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MACROFOUNDATIONS: EXPLORING THE INSTITUTIONALLY SITUATED NATURE OF ACTIVITY

Christopher W. J. Steele, Timothy R. Hannigan,
Vern L. Glaser, Madeline Toubiana and Joel Gehman

In recent years, institutionalists have devoted increasing attention to the so-called “microfoundations” of institutions: that is, to the everyday activities and dynamics through which institutions are constituted, exert their influence, and decline into obscurity (Haack, Sieweke, & Wessel, 2019; Powell & Colyvas, 2008; Powell & Rerup, 2017). While the value of such work is both substantial and self-evident, several authors have expressed concern that the imagery of “microfoundations” smuggles in an inappropriate ascription of causal primacy to “the micro,” or even to atomistic individuals, and thus casts into shadow some critically important facets of institutions and institutional theory (Boxenbaum, 2019; Hwang & Colyvas, 2019; Jepperson & Meyer, 2011). Most notably, a focus on microfoundations risks obscuring the constitutive and contextualizing powers of institutions (Gehman, Lounsbury, & Greenwood, 2016; Lounsbury & Wang, 2020; Meyer, 2010; Wooten & Hoffman, 2017). Constitutively, institutional arrangements are inscribed into the symbolic frameworks, bodies, emotional registers, and sensory apparatuses through which people experience world and self (Bitektine, Haack, Bothello, & Mair, 2020; Meyer & Vaara, 2020; Toubiana, in press; Voronov & Weber, 2020); as well as being inscribed into the forms and workings of organizations and other social actors (Marquis & Tilcsik, 2013; Meyer, 2010; Tracey, Phillips, & Jarvis, 2011; Waeger & Weber, 2019). Institutional arrangements also play a complex and intricate contextualizing role: furnishing settings, materials, and infrastructures for local episodes of individual, interactional, and organizational cognition, emotion, and action (Creed, Hudson, Okhuysen, & Smith-Crowe, 2014; Hinings,

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Logue, & Zietsma, 2017; Lawrence & Graham, 2015; Lounsbury & Glynn, 2019; Ocasio, Thornton, & Lounsbury, 2017; Sadeh & Zilber, 2019; Steele, in press). Both of these themes sit oddly with any explanatory privileging of “the micro” – indeed, at first glance, they would seem to support a precisely inverted prioritization of “the macro.” With such thoughts in mind, the 2018 Alberta Institutions Conference invited participants to articulate the “macrofoundations of institutions”; using this impish terminology (Fine, 1991) in a purposefully provocative call.

For us, the concept of macrofoundations was ultimately intended to be heard in harmonic counterpoint with that of microfoundations: to highlight that “the micro” and “the macro” are always and everywhere entwined in a co-constitutive interplay, in which both have every bit as (patently in)valid a claim to being foundational (Fine, 1991; Meyer & Vaara, 2020; Steele, Toubiana, & Greenwood, 2019).¹ Contributions to the conference seemed to us to intuit, embrace, and embody this spirit. The interest and enthusiasm of the 106 registered participants motivated the present volume – and the 34 presentations provided plenty of material for inclusion! The 11 chapters of this volume, drawn from this rich vein of material, explore and expand upon the broad notion of macrofoundations empirically and theoretically; and we would like to express our gratitude to all the contributors for the work that they did in generating an eclectic yet coherent array of insights into the constitutive and contextualizing powers of institutions. Here, we will briefly introduce the 11 chapters, in their order of appearance. We do so under four headings, which we have used to structure the volume: “definitions and pontifications,” “macrofounding the local,” “localizing the macrofoundational,” and “reflections and future directions.”

