Institutional Aesthetics: Creativity, Subjectification and Connection

Steve Taylor, Douglas Creed and Bryant Hudson

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Institutional Aesthetics:
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Abstract

As a way to resolve the paradox of embedded agency, the seeming impossibility that persons whose perspectives and behaviors are shaped by established cultural prescriptions can possibly change or create alternative societal arrangements, we offer institutional aesthetics and aesthetic codes as an essential complementary framework to the dominant institutionalist perspectives for understanding cultural embeddedness, subjectivity, and creativity. The personal aesthetic comprises several components: the person’s innate capacity to look at and engage with the world; an internalized knowledge of the culturally-specific aesthetic codes of the communities of which one is a part, which we refer to as institutional aesthetic codes; and an impetus to act in aesthetically affirmed ways as a way of sustaining belongingness in valued groups. Our personal aesthetic guides what we each pay attention to. Adding the concepts of institutional aesthetics codes and personal aesthetics to institutional theory points to the possibility of agentic semiautonomous opportunities for expression and de novo creativity; and foregrounds connection between people as a primary driver of persons’ participation in institutional processes, which suggests institutions don’t just change – they change in connective ways.
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Introduction

The question of institutional inhabitants’ role in institutional creation and change has vexed scholars for some time. Often framed as the paradox of embedded agency (e.g. Seo and Creed 2002), the central concern is the seeming impossibility that persons whose perspectives and behaviors are shaped by established cultural prescriptions can possibly change or create alternative societal arrangements. Cognitive constraints appear to be antithetical to creativity, change agency, and institutional entrepreneurship. While theory has been able to accommodate creativity in the form of recombining existing arrangements in new ways, de novo creativity – bringing something completely new into existence – still seems somehow outside the realm of theoretical possibility. One reason for this apparent impasse is that institutional theory offers a largely impoverished depiction of human beings, their passions and commitments, and their capacity for creativity. In this paper, we extend arguments that people are endowed with and compelled by more than cognitive constraints, such as logics and cultural scripts but also are animated by aesthetics. We argue that the concept of institutional aesthetics provides an essential complementary framework to existing institutional perspectives for understanding values and their connection to creativity, cultural embeddedness, institutional commitments, and subjectivity.
Accounting for internalized values is essential for understanding the motivation to create, reproduce, or change institutional arrangements, but according to Friedland (2013b), institutional theory has yet to adequately do so. In this paper, we develop his suggested corrective, which entails attending to subjectification and personal identification with institutional values by framing the concepts of an institutional aesthetic code and a personal aesthetic. We draw on Gagliardi’s (2006) definition of an institutional aesthetic code as a group’s culturally specific system of “correspondences” or linkages between values and beliefs, on the one hand, and patterns of images, expressions, and actions that materialize them, on the other. An institutional aesthetic code operates at the macro and intersubjective level, linking shared values to the expressions and enactments of those values. A personal aesthetic is a person’s distinct internalization of the many codes of the many groups to which one belongs. It operates intrasubjectively at the level of the person.

For Friedland, understanding the role of internalized values is so important that he argues that institutions are better understood using Weber’s notion of the value sphere. Here value spheres refer to domains of social life, or “life spheres,” each of which is governed by its own distinct coherence, value orientation, and laws – its own “value rationality,” which Friedland also describes evocatively as the “god” at the center of the value sphere or its “substance.” Indeed, it seems he uses value rationality, god and substance interchangeably to capture the governing values at the center of institutional spheres. In contrast to “instrumental rationalities,” which cognitively orient actors to observable external objects and to means/ends chains, a value rationality leads actors to be “passionately and expressively oriented to unobservable values they have internalized
and the unconditional requirements” of their beliefs (Friedland 2013a p. 16). Friedland couples the ideas of internalized values and beliefs here because in his view people enact institutional prescriptions as exercises of faith in the god at the center of the value sphere.

Substances, like gods, give value *ex nihilo* – a kind of civilizational gift-giving. They also give us to ourselves. … We know ourselves and each other through the particularity of our service to these gods. We are given ourselves through a call from elsewhere. Substances are immanentized through material practices. … value rationality [is] … in the conjunction of value, commitment, sign, and subjectivity. (Friedland 2013a p. 20)

If immanentizing or making manifest, through practices, the substance of an institutional value sphere requires achieving a conjunction of value, commitment, sign, and subjectivity then it requires much more than a schooled ability to enact institutional prescriptions.

We argue it requires an aesthetic capability for creativity that brings together a mix of sensory perception, evaluation, imagination, and execution. Further, at the level of the person, this mix is driven and constrained by a personal aesthetic, which we conceive of as an internal self regulatory system that shapes how one views and deliberates on the value of phenomena in one’s value spheres in ways that in turn shape one’s choices relative to how one participates in the institutional processes of a value sphere. The personal aesthetic manifests a fundamentally different mode of attention (which we discuss in more detail later) than analytic rationality. This different mode of attention
draws upon analytic knowing, but in support of the creative process rather than as part of a process for determining appropriate means to a known end.

Our theorizing builds on recent arguments that extend the inhabited institutions perspective by attending more fully to the doubly embedded character of institutional experience. By doubly embedded, we mean that the human beings – who are sometimes abstractly depicted in the literature as institutional inhabitants to emphasize their embeddedness in institutionalized systems of meanings and their reliance on institutionally prescribed ways of being – are better conceived of as persons whose actions are embedded not just in macro logics or systems of meanings, but also in systems of valued social bonds with histories of social interactions (Hallett & Ventresca 2006). It is these histories of social interaction that “give ‘contour’ to those logics, establish local meanings, and shape action” (W. E. D. Creed, et al. 2014).

In light of this double embeddedness, we adopt four assumptions in our theorizing. First, the contours of meaning that underpin human enactments, including material practices and acts of creativity, are based in social interactions which are themselves embedded in various types of social “connective tissue” (Hallett & Ventresca, 2006), including not only kinship relations and shared histories, but also shared institutional aesthetic codes. These aesthetic codes, which are a facet of a community’s institutional arrangements, shape how persons assess the world they encounter and what they value as beautiful, true, or worthy or as ugly, false, or contemptible.

Second, the “institutional inhabitants who engage in the symbolic interactions through which the contours of institutions are negotiated have not only shared cognitions about institutional prescriptions, but also strong emotional impetus to preserve valued
social bonds and their standing as valued persons within the communities constituted by those bonds” (W. E. D. Creed, et al. 2014: 294). Indeed, preserving valued social bonds is a fundamental aspect of human motivation (Scheff 2000). Persons preserve those bonds in part through enactments and symbolic expressions that resonate with the institutional aesthetic codes of their valued communities.

Third, institutionalization as a process actually relies on subjectification or the constitution of actors as subjects committed to the substance at the center of an institutional sphere, with its associated practices and beliefs. This means that institutionalization and subjectification are intertwined, even inseparable processes. It also means that a persons’ capacity for aesthetically resonant choices, actions and expressions, are both the product and the engine of these intertwined processes (Hasselbladh & Kalinikos, 2000; Cooper, Ezzamel & Willmott, 2008; Creed et al, 2014).

