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Inhabited institutions: Social interactions and organizational forms in Gouldner's *Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy*

Tim Hallett · Marc J. Ventresca

Abstract Organizational sociologists often treat institutions as macro cultural logics, representations, and schemata, with less consideration for how institutions are "inhabited" (Scully and Creed, 1997) by people doing things together. As such, this article uses a symbolic interactionist rereading of Gouldner's classic study *Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy* as a lever to expand the boundaries of institutionalism to encompass a richer understanding of action, interaction, and meaning. Fifty years after its publication, Gouldner's study still speaks to us, though in ways we (and he) may not have anticipated five decades ago. The rich field observations in *Patterns* remind us that institutions such as bureaucracy are inhabited by people and their interactions, and the book provides an opportunity for intellectual renewal. Instead of treating contemporary institutionalism and symbolic interaction as antagonistic, we treat them as complementary components of an "inhabited institutions approach" that focuses on local and extra-local embeddedness, local and extra-local meaning, and a skeptical, inquiring attitude. This approach yields a doubly constructed view: On the one hand, institutions provide the raw materials and guidelines for social interactions ("construct interactions"), and on the other hand, the meanings of institutions are constructed and propelled forward by social interactions. Institutions are not inert categories of meaning; rather they are populated with people whose social interactions suffuse institutions with local force and significance.

Sociologists have long debated the role of social structure and human agency in the constitution of society. For every Durkheim, there has been a Simmel, for every Parsons, a Goffman, for every "institutionalist," an "interactionist." One of the primary goals of contemporary sociological theory is the reconciliation of this debate. Theorists such as Giddens, Collins, Bourdieu, and others have made considerable progress towards this goal. Although these efforts have penetrated many subfields, much of organizational sociology – especially in the

T. Hallett
Sociology Dept., Indiana University, Ballantine Hall 744, 1020 E. Kirkwood Ave., Bloomington, IN 47405, USA
e-mail: hallett9@indiana.edu

M. J. Ventresca
University of Oxford and Stanford University

"new institutionalist" idiom – is oriented towards a macro, structural perspective. This is somewhat surprising, because organizations are a rich venue and provide considerable analytic purchase for a more comprehensive dialogue. They are composed of people who act, at times in concert and at times in conflict, within the confines of an immediate working context, and within a larger environment. They are replete with structure and agency at multiple levels of analysis.

Our goal in this article is to "inhabit" contemporary institutionalism with social interactions. Toward this end, we revisit Gouldner's classic study *Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy* and we use a symbolic interactionist rereading of the text as a lever to move boundaries that have formed to constrain thought about institutions, action, interaction, and meaning in organizational sociology. Although it has been over fifty years since Gouldner published the findings of his ethnographic study of a gypsum mine, we argue that *Patterns* is exemplary of an "inhabited institutions approach" that focuses on (1) local and extra-local embeddedness, (2) local and extra-local meaning, and (3) a skeptical, inquiring attitude. This reengagement with *Patterns* points the way for new research in the inhabited institutions approach.

We begin by articulating the "people" problem in contemporary institutionalism. Then we discuss some of the ways that scholars have reached toward symbolic interaction as they grapple with this problem, and we explain why *Patterns* is a good place to look for a resolution. After discussing the intellectual context in which *Patterns* was written, its contemporary institutional relevance, and the symbolic interactionist reading, we show how the "inhabited institutions" approach enables us to cluster seemingly different studies into a common area. We conclude by discussing the value this article can contribute to organizational sociology, symbolic interaction, social theory, and general sociology.

The problematic view of institutions in contemporary organizational analysis

It has become commonplace in organizational sociology to treat institutions as broad, "supraorganizational" logics or "symbolic systems" that order reality, "rendering the experience of time and space meaningful" (Friedland and Alford, 1991: 243). In other words, institutional logics are broad structures of meaning that are taken-for-granted and organize activity. Research in this "new" institutional tradition makes passing references to micro sociology as a part of the scaffolding on which the approach is built. For example, in their seminal piece on formal structure as "Myth and Ceremony," Meyer and Rowan (1977) make their case by citing Goffman:

> Considerations of face characterize ceremonial management (Goffman, 1967). Confidence in structural elements is maintained through three practices – avoidance, discretion, and overlooking (Goffman, 1967, pp. 12–18). Avoidance and discretion are encouraged by decoupling autonomous subunits; overlooking anomalies is also quite common. Both internal participants and external constituents cooperate in these practices. Assuring that individual participants maintain face sustains confidence in the organization, and ultimately reinforces confidence in myths that rationalize the organization's existence. (Meyer and Rowan, 1977: 358).[1]

Thus, social interactions would seem to be foundational to the institutionalist enterprise.