DEFINITIONS AND PONTIFICATIONS

In the first chapter of the volume, Steele and Hannigan make an initial exploration of what a macrofoundational agenda might entail, and the opportunities it might offer (Steele & Hannigan, 2021). They first propose focusing attention on the ways in which institutions contextualize local activities, and the ways in which institutions shape the nature of people, objects, and physical spaces. They suggest that exploring these topics should cast light on how institutional arrangements elicit, shape, and – critically – preempt micro-dynamics, on how institutions shape lived experience (and the conditions in which such experiences arise), and on the tectonics of large-scale institutional change. Importantly, they also highlight another idea that should inform any emergent macrofoundational agenda: that macrofoundational forces are implicitly and explicitly negotiated, or refracted, in the course of local happenings. In this sense, they follow Gary Alan Fine in suggesting that there are no clear causal arrows running from the micro to the macro or vice versa, but, rather, an unfolding process of mutual constitution. As they put it (p. 21):

Macrofoundations are not linkages to stable and given entities, which hover above local activities; rather, they are concrete concatenations of activities and states of affairs over multiple sites – specific flows of effects and reactions, which work to pin local activities into place.

Their explorations ultimately lead them to suggest abandoning the imagery of “foundations” entirely, in favor of an alternative “optometric” imagery, which views the micro and macro as lenses; that is, as microscopes and macroscopes. They argue that embracing this imagery would not only encourage further reflexivity regarding the lenses we use as institutionalists – each of which draws some phenomena into focus, at the cost of blurring or blocking out others – but also help to foreground the use of various micro and macro “lenses” by participants in everyday life, as a consequential empirical phenomenon. Thus, they explore the horizons opened up by the idea of macrofoundations, even as they set aside the term.

MACROFOUNDING THE LOCAL

The next section of the volume focuses on the role of institutions in contextualizing the ostensibly “micro”; which is to say, the ways in which institutional arrangements “macrofound” local life. The three chapters flesh out the contextualizing and constitutive powers of institutions, both empirically and theoretically. Thus, [Middleton, Irving, and Wright \(2021\)](#) explore empirically how institutional prescriptions shape and transform the social spaces in which everyday life unfolds – with important consequences for the patterning of local activities. [Biygautane, Micelotta, Gabbioneta, and Cappellaro \(2021\)](#) show empirically how inter-institutional orders can provide a critical context for evolving populations of organizations – shaping local motivations and feasibilities in ways that can preempt the adoption of organizational forms. And [Crawford and Dacin \(2021\)](#) theorize four distinct types of punishment that can characterize institutional arrangements – contextualizing everyday activities through the shadow of punishments present, or potentially-to-be. Beyond the immediate insights that these chapters provide into multiple extant conversations, they also provide a collective justification for further research into the contextualizing and constitutive force of institutions, and a generative set of directions for future work. Below, we introduce them in more detail, in sequence.

In the first chapter of the section, [Middleton et al. \(2021\)](#) explore how institutions exert their influence through the mundane spaces in which everyday life unfolds, through a qualitative study of the emergency department in an Australian hospital. They begin with the premise that everyday life is consequentially contextualized by mundane spaces, such as rooms, corridors, and buildings: as the material design of these spaces, and their prevailing patterns of use, shape the ease and consequences of various lines of action. The authors then argue that such spaces are in turn shaped by institutional arrangements. In their empirical work, they explore how a shift in the institutional context of Australian medical care – reflected in an increased prioritization of time-before-treatment – gave rise to, and took effect through, a change in the design and use of space. Previously, use of a waiting room kept walk-in “emergency” patients away from the treatment area, thus rendering them less visible and reinforcing professionally accepted patterns of prioritization (which gave priority to patients delivered by ambulance). Shifting institutional priorities led to abolition of the waiting room, with all patients being

queued instead in “an internal waiting corridor” by the treatment space. In these circumstances, walk-in patients – and delays in their treatment – were made very visible indeed; enmeshing physicians in a space of surveillance that challenged their old ways of working. The authors abstract from this to argue that spaces can serve institutional arrangements by *hiding* and *revealing*. They also show how spaces provide cues for identity and for institutional policing (*reminding* people of their responsibilities), and how they offer possibilities for the physical exclusion of disruptive actors (*containing* resistance). The first chapter of this section thus shows how institutions shape the mundane spaces that contextualize everyday life; providing the macrofoundations not only for local activities, but also for one of the most immediate and concrete contexts of such activity.