Fourth, modern complex societies are characterized by institutional pluralism (Dunn and Jones 2010; Kraatz and Block 2008; Seo and Creed 2002). Modern persons are members of multiple communities. Moreover, their secondary socialization into multiple, alternative communities (Berger and Luckmann 1967) means that they have knowledge of multiple institutional aesthetic codes. One important implication of this is that modern persons, even if well socialized into the norms of their primary communities, have no single institutional aesthetic code to turn to for more or less unambiguous guidance (Archer, 2012). In fact, personal aesthetics – those internal self-regulatory system that shape our perspectives, deliberates, and choices as to we participate our institutional value spheres – are complex amalgams of diverse institutional aesthetic codes.
Taken together, these four assumptions imply that the acquisition of a personal aesthetic is one aspect, perhaps even the critical aspect, of *subjectification* because it equips person with systematic *criteria* used in both intrasubjective and intersubjective *deliberation* that shape how they participate in institutional processes. A personal aesthetic informs assessments about what is valuable and beautiful or valueless and disgusting, which enactments are congruent with sustaining or enhancing standing in one’s communities or which puts one’s standing at risk.

Based on these assumptions, we adopt the image of the *conversation* to describe such deliberations. In terms of intrasubjective deliberations, a person’s personal aesthetic shapes and animates the internal conversation through which the person assesses the world and deliberates over values, choices and actions. In addition, the presence of many institutional aesthetic codes and the associated lack of unambiguous guidance make the personal aesthetic, the internal conversation, and the reflexivity they enable all the more salient in the person’s deliberation (Archer 2012). A person assesses the nature of reality, the salience of particular values, and the desirability of alternative actions through the lens of the personal aesthetic by way of the internal conversation.

By integrating the ideas of institutional aesthetic codes, personal aesthetics, subjectification, deliberation, and conversation, we contribute to emerging understandings of how, beyond shaping cognitions, institutions “more fundamentally … endow people with institutionally appropriate subjectivities and teach them to desire certain things” (Foster, et al. 2014 p. 1). Our theorizing is thus an integrated, cross-level response to Friedland’s call for attending to the internalization of values which enables us to explain the work of *de novo* creativity. Indeed, we see the internalization of multiple
institutional aesthetic codes as a critical facet of subjectification and the operation of the personal aesthetic in intrasubjective deliberations as fundamental to the capacity for institutional work (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006), particularly in the work of institutional creation and change.

In the following sections of the paper, we start with a more detailed discussion of creativity, first as it is understood in the institutional literature more broadly and then how the paradox of embedded agency and the problem of de novo creativity arises in traditional understandings of institutional theory. We follow this by contrasting how de novo creativity is understood as natural and unproblematic in theoretical accounts of creativity in arts practices. This leads us to the role of aesthetics and the differences in the types of attention that are driven by aesthetics and rational analytics. We then lay out the core constructs of institutional aesthetics and describe how these constructs interact in the process of de novo creativity. Finally we turn to the broader implications that institutional aesthetics have for subjectivity and connection, raising questions for further research along the way.

Institutions, creativity, and aesthetics

In this section, we consider how the institutional literature has dealt with creativity, particularly in light of the oft-invoked paradox of embedded agency, and the problems it poses for understanding de novo creativity. In the institutional literature there are two streams in particular that wrestle with the implications of embeddedness for creativity and change agency: institutional entrepreneurship (Battilana, et al. 2009;
MaGuire, et al. 2004), in which powerful actors are able to create new institutional forms, and institutional work (Lawrence and Suddaby 2006; Lawrence, et al. 2009; Zietsma and Lawrence 2010), in which the creation of new organizational forms rely on collective, embedded participation. Both of these streams link the creation of new institutional arrangements to the availability of a pluralistic resource base comprising, in effect, multiple, distinct pools of cultural materials, such as configurations of meanings, logics and practices. In both of these streams, creativity resides in the ability of change agents to transcend the boundaries between those resource pools or to combine elements of different institutional configurations in novel ways. Among the common images used to describe the actions of such agents are translation and bricolage.

The creativity inherent in translation and bricolage notwithstanding, institutional theory more generally has struggled to understand creativity, particularly de novo creativity. The focus of much of institutional theory has been on the socially constructed norms and rules by which people and organizations make sense of the world and take action. This is the stuff of embeddedness and it is commonly taken to mean that institutions not only constrain action and sense making, they channel and constitute them in particular ways (Friedland, 2002; Meyer and Rowan, 1977). In addition, while most institutional scholars recognize to some degree that the plasticity of institutionalizations and contestation over meanings provide some room for adaptability (de Rond and Lok, 2013), the theoretical emphasis has remained on the recombining and blending of elements of existing pluralistic (Kraatz and Block, 2008) institutional configurations. In other words, the processes remain closely akin to translation and bricolage. Indeed, the institutional entrepreneurship and the institutional work literatures each invoke the
embeddedness of would be change agents in pre-existing institutionalized configurations. Each literature holds that even while social actors are able to exercise a certain degree of creativity, they are necessarily constrained by their embeddedness in particular organizational spheres and their access to diverse cultural resources. To successfully translate between institutional spheres or to practice bricolage with the elements of existing institutional configuration, such actors must have a “foot in both camps.”

None of these institutional explanations account for creativity as a fundamental part of the human condition. Embeddedness arguments gets it partly right; some, perhaps most, forms of creative expression and novel action “are ignored and whither, or are actively suppressed” (Jones and Massa, 2013:1100), especially when they pose a threat to existing institutionalizations. Some creative, novel action does actually happen and it goes beyond the common foci of translation, bricolage, or “diffusion, where social actors imitate prestigious others and conform to prevalent practices (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; see Mizruchi & Fein, 1999; Heugens & Lander, 2009 for reviews)” (2013: 1100, citations in the original).

Creativity more broadly

In his comprehensive summary of creativity research across the disciplines, Sawyer (2012) divides research on creativity into individualist approaches and sociocultural approaches. In the individualist approach, creativity is defined as “a new mental combination that is expressed in the world” (2012:7). In this definition we see the same problem with treating de novo creativity that exists in institutional theory – if
creativity is defined as new mental combinations, it implies that the things being combined already exist and *de novo* creativity is impossible. In the sociocultural approach, the definition of creativity is “the generation of a product that is judged to be novel and also to be appropriate, useful, or valuable by a suitably knowledgeable social group” (p. 8). While this definition avoids the issues of antecedent materials and recombination that have limited institutionalists’ ability to address *de novo* creativity, it invokes clearly institutionalist notions of appropriateness and value. Thus, while creativity research in organizational studies tends to take the sociocultural approach, typically defining creativity as “something that is both novel and in some sense valuable” (Ford 1996: 1114), it is a definition that institutional theorists could well embrace because it frames creativity as driven and constrained by a knowledgeable judgments of novelty and appropriateness.

