaisons dealing with suspicious deaths.

11.3.3.3 Margins, Outsiders, and Radicalism

Though Eisenstadt (1984) rarely framed his thoughts on the Axial Age this way, he implied throughout his analysis that many of the religio-cultural entrepreneurs of the Axial Age emerged on the margins of existing cores (see also Humphreys 1975; Abrutyn 2014a, 2015a). In some cases, it was physical marginality, such as the Israelite prophets, priests, and scribes vis-à-vis the Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian empires they were subjected to. Here, transportation and communication technologies limited the literal reach of each empire, despite political entrepreneurial strategies meant to mitigate these limitations. On the margins, monitoring and sanctioning is costly, and very often is the reason kings and empires collapse. In these relatively autonomous spaces, creativity is both an intrinsic activity born of fewer constraints as well as driven by threats from the distant core to restrict innovation and impose reality from without. But, Eisenstadt also shows how actors like the Confucian literati and the Buddhist-Brahmanic heterodoxy in India reflected *cognitive* marginality. That is, distance wasn't so much physical, but was far more about groups seeing the core as "alien" to a new set of organizational, symbolic, and normative frames of reality. In the modern world economy, we see these same types of marginal entrepreneurs in the various forms of religious radicalism across regions and across religions (Almond et al. 2003). In this case, the core is the modern world-system and it is a relatively autonomous polity and economy imposing "universal" culture and exploitative structure on local cultures in ways

alien to traditional forms of kinship and religion. Hence, the dominant counter-ideologies, across cases, is a religio-kin traditionalism focused on particularism and fundamental values. Other examples of marginal actors can be found in Collins' (1981) geopolitical theory of "marcher" states or Chase-Dunn and Hall's (1997) similar idea of peripheral conquerors—both cases highlight the freedom to innovate militarily, organizationally, and symbolically in ways that make them swifter and stronger against city-states and empires that are too big to change rapidly.

11.4 Institutional Spheres in Four Dimensional Space

Besides further exploring and using entrepreneurs as means of introducing evolutionary accounts to historical methods, the cutting edge of institutional analysis finds itself in the four dimensional space—physical, temporal, social, and symbolic—that have become central to understanding how macro-level reality presents itself to people and affects their lives. Indeed, it is within each of these four dimensions that institutions make important cross-cutting linkages to other levels of analysis and substantive fields.

11.4.1 Physical Reality

Archaeologists have long recognized the importance of space and place, both in terms of size, scale, and differentiation; and place matters for political economy and, therefore, reverberates across other institutional spheres (Logan and Molotch 1988). Palaces were very often set upon a hill; built much larger and adorned with gaudier architecture than normal houses; surrounded by large courtyards to intensify the scale vis-à-vis the visitor; and, surrounded by walls that presented physical and cognitive barriers. Joyce (2000:71–2) remarks,

> By creating different kinds of space within sites, the continuing elaboration of monumental architecture served to create spatial arenas with restricted access, a constantly visible form of exclusivity [that had the double function of effecting] the patterns of habitual movement of all the inhabitants of the site, stratifying space and hence the people who were allowed access to different space, creating and marking centers and peripheries [and] permanently inscribed a small number of figures as actors linking the natural and supernatural world.

Physical space, then, becomes infused with meanings associated with patterns of behavior, role performances, temporal distinctions, activities and beliefs, and power/prestige differentials. To be sure, we often take for granted space, but it undoubtedly organizes reality for us, and often demarcates institutional space. This is especially clear when consider the physical construction of small towns where institutional space blurs together—e.g., city hall is next to the courthouse, the main church, and main street—and big cities where zones or districts emerge that differentiate the institutional activities (Abrutyn 2014b).

11.4.2 Temporal Reality

Sociologists have been slower to think about social structure in temporal terms, though clearly some have in abstract ways (Luhmann 2004). In short, temporality becomes important in three sorts of ways: (1) for compartmentalizing activities and orientations to reduce the complexity of role performances; (2) for sedimenting previous encounters into ritualized interactions that both reduce the need to produce culture completely anew and impose a sense of structure that guides interactions (Goffman 1967); and (3) as authoritative decisions made by one segment of institutional life reverberate and shape the reality of others. In each of these ways, time aids in the realization and manifestation of macro-level space. Sometimes it is in the cues that signal we are to reframe our identity performance to match the expectations of others, while other times it in the strain and conflicts that arise over the interstices of temporal institutional boundaries—e.g., when, not where, does the economic institution (e.g., work) end and the kinship institution begin? These are not individually based conflicts, though each person may experience them uniquely.