In the next chapter, [Biygautane et al. \(2021\)](#) begin with the observation that institutional theorizing has generally privileged western conceptions of institutional orders, neglecting the distinctive workings of institutional orders in non-western cultures. To illustrate this, they argue that the tribal system in Qatar anchors the inter-institutional system in that setting and has given rise to distinctive institutional orders of state, market, and family. The authors then show how these institutional orders in Qatar, as a macro-institutional context, have consequentially shaped the adoption and implementation of a Western organizational form – in the form of public–private partnerships (e.g., long-term contracts between government actors and private actors, based on a delegation of responsibilities for the construction, ownership, and management of an infrastructure project). For example, their study shows how the role of the ruling family in government mitigated the very need for public–private partnerships by fusing the public and private sectors, and by prioritizing the needs of certain interest groups in a manner that reduced the benefits that might accrue from public–private partnerships. Additionally, the authors point to the ways in which the tribally influenced role of the state, the lack of market norms of competition in Qatar, and the uncertainty foreign investors faced in their interactions with the ruling family, collectively led to public–private partnerships *creating* inefficiencies – the exact opposite of what might be expected in a western context (optimistically speaking). The chapter thus “reveal[s] the importance of considering the culturally-contingent nature of institutional orders in examinations of countries that are particularly distant from the Anglo-Saxon tradition”; both as an end in itself, and as a means of better understanding more localized or specific dynamics, in those contexts.

In the third chapter of the section, [Crawford and Dacin \(2021\)](#) draw our attention to the macrofoundational by exploring the distinct types and patterns of punishment that can uphold institutional arrangements. Building on the premise that “one way that institutions exercise their constitutive power is by punishing wrongdoers or those who violate the integrity of the institution (beliefs, norms, structures and practices),” they introduce four distinct types of punishment, which vary in their visibility and formalization. While the first type of punishment, retribution, is the formalized and visible type most often explored in the literature (i.e., sanctions, fines, and incarceration), the authors argue that the three other types – punishment-as-charivari, punishment-as-rehabilitation, and punishment-as-vigilantism – though less explored, are equally important. They draw our attention to

the shaming efforts which are part of punishment-as-charivari, to restoration and forgiveness as part of punishment-as-rehabilitation, and to intense violence as the core mechanism of punishment-as-vigilantism. In the process, they highlight the multimodal nature of punishment, and the role of emotions, the material and the symbolic in defining both punishment and response. Crawford and Dacin thus cast light on another way in which institutions macrofound local activities: by inspiring and intertwining with distinctive regimes of punishment, which contextualize everyday life. In addition, they also illuminate the recursive relationship between the micro and the macro. In both punishment-as-charivari and punishment-as-vigilantism, for example, people who are emotionally invested in institutions seek to publicly shame or to hurt others in order to uphold those institutions. Institutional arrangements and patterns of punishment thus contextualize local efforts to reinforce and defend institutions; with micro and macro unfolding in a co-constitutive interplay. In closing, the authors critique institutional researchers for ignoring some of the most harmful ways institutions can operate – through violence – and ask readers to take seriously the role of violence as they further explore the macrofoundational agenda.

LOCALIZING THE MACROFOUNDATIONAL

This discussion of the inseparability of micro and macro neatly sets the scene for the third section of the volume. Here, we emphasize a second element of the “macrofoundational agenda” as we see it: that macrofoundations are themselves locally negotiated in part, and are matters of implicit and explicit local concern as local happenings unfold. This opposition to the analytic partitioning of the macro and micro is a critically important idea behind the macrofoundational challenge first posed by Gary Alan Fine, and a key part of the spirit of the volume. The three chapters in this section explore empirically how local understandings of institutional arrangements and their impacts play into local activities – and how these local activities, through their concatenations and reverberations, constitute and reconstitute the macro-context over time. First, [Brüggemann, Kroezen, and Tracey \(2021\)](#) explore how the felt encroachment of dominant institutional logics can inspire efforts at resistance; efforts that may not only preserve marginalized logics, but also drive their refinement, elaboration, and evolution. In the second chapter, [Hannigan and Casasnovas \(2021\)](#) explore the interplay of micro and macro in emerging fields: how field-configuring events, captured by media reports, serve as provisional portraits of the field that contextualize further events; providing a kind of “bootstrapping” process of field emergence. In the final chapter of the section, [Meyer, Kornberger, and Höllerer \(2021\)](#) explore how local efforts to understand and change a complex configuration of institutional arrangements – in their case, the city of Sydney – helped to constitute a distinctive thought style, associated with a reformulated “public” of participants and audiences; essentially providing “the city” with a new infrastructure for ongoing self-reflection or thought. All three chapters give a sense of the recursive or

co-constitutive relationship between “the macro” and “the micro,” as we unpack in more detail below.