In contrast to the sociological approach, we contend that creativity actually stems from a fundamentally different mode of attention than that which underpins judgments of usefulness and appropriateness. It stems from an aesthetic mode of attention. When artists think or talk about creativity, they don’t often focus on the spark, the idea, or even the novelty of the outcome. Instead artists commonly focus on the process itself (e.g. Ibbotson 2008; Taylor 2012b; Tharp 2003). To the degree that they talk about creativity, they conceive of it as coming from dedication, hard work, and deep engagement with their craft. In short, the focus is on Apollonian (in contrast to Dionysian) creativity (Lehrer 2012; Nietzsche 1872/1993). Nietzsche applied the Dionysian/Apollonian dichotomy to creativity to distinguish between the idea of creativity from sudden inspiration (Dionysian) and the creativity that comes out of craft mastery and years of
practice (Apollonian). As Edison is said to have described genius – it is ninety-nine percent perspiration and one percent inspiration. Or as one writer describes it:

… the most important thing about art is to work. Nothing else matters except sitting down every day and trying. …

Because when we sit down day after day and keep grinding, something mysterious starts to happen. … When we sit down each day and do our work, power concentrates around us. The Muse takes note of our dedication. She approves. We have earned favor in her sight. When we sit down and work, we become like a magnetized rod that attracts iron filings. Ideas come. Insights accrete. (Pressfield 2002 p. 108)

With its image of earning the Muse’s favor, this passage could make creativity seem the result of a magical visitation, but for its emphasis on work. In short, for the artist, creativity is not about an idea that is novel and useful; instead creativity stems from deep engagement in a process. Such engagement is driven by a fundamentally different way of paying attention to the world. It is concentrated and disciplined – and as the evocative image of a magnetized rod attracting iron filings suggests – characterized by a hungry receptivity that we contend is shaped by the artist’s personal aesthetic. The outcomes are often something new that did not previously exist in the world.

To better understand that process, we now turn to aesthetics and how aesthetics are based in a sensory knowing that differs from analytic rationality. In short, analytic rationality and sensory knowing result in two very different ways of paying attention to and acting in the world. These differences have important implications for how people participate in institutional processes.

*Aesthetics*
The dominant perspectives on the embedded nature of institutional inhabitants has had little if anything to say about the possibility that people encounter and assess the world – be it the natural world or the world of value spheres – sensually, rather than merely cognitively. Gagliardi would attribute this to the oppositional nature of Newtonian science that privileges the study of what is ostensibly “objective, universal, and subject to the language of mathematics,” while relegating to a lesser status knowledge that is “the object of subjective experiences, sensory, or inexact” (2006:704). In Gagliardi’s view, this privileging of the Newtonian view divided cognition from contemplation and imagination.

With the advent of modernity these … distinctions hardened. New hierarchies took unequivocal shape among the values referred to by such polarities. Work and production become more important than leisure and play, activity over contemplation, utility rather than beauty. Above all … logico-scientific (objective) knowledge established itself definitively as a superior form of knowledge over aesthetic-intuitive (subjective) knowledge. The aesthetic was demoted to the ‘secondary sphere of consumption, of spare time, of the useless’ (Carmagnola, 1994:129, parentheses in the original).

Most organizational theories are unfortunately intellectual legatees of this privileging of logico-scientific knowledge. Consequently, in the absence of an aesthetic capacity for bridging these oppositions, many organizational theories are “impoverished artifacts” of this intellectual division (Kuhn, 1996, cited in Gagliardi, 2006:705)

Gagliardi’s concern resonates with Friedland’s (2013) critique that by omitting the notion of internalized value, the dominant perspectives in institutional theory offer no way to understand the human motivation to create. While the effects of emotion and affect on institutional inhabitants have begun to draw notice (Friedland, et al. 2014; Haack, et al. 2014; Voronov 2014), institutional scholars have yet to expressly explore
institutional inhabitants’ feelings, tastes, and appreciations – that is, their aesthetic resonances and sensibilities.

Efforts to assert the importance of aesthetic ways of knowing go back to the mid-eighteenth century. In response to the Cartesian mind/body duality and its focus on logic as the science of reason, Baumgarten (1750/1936) argued for a science of sensible cognition, which he called *Aesthetics*. He argued that our immediate felt sense of the world – a direct sensory knowing – was important and worthy of study alongside rational cognition. More than a century later, Nietzsche declared that not only was this sensory knowing important, but it was temporally prior to and thus the foundation for rational cognitions (Welsch 1997). This has been born out by modern neuroscience (Damasio 1994; LeDoux 1996) and brought into organizational scholarship (Gagliardi 1990, 1996; Strati 1992, 1999; Taylor and Hansen 2005). In short, analytical rationality and aesthetics result in two very different ways of paying attention to the world and acting in the world. Thus, when we argue for an aesthetic institutional inhabitant rather than a primarily and overly cognitive one, we are arguing that action is based most immediately in sensory knowing (Strati 2007) rather than primarily on rational cognitions.

Our theorization of institutional aesthetics starts with a set of constructs that break down how aesthetics enable and constrain persons differently than the prescriptions and cognitions that dominate conventional institutional arguments. This yields a fuller, richer picture of persons within institutions.

**Key constructs in institutional aesthetics**
We now turn to defining the key constructs for our conceptualization of creativity based in institutional aesthetics. We start with *institutional aesthetic codes*, then move to how multiple institutional aesthetic codes become intertwined in *personal aesthetics*. We next discuss how an aesthetic knowledge of and interaction with the world requires different *modes of attention* than those needed for a rational/analytic knowledge and interaction with the world. An aesthetic mode of attention feeds and is fed by an *internal conversation*. There are different *inner voices* within that internal conversation such as the critic and the muse. These voices play different roles in *rehearsal and performance spaces*. We discuss each of these below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Aesthetic Codes      | • a community’s specific symbol system for externalizing typifications, constructing reality, and organizing meanings  
                       | • a system of “correspondences” links a community’s values and beliefs to appropriate symbolic representations and actions |
| Personal Aesthetic   | • the person’s distinct internalization of the institutional aesthetic codes of the communities of which he or she is a member.  
                       | • the person’s lens or socially embedded mode for seeing and creating  
                       | It comprises several components:  
                       | • the person’s innate capacity to look at and engage with the world;  
                       | • an internalized knowledge of the culturally-specific aesthetic codes of the communities of which one is a part (institutional aesthetic codes  
<pre><code>                   | • an impetus to act in aesthetically resonant and affirmed ways as a way of sustaining belongingness in valued groups |
</code></pre>
<p>| Modes of Attention   | Aesthetic attention is a broad, unfocused sort of attention,               |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Rational/logic versus Aesthetic)</th>
<th>Reason-based attention is a form of narrow, focused attention.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internal Conversation</td>
<td>the way persons talk to themselves as they deliberate their goals, values, understandings, and the very criteria they employ to evaluate them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inner Voices: Critics and Muses</td>
<td>The inner voices are the internal community of interlocutors that engage in our internal discussions. Of particular importance are the inner critics and the inner muses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The inner critics are disciplining voice in the internal conversation that expresses limits and constrains our thinking within existing norms and models of the world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The inner muses are those voices that imagine what might be possible and what we aspire to for our world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rehearsal space/performance space</td>
<td>rehearsal space is where persons engage in an aesthetic mode of attention and silence or ignore the disciplining voices of the logics they have internalized</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 – Institutional Aesthetics Constructs

_Aesthetic codes_

The term “aesthetic” gets used in a variety of ways, all of which have a family resemblance. For example “aesthetic” can be used to mean tasteful, related to form, subjective, beautiful, cosmetic, poetic, or according to aesthetic criteria, all of which harken back to an idea of knowing that is grounded in sensory experience (Welsch 1997).

Every culture and community, regardless of their size, scale, and type, has an aesthetic code, a system of “correspondences” that links their values and beliefs, on the one hand, to appropriate symbolic representations and actions, on the other (Gagliardi 2006; Meyer, et al. 2013). By institutional aesthetic code, following Meyer et al (2013), we mean a community’s specific symbol system for externalizing typifications,
constructing reality, and organizing meanings. Drawing on Gagliardi (2006), Meyer and her colleagues view institutional aesthetic codes as structurally linking an institutional sphere’s values and beliefs with culturally valued images and symbolic constructions.