Rather, they become known sites of contestation, resistance, and struggle. Of the four dimensions, however, temporality demands the most future research.

11.4.3 Social Reality

Conversely, the institutional differentiation of social space has been well documented, ranging from research on role differentiation (Freidson 1962), group differentiation (Merton 1967), organizational differentiation (Blau 1970), and categoric differentiation (cf. Chap. 16 of this volume). Moreover, the division of labor is central to the classics. If there is any frontier here, is finding ways to empirically link the macro-level to the level of identity, self, and status. Social psychology assumes this link exists (; Fine 1991; Burke 2006), while some of my work on ecology explicitly highlights potential testable propositions that could bring the two into closer dialogue.

11.4.4 Symbolic Reality

One of the more exciting areas of institutional research is in the cultural and symbolic aspects of institutions that Parsons' left quite flat and unsatisfactory. The institutional logics perspective, for example, has worked to create ways of measuring specific logics, such as *love* and the way it shapes the practices and beliefs of real people (Friedland et al. 2014). The idea of a "logic," has its roots in the concept *generalized symbolic media*; a concept, unfortunately and unfairly, linked to Parsonsian (1963) functionalism. Its use, as noted above, predates Parsons in Simmel's (1907) work on *money* transforming the economy and economic relations and Mauss' (1967) and Levi-Strauss' (1969) respective work on non-economic media of exchange. As noted above (see Table 11.2), I have added numerous media to account for the number of autonomous institutional spheres. Like logics, media are vehicles of culture; unlike logics, media "circulate" along the many structural connections, are unevenly distributed like Bourdieuian capital, and are not merely "cognitive" things, but linguistic (themes; texts) (Luhmann 1995) *and* present in physical objects that act as referents of value (Abrutyn 2014b, 2015b). The latter is a major difference between the functionalist and the institutional logics program, and my own read on institutional spheres. In part, as value adheres in actual objects, the institution and commitment to the role-identity and status position one accesses the institution become powerful forces: objects are tangible, can be touched, hoarded, gazed longingly, monopolized, and provide sensual pleasure in their ownership and use. *Money* is not just a medium that regulates exchanges, then, it is also a language embedded in texts, themes of discourse, strategies mobilized in speech and performance *and* a set of objects—coins, cars, etc. It can be displayed or relegated to special places and rituals that reinforce its importance to the person's identity and, perhaps, global self. Same with *love*, *sacredness*, and *knowledge*—all of these media can be transformed into referents of value which are signs to the owner and the audience of the person's institutional self, their status, the expectations one might have of them, the obligations they have for themselves, and so forth.

11.5 Conclusion

The study of institutions has a long, rich history with sociology, and has become increasingly important to political science (Evans 1995) and economics (North 1990, 2005; Nee 2005). Yet, like culture (see Chap. 6 in this volume), it is one of the hardest concepts to nail down because it is used in so many different ways. While debatable, institutions were presented above as the major macro-level structural and cultural spheres of social reality such as polity, religion, or economy. They are constituted by meso-level social units like groups or organizations, micro-level units like encounters and identities, and cross-cut by global and situational stratification systems. While systems and subsystems, in the Parsonsian or Luhmannian traditions, are often overly abstract in their conceptualization, it was further

argued above that institutional spheres, as they grow autonomous, carve up physical, temporal, social, and symbolic reality in ways that *impose*, external to the person, institutional reality. While individuals may not be fully conscious of this, the fact that ordinary people reify these spheres by talking about "the law," or "religion," or "economy," as entities that act collectively and beyond their control indicates just how powerful a force these spheres have on people's everyday reality.

A vibrant, and more empirically grounded, macrosociology becomes possible when we start to reconceptualize institutional spheres as such. Logics and media are created by elites, perpetuated by "canonical" texts, experts, routines, and the differentiation of those four dimensions of space, and, they circulate along structural connections that are infused with meaning by the pursuit, acquisition, and use of these media in linguistic, ideational, and physical forms. Institutional analysis, as Weber recognized under a different terminology, also offers much for an historical comparative sociology, as we can examine the synchronic or diachronic variation of a sphere or set of spheres, their autonomy, and the consequences across time and space. Either way, taking institutional spheres serious in sociological theory and research is important if we are to create the most robust and comprehensive conceptualization of the social world possible.

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