Brüggemann et al. (2021) observe that existing research has not considered what happens to marginalized logics in fields with a dominant logic. By exploring the empirical case of the UK trade publishing industry, they cast light on the ways in which field actors’ active resistance to dominant logics can not only preserve marginalized logics, but also fuel their elaboration and evolution; thus driving ongoing change in institutional arrangements. More specifically, they show how the evolution of a marginalized editorial logic in publishing occurred along three generative paths, as actors resisted the dominant market logic: *preservation*, in which conformity to the marginalized logic was used as a special marker of reputation and prestige by high-status publishing houses; *purification*, in which the editorial logic was articulated in contradistinction to the market logic, emphasizing and elaborating the merits of a more vocational approach to publishing; and *radicalization*, where the editorial logic of publishing became increasingly bound up with other interests and concerns that were marginalized by the market logic. Together these efforts to navigate a macrofoundational context have led to the refinement and evolution of the marginalized editorial logic; which continues to spread, and transform that context in turn. As a multimethod study combining interviews, participant observation, and archival data over several years, the chapter provides a rich historical account of activity in the periphery of a field: illuminating the active institutional work around “logics that are seemingly left behind in the wake of a shift toward a new dominant logic” (p. 124), and its consequential nature. This contributes to recent calls to better understand the dynamics of intralogic evolution, and the historical contingencies of logics; uncovering distinct patterns of institutional change. This chapter thus explores how institutions contextualize local activities, while also casting light on how these contextualizations are localized – becoming the felt and understood context for local actions and acts of resistance – and how local actions shape logic and field evolution.

In the following chapter, Hannigan and Casasnovas (2021) take up this same theme of the recursivity between the micro and the macro. They explore how early moments of field emergence both structure and are structured by provisional understandings of the field as a macro-context. Through a multimethod empirical study combining topic modeling and qualitative field methods, they track early activity of the impact investing field in the UK. They use the metaphor of a camera obscura to show how traces of key moments are partially captured by the media, and turned into provisional pictures of the field that inform later moments. In a context full of ambiguity and complexity, these provisional pictures and their elements serve as macrofoundational cues, which affect how actors in this field come to understand and develop their relative positioning. Field-configuring events – as moments of intense interaction – play a particularly important role in shaping these provisional portraits of the field, and thus help reconfigure the ways in which actors are meaningfully arranged and interrelated. This study thus helps us begin to theorize the emergence of early institutional infrastructures (Zietsma et al., 2017). Importantly, for our purposes, the authors highlight recursivity between micro and macro: how key (micro) events or “moments,” captured in

media reports and other documents, feed into provisional understandings of the macro-context which help contextualize local understandings and activity – and thus feed into later moments of moment.

In the final chapter of the section, [Meyer et al. \(2021\)](#) take up the theme of the co-constitution of micro and macro, and, in so doing, explore the constitutive powers of institutions. They argue that Ludwik Fleck’s concepts of “thought style” and “thought collective” provide helpful resources for understanding the relationship between the micro and the macro. Their chapter begins with a compelling illustration of the strategic planning process conducted by the City of Sydney over a 10-year period. Interestingly, the objectives of the strategy remained unachieved – yet most stakeholders viewed the strategic planning process as having been a resounding success. The authors show that stakeholders credited the strategic planning process for three outcomes: it changed the way that city-makers thought about the relationship, context, and complex nature of the city; it instigated a process of learning and discovery; and it facilitated the constitution of an imagined community, or public, around the strategy process. Meyer et al. theorize that this can be understood as the emergence of a thought style, which they define as an “epistemic condition for cognition, meaning, and truth” associated with a particular community of people, which provides “the precondition for collective reasoning and collective action” (p. 193). They thus suggest that strategic planning activities in Sydney were not effective because of their ability to achieve particular outcomes, but because they changed the “cognitive tracks” of city-makers by generating a thought style and associated thought collective. The authors build outward from this to argue that institutions are not “constraining conditions” that hamper cognition; instead, as collective thought styles, institutions are “the foundation of all thinking and knowing.” But like [Steele and Hannigan \(2021\)](#), [Meyer et al. \(2021\)](#) worry that the foundational terminology does not do justice to the co-constitutive relationship between institutions and the actions – as institutions prompt and contextualize the very actions by which they are constituted. To help navigate us past the monolithic ruins of the micro–macro divide, they provide another provocative analogy: envisaging social life in terms of an MC Escher drawing in which “it is impossible to tell which hand is prior to the other” or “which steps are bottom and which are top” – in which “there is no foundation that could hold and no origin that could explain its reality” (p. 198).

REFLECTIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In the final section of the volume, we present four reflective pieces – each of which articulates possible future directions for addressing the challenges posed by Fine, and for an institutionalism that takes seriously the “macrofoundational” themes raised above. The first chapter, by [Glynn \(2021\)](#), explores the language of institutionalism to see what presumptions we have smuggled in, and what blinkers we have unwittingly adopted. The second, by [Höllerer, Schneiberg, Thornton, Zietsma, and Wang \(2021\)](#) provides an interweaving of four reflections on the

notion of macrofoundations, which explore the different forms of contextualization that might macrofound local activity, and the interplay of micro and macro; as well as the joys of breaking down our intellectual silos. [Gehman \(2021\)](#), in the third chapter, digs into the roots of institutionalism in search of lost insights; and uncovers a key theme from the work of early phenomenologists that could inform contemporary institutional theorizing. And finally, Scott provides a contextualization of the notion of macrofoundations; situating this volume within the history of institutionalism, and highlighting conversations that could bolster the foundations of a macrofoundational agenda. Together, these pieces provide a forward-looking closing point for the volume as a whole; and, we hope, effectively convey the prospects for generative and theory-building work on, near, or around the macrofoundations of institutionalism.

The first piece is based on Mary Ann Glynn's 2018 keynote speech for the conference. Taking the call for papers to heart, Glynn takes stock of "where we have been, and where we are headed." She begins with an orienting content analysis of explicitly institutional scholarship in eight key journals, from 1936 to 2017 – a corpus of 2,201 articles. This reveals several insights. For example, institutions seem predominantly to be invoked as nouns; which, Glynn suggests, may reinforce a long-standing tendency to theorize institutions as solid, durable entities; turning our attention to macro-matters. In contrast, the use of institutionalization, as a verb – as yet the least common usage – encourages focus on dynamism and the mechanisms of (im)permanence, and may thus highlight more micro-matters. Critically, Glynn argues that the greatest insights are likely to emerge through reconciliation of these registers. She thus calls for a synthetic rather than adversarial conceptualization of macro and micro approaches; and – distinctively and generatively – pushes us to question the relative weight of local/micro and trans-local/macro influences in different settings and in different episodes. She suggests we consider macrofoundational contexts, such as the field, as a form of contingency: drawing our attention to how fields differ, and the consequences of these differences for the differing kinds of things that become institutionalized, to differing degrees, and for the kinds of factors that exert causal force within that space (i.e., to differences in the kinds of factors that predict organizational success in fields focused on issues and fields focused on exchange, or in fields that are bound together more by geography or more by shared understanding). In other terms, Glynn calls for attention to the varying constitutive dynamics that characterize different types of fields, and how they contextualize individual institutions, organizations, and everyday life. The chapter closes with a suggestion that we attend to the linguistics of our theorizations: as a means of foregrounding co-constitutive dynamics, and as a means of avoiding conceptual dissipation – a matter of moment, given the power of semantics and imagery to shape what we can see.