We conceive of aesthetics, then, as a type of knowledge that is based in sensual experience of the world, but made sense of in terms of culturally embedded aesthetic codes that shape persons’ modes of seeing and representing in ways that underpin assessments of value and choices of action. In this sense, a community’s or culture’s aesthetic code is a form of connective tissue and aesthetic experiences and their associated actions and expressions are forms of connection. Taylor and Hanson (2005:1215) trace the precedents for this linking aesthetics and connection in this way.

Bateson (1979) suggested that by aesthetic he meant experience that resonated with the pattern that connects mind and nature. Ramirez (1991) developed this idea in terms of systems and suggested that aesthetics were about the ‘belonging to’ aspect of a system (as opposed to the ‘separate from’ aspect of being in a system). Sandelands (1998) argues that humans are fundamentally both part of a group and individuals and that artistic forms are how humans express the feelings of being part of a social group.

In other words, our personal aesthetic experiences, as informed by a community’s shared institutional aesthetic code, connect us, one to another. In addition, a community’s institutional aesthetic code defines how we make sense of our connectedness. Such an aesthetically rooted understanding of connectedness sits in contrast to rational analytical understandings, which are implicitly based in our experience of self as separate from others.
**Personal aesthetic**

In contrast, a personal aesthetic is the person’s distinct internalization of the institutional aesthetic codes of the communities (plural) of which he or she is a member. It is a product of a personal biography of intersubjective encounters with other members of those communities. Briefly, we see the personal aesthetic as comprising several components, both innate and learned: the person’s innate capacity to look at and engage with the world; an internalized knowledge of the culturally-specific aesthetic codes of the communities of which one is a part, which we refer to as institutional aesthetic codes; and an impetus to act in aesthetically resonant and affirmed ways as a way of sustaining belongingness in valued groups.

The personal aesthetic becomes both the lens through which the person views the world and the person’s socially embedded mode for seeing and creating (Meyer, et al. 2013). The personal aesthetic links the values and beliefs of the value spheres one inhabits and one’s expressions and symbolic representations. It serves as the basis for personal judgment, determining whether one finds something beautiful or ugly, sublime, or grotesque, and so on (Strati 1992). As a part of a person’s subjectivity, a personal aesthetic comprises the criteria by which we react to our immediate sensory perception with either pleasure or displeasure (Nuzzo 2006), with positive or negative affect. In contrast, the use of rational cognition is based on an external set of organizing principles or rules that shape assessments of appropriateness and validity.

The personal aesthetic emerges through “the writing of the aesthetic code into the eye” in a way that “aesthetizes” institutional arrangements, such that the person is
furnished with “schemata of perception and taste, models of vision, ‘lenses’ through which to look at reality” (Gagliardi 2006:711). For persons furnished with a personal aesthetic the world becomes meaningful in an embodied, resonant, and connected way or to borrow Gagliardi’s metaphor, “land becomes landscape,” moving from abstract space to inhabited place. The personal aesthetic also animates the person’s internal conversations – the patterns of self-talk that enable persons to deliberate over their perceptions, goals, values, and understandings and to consider and assess prospectively possible courses of action and their normative or value implications (Archer 2012). Such internal conversations are not merely about appropriateness and instrumentality, but also about the interactions among aesthetic values that the person holds, such as truth, beauty, and goodness or their opposites.

Both institutional aesthetic codes and personal aesthetics have many aesthetic categories; alongside a sense of beauty or the sublime, there is a sense of ugliness and the grotesque, a sense of the virtuous or praiseworthy, and a sense of the repugnant and shameful. With this spectrum of aesthetic categories in mind, we propose that Creed et al.’s (2014) depiction of the a person’s sense of shame may provide some guidance for understanding the nature of the personal aesthetics that we are each equipped with. First, a personal aesthetic, like a person’s sense of shame, is the sedimented product of a personal history of intersubjective encounters with the world that unfold within systems of valued social relations. Like the sense of shame, the personal aesthetic has an inherent and learned dimensions, including the innate capacity for wonder at the world and the acquired knowledge of what triggers disgust or exhilaration among members of our valued communities, the building blocks of the community’s aesthetic code.
Consequently, the personal aesthetic, like the personal sense of shame, provides persons with a framework for self-regulation that enable them to do the things that elicit aesthetic pleasure on the part of valued others rather than the opposite. The personal aesthetic is therefore implicated in both a person’s self-presentation in the intersubjective processes that underpin institutional arrangements and in how they choose to live in accord with a culture’s values and sensibilities.

In this way, our personal aesthetics become a powerful feature of the self-regulation that is essential to our preserving our valued social bonds. Indeed, in light of the ways the sense of shame offers a model for framing an understanding of the structure and role of the personal aesthetic, it may even be more proper to say that the sense of shame is actually a component of a larger system of self-regulation, the personal aesthetic. In this way of thinking, the shameful is one aesthetic category out of the many that comprise an aesthetic code.

Modes of attention (rational/logic versus aesthetic)

It is tempting to think of institutional aesthetic codes and the personal aesthetic as being the same as analytical rationality and institutional prescriptions in how they guide individual’s thinking and constrain action. They operate differently, however, and as noted earlier, the most important difference between the two is that they entail very different ways of paying attention to the world and result in different ways of acting in the world.
McGilchrist (2009) argues that we have two distinct ways of paying attention to the world. The first is a broad, unfocused sort of attention, without pre-conceived notions, which we argue is more likely to be governed by aesthetic codes than by analytical rationality. Analytical rationality entails a narrower, focused attention, which is more likely governed by intendedly instrumental reasoning and (retrospective) sensemaking. The purposes of these two modes are different – analytical rationality’s purpose is to manipulate the world for our own benefits and uses, while the aesthetic’s purpose is to connect and relate to that world.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Analytical</th>
<th>Aesthetic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attention:</td>
<td>Narrow, focused</td>
<td>Broad, unfocused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose:</td>
<td>Manipulate the world for our own uses</td>
<td>Connect with the world in order to make meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation:</td>
<td>Orients us to means/ends chains</td>
<td>Orients us to values and meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Form of Expression:</td>
<td>Uses Discursive/Logical Language</td>
<td>Uses Presentational/Artistic Forms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach:</td>
<td>Linear/Sequential</td>
<td>Wholistic/Parallel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grounding:</td>
<td>Works from existing Schema / Frames</td>
<td>Works from Sensory Perception</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 – Analytical versus Aesthetic Modes

Gagliardi (2006) offers a catalogue of ways scholars have conceived of these two modes of thinking, which we summarize in table 2. The analytical mode is intendedly
rational, calculative, and reason-based while the aesthetic mode may deal with the ineffable. In terms of language, the analytical mode relies on discursive language that enables us to describe what we know in a linear fashion, while the aesthetic mode uses presentational language to acquaint us with what is to be known in a simultaneous, ambiguous, or even contradictory fashion (Langer 1942, 1974). The analytical mode operates through recognition or the interpretation of objects through the use of existing schema while the aesthetic mode operates through the perception of the objects (Dewey 1958) in ways that let “its qualities modify previously formed mental schema and habits” (Gagliardi 2006:713). Gagliardi concludes from this mix of conceptualizations that the aesthetic mode is central to learning. We argue here that it is central to creativity as well.