The next chapter of the section ([Höllerer et al., 2021](#)) revisits the closing plenary at the 2018 Alberta Institutions Conference, in which four prominent scholars – Markus Höllerer, Marc Schneiberg, Patricia Thornton, and Charlene Zietsma – shared their views on how we could return macrofoundations to center-stage in institutional analysis. Working with the four panelists, Milo Wang draws out several major themes that emerged during the discussion, and which were

elaborated for this volume; themes that cast light on some of the open questions and terrain that might be opened by a turn to “macrofoundations,” and some of the risks and pitfalls that we should scrupulously seek to avoid. The first major theme to emerge pertains to the various meanings that macrofoundations could have, or the various types of macrofoundation we could explore: here, Schneiberg emphasizes the role of institutions as socio-cognitive infrastructures, undergirding activity and social order, whereas Zietsma emphasizes the role of macro-foundational context in informing our emotions and understandings, and the possibilities for exposing people to different understandings of macro-context as a means of achieving social change and reform. Second, the chapter cautions that a singular or exclusive focus on the macro level would blinker our understandings and theorizations. Both Thornton and Höllerer, in particular, advocate for more cross-level studies of institutions – and also for understanding the macro and the micro as co-constitutive analytical categories. Finally, the four panelists discuss how we could break academic silos in institutional analysis and strive for theoretical innovation through interdisciplinary studies and other means. Thus, they highlight several opportunities and risks for those exploring macrofoundations.

In the penultimate chapter, Gehman (2021) picks up on a suggestion offered by Markus Höllerer during the conference’s closing plenary, and seeks to “trace the core ideas to their very origins” (Höllerer et al., 2021, p. 230). Specifically, he revisits the phenomenological understanding of the “institution” concept by returning to the philosophical writings of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty. Although institutional scholars often acknowledge the phenomenological origins of institutional analysis, Gehman suggests that the philosophical foundations of the concept offer an array of insights that are underexploited or unrecognized within organization theory; and seeks to unearth some generative connections. After laying out some institutionally germane aspects of their respective philosophies, he connects these philosophical ideas with contemporary conversations. He builds on Evans and Lawlor’s (2000) reading of Merleau-Ponty, which uses the metaphor of flesh to explore the interplay of visible and the invisible – suggesting that institutions and (human) being are crisscrossed and interwoven, or fleshed together, and this intertwining is the foundation or grounding of both being and institution. Gehman suggests that such a philosophical understanding of institution radically problematizes, and more likely completely undermines the growing bifurcation between micro and macro-institutional explanations; posing particular challenges to microsociologies grounded on individuals qua individuals. The chapter reminds us that at its core, phenomenological institutionalism conceives of actors “as constructed by institutional models and meanings rather than as prior and fixed entities” and institutions “as general models constructing both actors and their activities” (Meyer, 2009, p. 40). Gehman closes with a provocation for work on institutions as the macrofoundations of local activity: arguing that phenomenology teaches us that flesh – the twining of the visible and the invisible – and our perceptual and perpetual faith in the world is the foundation of institutions. Institution “is the wherewithal on which I count at each moment, which is seen nowhere and is assumed by everything that is visible for a human being” (Merleau-Ponty, 2010, p. 12).