In terms of creativity, the important advantage of the aesthetic mode is its relative openings whereas the analytical mode is bounded and self-sealing. In the analytical mode, cognitive schema or a cognitive map determines what data or evidence to pay attention to; it prescribes analytically manipulating that data and takes the result as truth/reality going forward (Ocasio 1997). Data that doesn’t fit within the cognitive map is ignored or not even seen and registered. There is little to no room for de novo creativity or indeed much in the way of individual subjectivity. In contrast, in lieu of a cognitive map, the aesthetic provides a “sensory map” (Gagliardi 1990) for paying attention to stimuli, data, and our own aesthetic sensibilities (complete with their inherent subjectivity), exploring what we perceive, and making sense of it.

Gagliardi describes this as the capacity for our attention to oscillate between two dimensions of experience: between perception – “the cognitive dimension of sensible experience” - and “its emotional dimension – assessment of the sensible on a scale
ranging from aversion to desire, up to the highest forms of desire and pleasure.” (2006: 703) In this way, the aesthetic mode of attention is guided by aesthetics, perception, and emotion in much the same way that the analytical mode of attention is guided by cognitive schema and reasoning, but the way each mode guides us to interact with the evidence of our senses is very different.

We are very familiar with the form of thinking/reasoning associated with the analytical; it is at the heart of our training as academics and our scholarly scientific work. So let us look at how the aesthetic mode and its associated patterns of thinking work. The first thing to consider is the way in which our personal aesthetic – comprised of our innate capacity to look at and engage with the world, our internalized knowledge of our communities institutionalized aesthetic codes, and our impetus to act in aesthetically resonant ways – guides what we pay attention to. The greater openness of the aesthetic mode means that it does not guide us to select some data and ignore the rest, but rather to stay with our senses (Springborg 2010, 2012) which brings our whole body into the process. Coupled with staying with your senses is a particular form of openness – not knowing (Berthoin Antal 2013) – that is, suspending the closure of logical thinking in what English romantic poet John Keats (1970) referred to as “negative capability.”

Writing in the early 19th century, Keats offered several definitions of negative capability: “the ability to contemplate the world without the desire to try and reconcile contradictory aspects or fit it into closed and rational systems;” or, writing of Shakespeare’s particular creative gifts, the capacity to be “in uncertainties. Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason” (Keats, accessed at [http://www.keatsian.co.uk/negative-capability.php](http://www.keatsian.co.uk/negative-capability.php), May 9, 2015). Philosopher Roberto Mangabeira Unger (2007:135) links
negative capabilities to the mind’s “power to turn against itself, testing, denying, subverting, escaping, and transforming the presuppositions on which it has operated and the routines by which it operates.” Unger sees negative capability as the essence of who we are, arguing that without it our mental lives would be consumed with “‘zombie’ activities and we would cease to be ourselves” (2007:135). The subversive nature of negative capability is antithetical to the notions of institutional determinism that underpin the alleged paradox of embedded agency.

Of course, simply paying attention to our world, free of any preconceptions or frameworks to guide that attention, is for all practical intents and purposes ontologically impossible. As a starting point we necessarily draw upon our personal aesthetic to guide and mediate our perception. For example, consider how we encounter a new color: one starts with a question, given the number of existing colors I know, what color is that? But the more aesthetic attention one engages, the more his or her aesthetic develops. As the organizational scholar and artist Mary Jo Hatch says, “The more I paint, the more colors I see” (quoted in Taylor 2012b p. 7). With each sip, the experienced wine connoisseur tastes more distinct flavors than the novice. And as those tastes develop, as we see more colors, our personal aesthetic evolves. We develop new ways to talk about these new colors, new ways to name them, and most importantly, new ways deploy them. Our new ways to name and deploy them, based in our own subjective experience, is fundamental to the processes of de novo creativity.

In this light, it is not surprising that institutional theory has difficulty accounting for creativity because institutional theory has theorized persons as being dominated by the analytical mode of attention and as being without negative capability. However,
normal humans routinely use both modes of attention. In fact, at an individual level, extreme over use of the analytical mode suggests a pathology that is associated with a lack of social intelligence typical of the Autism Spectrum (McGilchrist 2009). Arguably, institutional perspectives that implicate disproportionately the analytical mode in models of agency have in effect unwittingly theorized all institutional inhabitants as falling along the Autism Spectrum. Adding institutional aesthetic codes and personalized aesthetics alongside institutionally determined modes of analytic reasoning and sensemaking facilitates not only an awareness of the normal aesthetic processes that all normal humans routinely engage in, it also adds to our understanding of how we navigate the social and institutional world through the mixed use of analytical and aesthetic modes of attending and thinking.

We suspect institutional theorists have omitted the aesthetic mode and institutional aesthetic codes for several reasons. First, the analytical mode dominates so many aspects of our modern world (McGilchrist 2009), in effect, privileged over the aesthetic mode as ostensibly more objective and rational as opposed to subjective and emotional. In addition, most people are not artists or connoisseurs, and even artists and connoisseurs, like all people, use both modes of thought. They are often more animated by their sensibilities and personal aesthetic in particular domains while more subject to the constraints of institutional prescriptions in other domains. Second, creative processes have institutional dimensions that may mask to a degree their aesthetic components. For example, creativity is not as simple as solo artists creating something new based on an autonomous personal aesthetic. As internalizations of institutional aesthetic codes, personal aesthetics are not disembedded and autonomous. In addition, the recognition of
creativity entails institutional processes. For creative work to become recognized and
taken-up there is a complex interaction with gate-keepers, audiences, and others,
including those who claim the role of arbiters (Becker 1982). This interaction, a form of
intersubjective construction that determines what is accepted by the world as new art and
what is not, is a form of institutionalization. The process through which something new,
an act of creation such as a work of art, is taken up is guided by both the subjective
personal aesthetics of the interactants and the institutional aesthetic codes that they share.

*Internal conversations as a mechanism of creativity*

This idea of socially constructed recognition, of how an act of *de novo* creativity,
such as a work of art, is taken up, may seem congruent with conventional notions of
levels of analysis and structuration. For example, in depictions of institutionalization that
rely on structuration processes, macro level systems of rules and meanings contextualize
and constrain micro level action formation (often framed as compliant enactment of
institutional prescriptions). Micro level enactments in turn ramify upward to reproduce
the macro structure (with the meso level, that is, the social or interaction level, essentially
omitted or untheorized) (Barley and Tolbert 1997; Weber and Glynn 2006). However, we
would argue that the conventional notion of levels of analysis is inadequate to
understanding the person’s engagement with the world, particularly when we consider the
difference between the analytical mode (reason-based, rule-following) and the aesthetic
mode, the interplay between these modes, and the socially connective nature of the
institutional aesthetic code. Engaging the institutional values spheres of our world is not
just an intersubjective process of social construction – involving semi-autonomous beings, embedded solely in a system of institutional prescriptions – who interact in a way that leads to the reproduction of institutional arrangements. Our engagement with the institutional values spheres of our world is, as noted earlier, doubly embedded, meaning that it is also embedded in valued systems of social bonds.

A renewed attention to the double embeddedness of symbolic interactions in systems of meaning and in systems of valued social bonds should not now blind us to the ways our engagement is also *intrasubjective*. It also involves an internal conversation that is the foundation for the reflexivity that underpins the human capacity to create new forms of social arrangements and ways of being (Archer 2012).