In the closing chapter, [Scott \(2021\)](#) chronicles a broad scholarly history that contextualizes the volume and its driving concerns. He begins with the founding political scientists, economists, and sociologists who charted the rise of the modern state, the capitalist economy, and bureaucracy and rationalism, in a valiant effort to articulate tectonic shifts in the conditions of social life. He notes that this macro-social, comparative, and historical work was later eclipsed by more individualist, micro-social scholarship, centered in the United States. [Scott](#) implies that this new, micro-social orientation has since set the terms of debate, even for those who challenged it. Thus, even as institutionalists sought to re-emphasize macro-context, they tended to focus on the traceable impact of local contexts, such as fields; keeping close to the ground, relative to the vast scope of their progenitors. [Scott](#) urges a resurgent broadening of scope. He prompts us to look at regions and social sectors, societal systems, transnational systems, and world society: arguing that each of these institutional formations may possess distinctive dynamics, worthy of study in their own right; and that each may serve as a significant form of macro-context for action and the eddies of imagination. In each of these areas, [Scott](#) points to extant work, and highlights themes and insights of significance. Ultimately, he calls for historical and comparative explorations of these far-reaching arrangements and their contextualizing forces; thus making a call for the study of macrofoundations, macrofounded in a history of social scholarship.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The call to think through the macrofoundations of institutionalism is a challenge to think through the contextualizing and constitutive powers of institutions. In our view, the contributions to this volume do much to draw out these powers: from the role of institutions in the emergence and workings of the physical spaces in which action arises ([Middleton et al., 2021](#)), to their role in the evolution of cities ([Meyer et al., 2021](#)), punishments ([Crawford & Dacin, 2021](#)), and whole populations of organizations ([Bygautane et al., 2021](#)). At the same time, the current volume reminds us that these mighty macrofoundations are themselves formed from concatenations of local happenings; and are matters of local and immediate concern, implicitly and explicitly, for those who are wholeheartedly immersed in their locales ([Brüggemann et al., 2021](#); [Hannigan & Casasnovas, 2021](#)). Macrofoundations emerge hand-in-glove with micro-dynamics, in a co-constitutive interplay ([Gehman, 2021](#); [Meyer et al., 2021](#); [Steele & Hannigan, 2021](#)). It is this interplay, at least in part, that makes discussion of macrofoundations so intriguing and potentially generative ([Glynn, 2021](#); [Höllerer et al., 2021](#); [Scott, 2021](#)). And yet it is the topic, rather than the label, to which we are committed. The term itself, as a playful inversion of the microfoundational label, may prove felicitous, or may be swiftly abandoned in favor of other imageries; optometric ([Steele & Hannigan, 2021](#)), staircase based ([Meyer et al., 2021](#)), or otherwise. In any case, explorations of the institutional situation of local activities – and the localized invocation of institutions – promises to be a core theme in any effort to

develop a genuinely holistic and integrative institutionalism (Steele et al., 2019). We hope this volume exemplifies and encourages such efforts, and are grateful to all the authors who made it a possibility.

NOTES

1. On this point, we should note that there is an ambiguity in the “microfoundational” movement in institutionalism. On the one hand, the imagery of microfoundations suggests that the micro is in some way foundational, or has some explanatory priority; certainly a guiding theme of the microfoundational “turn” in many other fields. This approach, to our mind, entails risks of implicit atomization – failing to adequately take note of the ways in which people, and local happenings, are always already situated in ongoing and constitutive webs of action and significance. Given that this enmeshment is one of the core premises and general findings of institutionalism, this prospect seems troubling to say the least. Moreover, we worry that this kind of approach ultimately entrenches and reifies the division between micro and macro – artificially separating them analytically, in order to then relate them theoretically. It seems to us that this obscures the way in which everything is *simultaneously* micro and macro (so that “individual” behavior is simultaneously and constitutively part of group and societal patterns of behavior), and that this risks blinding us to some interesting themes – for example, the ways in which “micro” or “macro” status is consequentially *attributed* to phenomena in everyday life (e.g., as people dismiss a novel behavior as a “local deviation,” or observe the same behavior as evidence of an “emerging trend”; with very different consequences for them, for organizations, fields, and even societal orders).

On the other hand, many proponents of the microfoundational movement in institutionalism actually evangelize for “cross-level” studies without any presumption of micro-priority. They agree happily that the macro “situates” the micro: a term sufficiently vague, perhaps, to incorporate the contextualizing powers of institutions, or even, if the meaning of “situation” is somewhat stretched, to acknowledge their constitutive powers. Though we still worry that the terminology risks reifying the micro and macro, and would prefer to talk about the intertwining of local and trans-local happenings, we find this vision of micro-foundations far less troubling than the other. Indeed, we are generally in sympathy with this approach, and see our efforts to emphasize “macrofoundations” as a natural complement to “microfoundational” work in this vein; a belief that is echoed in the recent edited volume on “microfoundations” (Haack, Sieweke, & Wessel, 2019). Our only quibble is that, if the call for microfoundations is simply a call to explore the interplay of local and trans-local, then it is not actually *about* the micro any more than the macro, nor does it ascribe any genuinely foundational status to the micro; making the label somewhat misleading at best. Some of us have elsewhere suggested the alternative term and goal of a more “integrative institutionalism”: an institutionalism that casts neither micro nor macro as “foundational,” but regards them as linked in an MC Escher staircase, “in which ‘foundational’ causality moves perpetually from level to level” (Steele et al., 2019, p. 354); where every step “upward” might moments later lead you “downward” (Meyer et al., 2021).

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