This reflexivity is commonly invoked but undertheorized in depictions of embedded agency in the institutional literature. So here we expand on our discussion of the internal conversation. Sayer (2011), drawing on Archer (2003, 2007) and Taylor (1989), positions the internal conversation as the foundation of a person’s dialogical construction of self-hood and of our capacity for evaluation, reasoning, and caring about people, things, and social arrangements. Here, internal conversation refers to the way persons talk to themselves as they deliberate their goals, values, understandings, and the very criteria they employ to evaluate them. In institutional theory, reflexivity has been invoked to explaining how persons are able to gain a critical stance on institutional constraints. Sayer decries deterministic accounts that minimize the capacity of human reflexivity to examine and reject institutional prescriptions: “ordinary people become atheists by deliberating on the religious discourses that unsuccessfully attempt to colonize
their thoughts; workers sometimes become concerned about how managerialism is affecting how they understand themselves” (2011:117).

The ubiquitous internal conversation is the primary mechanism of human reflexivity and the principal mechanism through which humans engage the world and the institutional value spheres they inhabit. They are also fundamental to acts of creativity. Humans have within themselves “irrepressible resources of transgression and transcendence” (Unger 2007:38) because of the nature of these internal conversations. Even though these conversations employ received cultural resources, how these conversations actually unfold reflects the interplay of several features: first, the particularity of our personal embodiment or biology, our personal history or biography, and our socio-cultural location and various socializations (Berger and Luckmann 1967); second, the contingent, fragmented, partial, overlapping, and hierarchical nature of the institutional arrangements that do shape us; and third, the infinite, recursive nature of language (Unger 2007). Language allows for extensive (if constrained ) recombinations of words. Internal conversations make use of these extensive recombinations in the particulars of form and content, even as they bear similarities in grammar, syntax, and vocabulary. This means, according to Unger, that we can be capable both of innovation within our social contexts or institutional value spheres and of innovation in the nature of our relationships to those spheres. That is, we are capable of action both within and about our institutional arrangements. We are not doomed to the, as Unger colorfully puts it, “narcoleptic compulsion” of remaining within taken-for-granted arrangements and beliefs (2007:58).
That the internal conversation is intrasubjective does that mean it is any less embedded in valued social bonds than is intersubjective processes of social construction. We conceive of the internal conversation as unfolding among an internal community of interlocutors – in effect, comprising the many selves of the self and the avatars of important others from our personal history of connection and relationships. These internal interlocutors can engage in an infinite number of encounters, exchanges, and deliberations.

This conceptualization of the internal conversation resonates in a surprising way with Friedland’s root image of the institutional inhabitants as servants of the gods of their value spheres. Across the spectrum of human religions, one of the most widespread, and perhaps even universal, understandings of the person is as a microcosm of his or her communities and of the larger world (Smith, 2004). In this view, the person is an arena in which all things can be found and all processes of creation and disintegration unfold. If, as Friedland asserts, at the center of the value sphere is a god and each person is a microcosm, then within and among each of the sphere’s inhabitants are saints and sinners, disciples and apostates, orthodox priests and raging prophets – in short, a community of persons with diverse and potentially competing stances vis-à-vis the substance at the center of the sphere. They are all simultaneously engaged in intrasubjective internal conversations as well as intersubjective processes of social construction. Bringing this highflying religious imagery somewhat back down to the institutional ground, it follows that every inhabitant of an institutional sphere has within him or herself, institutional enforcers and guardians (gatekeepers, arbiters, and critics) and institutional challengers (corrupters, muses, and, as Walt Whitman might say,
discorrupters). The image of microcosm is quintessentially social, bespeaking an internal conversation involving an infinite number of encounters, exchanges, and deliberations among an internal community. In this way, the internal conversation connects us to ourselves and to others.

Such a conception of the internal conversations suggests that “action formation” (e.g., Weber & Glynn, 2006) at the micro level does not take the form of persons’ compliance with taken for granted prescriptions emanating from a higher level of analysis. Instead, action formation is a product of nested, almost fractal conversations. Creative acts and a community’s taking up of such creative act or their institutionalization, are the outcomes of a mix of internal intrasubjective and intersubjective deliberations of the many persons inhabiting an institutional value sphere. But at the center, shaping how one participates in institutional processes, is the internal conversation unfolding in a person’s mind. The more doctrinaire the internal conversation, the more predictable and conventional the resulting enactments. The more transgressive and transcendent the conversation, the greater its creative potential. De novo creativity requires that the internal conversation has diverse interlocutors, the disciplined and the transgressive and transcendent.

*Inner voices: critics and muses*

Within the internal conversation, many of the voices express limits and constrain our thinking within existing norms and models of the world. These are the voices that tell us what is acceptable and what is not, what is possible and warn of what is taboo, what
dare not be thought, let alone spoken (Douglas 2002), Hudson & Okhuysen, 2015). We call the disciplining voices inner critics.

MacKinzie (1996) famously tells the story of asking children in the first grade if they are an artist and all of them raise their hand, yes. He asks the same question of second graders and then third graders and so on and each year fewer and fewer children raise their hand. The children were not wrong. The educational process, MacKinzie claims, is slowly but surely disciplining them and they are developing the internal voices that prevent creativity, that stop them from being artists.

Learning how to remain an artist, to be creative, includes learning to recognize and ignore some of the voices in your head (Bryan, et al. 1998; Cameron and Bryan 1992), to silence your “inner critic” (Taylor 2012a) while attending to the inner muses, those voices that creatively engage with what might be and what we aspire to for our world. In a very real sense this requires turning your aesthetic sensibilities inward to perceive the different voices, to attend to the muses, to hear the conversation that is being silenced by the censor or inner critic. How our internal conversations unfold matters for creativity.

Of course, artists don’t ignore their inner critics everywhere or at all times in their life; but they have times and places where they do so. For example actors learn to “turn off their censors” when they are rehearsing and improvising (Johnstone 1979; Stanislavski 1936). This shifts them into more of an aesthetic mode in which they stay with their senses and respond in undisciplined ways to each other. This undisciplined response is at the heart of creativity; it is the source of newness. That is not to say that all judgment goes out the window, but rather that judgment moves from a naysaying
intrasubjective mode prior to acting, that might nip fruitful ideas in the bud, to an evaluative intersubjective mode that is engaged after acting. The internal critics are silenced temporarily in part by promising them the chance to say their piece later on in the process.

Rehearsal space/performance space

After a rehearsal or performance, actors will talk about what worked and what didn’t. Painters will critically evaluate their work, but this happens after a work takes shape, after they create rather than before. We think of these times suspended judgment and experimentation as a sort of rehearsal space, where the inner critic is turned off, and actors are free to find and enact a dramatic authenticity and authority, to listen to their internal muses, that they then can carry back to the performance space. There the inner critics are again turned on and the actors pay attention to those previously silenced voices in their head. But that fresh dramatic authority has gained a place now in the internal conversation such it now has a wider range of voices and larger repertoire of creative expression and actions. Through this process, the bounds of possible performance have been expanded and changed.

These ideas, first, of a rehearsal or studio space where persons engage in an aesthetic mode of attention and silence or ignore the disciplining voices they have internalized, and second, of studio or rehearsal spaces that stand in contrast to the performance spaces, are critical to our conception of how institutional aesthetics drive creativity. An institutional aesthetic may constrain behavior every bit as much a set of
institutional prescriptions can in an institutional performance space, but within these studio or rehearsal spaces, the personal aesthetic functions in an enabling way. Similarly, the internal conversation has rehearsal and performance modes such that the conversation metaphorically can range from improvisational poetry jam to moralizing sermon, to fanatical diatribe.

Many common creativity techniques, such as brainstorming can be understood as attempting to create a rehearsal space for participants. Common brainstorming ground rules such as “they are no dumb ideas” and “don’t criticize other people’s ideas” are clearly efforts to silence internal critics. Of course, these rules are often difficult to follow as the inner critics are not so easily silenced, and the voices of inner muses have grown faint from years of being drowned out by the critics.

**Institutional aesthetics in the creative process**

With these constructs in mind, we now return to the creative process in institutionalized contexts to explicate *de novo* creativity. As a starting point and in the spirit of Apollonian creativity, we focus on the process, not the creative output or, by reduction, the creative idea. In brief then, an institutional aesthetics perspective is based on the idea that each person has a personal aesthetic. These personal aesthetics operate through our internal conversations, which unfold among the interlocutors we carry within us -- the many selves of the self, avatars of important others, critics and muses. In turn this microcosmic community of interlocutors is the product of our unique biographies and
the internalization of the institutionalized aesthetic codes of the multiple communities of which we are a part.

_De novo_ creativity arises when individuals allow the muses that animate an aesthetic mode of thought to dominate their internal conversation, suspending the judgment and discipline of the inner critic or other voices that amplify the analytical mode. These acts of _de novo_ creativity become social objects that are either taken up, or not, through a process of intersubjective engagement that parallels such internal conversations.

The inability of the institutional perspective to account for _de novo_ creativity motivated our initial exploration of institutional aesthetics. The conception of a personal aesthetic that guides our engagement with our direct sensory experience of the world opens up the possibility of _de novo_ creativity and points to the possibility of agentic semiautonomous opportunities for expression. An individual can identify the voices within their own internal conversation and sometimes choose to silence the censorious voices of the inner critics, which allows for the other, undisciplined voices of the muses to be heard. These muses attend to the constant stream of sensory information and, through the personalized aesthetic, make sense of it in new and different ways. These new and different ways of making sense of the world may or may not be taken up by others. Indeed, an institutional aesthetics perspective on creativity leads us to a social rather than an individual view of creativity because of the focus on connection and intersubjective evaluation. This raises a variety of questions for future research about the embedded, multilateral nature of creativity.
Implications of institutional aesthetics

To address the seeming impossibility that persons shaped by established cultural prescriptions can possibly change or create alternative societal arrangements, we offer institutional aesthetics and aesthetic codes as an essential complementary framework to the dominant institutionalist perspectives. We did this, first, by adapting two conceptualizations in the literature – one, the image of institutional orders as value spheres and, two, the idea that institutionalized aesthetic codes are the system of linkages between a community’s values and beliefs and what it affirms as appropriate symbolic representations and actions. We then theorized across levels of analysis to frame the personal aesthetic as one’s internalization of the diverse institutional aesthetic codes that characterize the multiple communities and value spheres to which the person belongs. We argue that this internalization – what Gagliardi evocatively describes as the writing of the aesthetic code into the eye – equips the person with an institutionally embedded aesthetic knowledge for evaluating meanings, values, actions and expressions. Further, we theorize that such evaluation unfolds through an internal conversation among a community of interlocutors – a microcosm of the person’s systems of valued social bonds. This framing of the internal conversations as microcosmic does two things. First, it links the intersubjective nature of the institutional aesthetic codes to the intrasubjective mechanisms of deliberation and self-regulation. Second, it explains how the internal conversation remains social, rather than isolated or solipsistic, because it populates the conversation with avatars of the members of the person’s valued communities, while at the same time introducing a multivocality that mirrors institutional complexity. This line
of reasoning thereby extends earlier institutional arguments that tie the preservation of valued social bonds to knowledge of culturally resonant actions and expressions and to self-monitoring and self-regulation. Our broader purpose has been to advance the inhabited institutions perspective by theorizing institutional inhabitants as whole persons who by their nature have sensory and aesthetic ways of knowing. Our argument provides the foundation for a theory that links persons’ internalized aesthetic codes and ways of knowing both to the preservation of social bonds and the processes underpinning both institutional reproduction and change and de novo creativity. The personal aesthetic code integrates diverse values and modes of attention; the internal conversation brings together the mechanisms of deliberation that animate both various types of institutional work and creativity.

Attending to persons’ sensory experience and knowledge and to the shared values which inform their personal aesthetics and serve as the lenses for individual and collective evaluations allows for a fuller explanation of socially embedded action. It enables a better understanding of human engagement with institutions “on the ground” and of the reflexive capacities necessary for navigating institutional complexity. The institutional aesthetics perspective offers an integrative framework that bridges the established cognitive and the emerging emotional approaches to understanding persons’ lived experience of institutional arrangements. Indeed, the cognitive, the emotional and the aesthetic may be a sort of three-legged stool (legs, not pillars). Our theorizing points to several possible directions for future research. To discuss them, we return to Friedland’s (2013) insistence that institutionalists must attend to subjectification and personal identification with institutional values.
An institutional aesthetic perspective on subjectification

The institutional aesthetics perspective offers two novel ways of understanding subjectification: writing the aesthetic code into the eye of the person and populating the person’s internal conversation with a microcosm of interlocutors. Here, subjectification refers to the ways institutional arrangements are implicated in providing identity and motives to person. Processes of subjectification underpin the disciplinary power of institutions by shaping persons’ self-conceptions and desires, (Cooper, et al. 2008:682). In addition, subjectification fosters the person’s perception of agency (a sense of autonomy and motivation) that underpins the self-regulation that drives participation in institutional reproduction (Cooper, et al. 2008:682). Subjectification occurs when shared, seemingly objective rules penetrate community members’ identity constructions. Cooper et al (2008) have argued that institutionalization hinges upon the subjectification of persons capable of and committed to enacting institutional prescriptions. Building on this perspective, Creed et al have theorized that the intersubjective experience of “systemic shame” equips subjects with a personal “sense of shame” that readies them for engaging in the “ubiquitous processes of self-surveillance and self-regulation that underpin [systemic shame’s] disciplinary power” (Creed et al, 2014: 282).

The institutional aesthetics perspective invites thinking of subjectification as “writing of the aesthetic code into the eye” of the person (Gagliardi 2006:711). That is, persons also acquire through their subjectification a cultural insider’s knowledge of the
institutional aesthetic code that structures the relationship between their community’s values and beliefs and the images and expressions that materialize them (Garliardi, 2006; Meyer, Hoellerer, Jancsary, and Van Leeuwen, 2013). The process of writing into the eye is never completed, however, because the person is always encountering new sensory phenomena and engaging in multivocal internal conversations over those encounters. Indeed, the person’s ongoing subjectification would appear to be the product of a ubiquitous internal conversation, but it is a conversation with many interlocutors.

While those conversations are embedded in the values spheres we inhabit, our particular personal biographies determine who the interlocutors are and which of them participate in a particular internal conversation. Thus, how our sedimented personal aesthetics continue to evolve as a consequence of our personal microcosmic community. In a recursive way, our personal aesthetic and our personal biography informs how we manage who participates and how our internal conversations unfold, how and when we move between rehearsal and performance spaces, and the degree to which we can be comfortable with our negative capability for living with mystery and uncertainty without what Keats described as the “irritable reaching after fact and reason.”

*Institutional biography as a history of social bonds and conversation*

The institutional aesthetic perspective adds new biographical dimensions to our understanding of the role of social bonds and intersubjective experience as the primary driver of persons’ participation in institutional processes. As Hallett and Ventresca (2006) emphasized in their discussion of symbolic interactionism, it is not what people do, but
what they do together that matters. The institutional aesthetic perspective implies that maintaining valued social bonds that bind persons to institutional orders requires personal expressions and actions that are not merely authorized, but are pleasing, resonant, and affirming of attachments. In effect, it implies an endless internal conversation with the avatars of people from our personal history of relationship.

Consequently, following Gagliardi (2006), we believe that institutional arrangements cannot be understood solely in terms of a community’s logos, its particular systems of rules that pertain to rule following. Nor is it sufficient to add just the normative particularities of its ethos, its shared moral experience. Institutionalists also have to draw on the connective tissue of institutional pathos, “the particular way of perceiving and ‘feeling’ reality – that belongs to the aesthetic experience” (2006:712). Gagliardi expands on the importance of pathos for understanding our encounters with the world in this manner:

... pathos – or the pattern of sensibility – that the subject has learned by living in a particular physical-cultural setting, and which he/she shares with other members of that culture; in relation to features of that pattern, an event or object may leave us indifferent or may reawaken our sense. (2006:714)

Knowledge of all three – logos, ethos, and pathos – and the incorporation of them all into the person’s internal sense of virtues that animate self-regulation – is essential to maintaining valued social bonds. The self-regulation of people who are not psychopaths or autistics melds all three. This means that how people participate in the symbolic interactions that are the nuts and bolts of institutional processes cannot be understood with a lens that relies unduly on logos and marginalizes either ethos or pathos (Gagliardi 2007).
People do not aspire to institutional roles and ways of being because of taken for
granted assumptions. They aspire to ways of being as a means of being connected to what
they understand to be the values of their communities, whatever those values and
communities may be. If fully capable and not pathological, persons will select ways of
being and acting that sustain their sense of self in relationship and their belongingness. A
focus on connection offers a route for understanding which bonds and communities are of
value to us and how our engagement in inter- and intrasubjective conversations and
deliberations of value shape how we reproduce existing or create new ways of being and
relating.

Our sense of connection to others comes about through the combined effects of
direct sensory experience and our assessments of those experiences in terms of a set of
internalized aesthetic criteria that stem from the institutional aesthetic codes of the many
communities we belong to. Aesthetically appropriate expression of how we experience
the world through our senses is an aspect of how we maintain our sense of belonging in
those communities. This makes the internalization of a personal aesthetic a critical
feature of our personhood. Institutional aesthetic codes define what is to be valued and
how valuable persons use their senses to experience the world, to express the nature of
their experience, and to chose how to act.

Broader Implications of an Institutional Aesthetics Frame

The institutional aesthetics perspective opens up new ground for theorizing
institutional processes by going beyond the perhaps overused notions of legitimacy and
appropriateness. The history of arts and letters has rich offerings in terms of aesthetic categories, largely absent in institutional theory, that could be meaningful complements to legitimacy and appropriateness for understanding persons’ experience of institutional value spheres. Philosophic aesthetics has identified between 6 and 64 different aesthetic categories (Strati 1992), such as the beautiful, the ugly, the grotesque, the sublime, and the comic. Recent work has considered the aesthetics of everyday experience (Light 2013; Saito 2007) and has suggested new aesthetic categories such as “cool” and “cute” (Botz-Bornstein 2012).

For example, considering particular aesthetic categories could complement and enrich current understandings of framing in institutional processes. One familiar line argument holds that institutional entrepreneurs win adherents by framing innovations in ways that resonant with existing frameworks, thereby legitimating departures from established practices. While theories of framing do not rely solely on cognitive mechanisms, as the idea of resonant frames suggests, this line of argument still does not attend to how inhabitants of institutional orders may actually experience such disruptors, their rhetoric, and their actions. Ladkin (2006) has analyzed the powerful effect of charismatic leaders not in terms of how potential followers make sense of how they frame their policy proposals but in terms of how charismatic people can be experienced as sublime. Ladkin's Kantian analysis of charismatic leadership emphasizes the awesome aspect of the sublime: “Although terrifying, experiences which evoke the sublime are also energizing and invigorating, and consequently draw us to them” (2006: 171). While followers might experience a leader as awesome and inspirational, critics may experience the same leader as grotesque, another well-theorized aesthetic category that speaks to
"psychic currents from below the surface of life, such as nameless fears, complexes, nightmares, angst. It is a dimension of intense and exaggerated emotions and intense and exaggerated forms.” (Fingesten 1984: 419). Our illustration is meant to show how the use of existing aesthetic categories might help us understand and distinguish between the sensory and embodied experiences of persons during institutional disruption or other change processes, thereby better capturing what actually is animating persons’ institutional work across the socio-political spectrum.

We think that creativity, subjectification, connection and change are not the only theoretical ideas that the conception of institutional aesthetics could shed new light upon. For example, to the extent that individual and institutional identity are narrative accomplishments, an institutional aesthetics perspective might open new doors to understanding those processes in a more arts-based fashion that recognizes genres while at the same time paying attention to individual voices and how those voices are connected to personal aesthetics and institutional aesthetic codes.

Of course, with theorizing institutional aesthetics there should also be empirical exploration. One might ask what the likely structure of the personal aesthetic is – compartmentalized or fused? Our hunch is that they are hybridized, but remain subject to situational, differentiated triggering. That is, even though the personal aesthetic code has a hybridized structure, situations can nonetheless evoke some features of one’s personal aesthetic code more than others. But this is an empirical question as to whether, when, and under what conditions particular elements of the personal aesthetic are evoked or triggered and with what consequences for a persons situated participation in institutional processes. One might ask about the interplay between the analytical and aesthetic modes
of attention. McGilchrist (2009) argues that the interaction is asymmetric: the aesthetic mode draws upon analytical attention, but the analytical mode is not aware of the aesthetic mode of attention. Similarly, the dynamics between rehearsal and performance spaces and the implications for embedded creativity are surely more complex than the simple dichotomy we have sketched.

The aesthetic perspective also provides a framework for exploring institutional biography. Researchers could attend to how persons use of aesthetic categories in their institutional work, including for examining how persons describe episodes of deliberation and how the refer to the perspectives of others as interlocutors in their deliberations. Attending to a person’s pattern of deliberation – both intersubjective and intrasubjective – could provide important insights into the factors that animate embedded social action.

Conclusion

We offer institutional aesthetics and aesthetic codes as an essential complementary framework to the dominant institutionalist perspectives for understanding cultural embeddedness, subjectivity, and creativity. The personal aesthetic comprises several components: the person’s innate capacity to look at and engage with the world; an internalized knowledge of the culturally-specific aesthetic codes of the communities of which one is a part, which we refer to as institutional aesthetic codes; and an impetus to act in aesthetically affirmed ways as a way of sustaining belongingness in valued groups. Our personal aesthetic guides what we each pay attention to. It guides us to stay with our senses and not know – that is, to suspend the closure of logical thinking in what English
romantic poet John Keats referred to as “negative capability.” Adding the concepts of institutional aesthetics codes and personal aesthetics to institutional theory points to the possibility of agentic semiautonomous opportunities for expression and de novo creativity; and foregrounds connection between people as a primary driver of persons’ participation in institutional processes, which suggests institutions don’t just change – they change in embodied, connective ways.

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