[1] Meyer and Rowan also cite Berger and Luckman (1967), and Scott and Lyman, (1968).

However, in subsequent work, these types of references are used to gloss the dynamics of social interaction to focus instead on macro-level interorganizational processes (Scully and Segal, 2002; Hirsch and Lounsbury, 1997: 411). Given the new institutionalist focus on macro environments, we can turn Meyer and Rowan's legacy on its head to say that organizational sociology has been "decoupled" from its foundations in social interaction: Passing references to micro sociology are a form of "myth and ceremony" that create academic "legitimacy."

The decoupling of institutions from social interactions is problematic for two related reasons. First, "institutions" become reified abstractions (Barley and Tolbert, 1997: 95). They are cut loose from their moorings in social interaction. Although institutions penetrate organizations, it is through social interaction that institutions are interpreted and modified as people coordinate the activities that propel institutions forward. Second, though institutional logics carry meaning, it is also true that meaning arises through social interaction (Blumer, 1969). These interactions are the beating heart of institutions. Institutions are not inert containers of meaning; rather they are "inhabited" by people and their doings (Scully and Creed, 1997).[2] Ironically, in the effort to "bring society back in" via macro "logics" (Friedland and Alford, 1991), institutionalism became *a-social* at the micro level.

Thus institutionalism finds itself grappling with an important question: "What should we do about people?" One answer is to view people as the "carriers" of institutional processes (DiMaggio, 1988; Scott, 2001:79). Institutions come "ready to wear," and people need only put them on and enact them in everyday life (Creed et al., 2002: 475). However, this view is narrow and over-socialized in its conception (Wrong, 1961; Fligstein, 2001). If people are more than mere "carriers" of institutions and if meanings are derived in part from social interactions, then people and the ways in which they do things together are fundamental components of "institutions."

To be sure, we are not the first scholars to identify these problems. Scully and Creed proposed the term "inhabited institutions" (1997) as a category for organizational research that brings people back into the fold. Much of this research centers on work activities as a kind of "agency" within institutional contexts (Barley, 1986; Stinchcombe, 1997; Heimer, 1999). In particular, Barley and Tolbert (1997) draw from Giddens's (1984) work on structuration "to articulate a model of how institutions are formed, reproduced, and modified through an interplay of action and structure" (Barley and Tolbert, 1997: 94). Their model has four conceptual moments: The *encoding* of institutional principles in behavioral scripts used in work activities; the *enactment* of these encoded scripts (consciously or otherwise); the *revision or replication* of scripts; and the *objectification and externalization* of work activities such that they become taken-for-granted and, in turn, shape future actions.

Although their research is largely conceptual, Barley and Tolbert make a valuable contribution to our understanding of the micro foundations of institutions. They draw heavily from phenomenology to analyze how "shared typifications" (scripts) are transformed into externalized "facts" that shape future action (Berger and Luckmann, 1966).[3] However, while work activities are a form of action and may include worker interaction, activities alone do

[2] There are dozens of variations and independent formulations of "meaning," and we recognize that "meaning" does not have a single meaning to the readers of this journal. There is no single philosophical "meaning" of meaning. There is no single linguistic "meaning" of meaning. There is no single sociological "meaning" of meaning. In this article, we take two of the sociological treatments of meaning (from institutionalism and symbolic interactionism), and bring them into dialogue, as a part of the larger goal of developing an inhabited institutions approach. Though it would be useful to survey all of the heterogeneous treatments of meaning, doing so is project in itself, and beyond the scope of this article. For one such sociological survey, see Wuthnow's (1987) book *Meaning and Moral Order*.

[3] Brown (1978) provides another phenomenologically oriented critique of organizational studies.

not encompass the range of social interaction. While this research certainly does not view people in organizations as lonely isolates, it lacks a full consideration of sociability and its implications for institutions (they only cite one interactionist – Goffman). Presumably, the meaning, encoding, and revision of scripts develop in part through social interaction. Barley and Tolbert mention that the structuration process happens through interaction, but what is contributed by these interactions and how they unfold remains to be seen.

To fill this void, Fligstein reaches towards symbolic interaction to propose the concept of "social skill," defined as "the ability to induce cooperation in others" (2001: 105). Fligstein notes that "New institutional theories emphasize the existing rules and resources that are the constitutive building blocks of social life. I want to add that the ability of actors to skillfully use rules and resources is part of the picture as well" (2001: 107). Fligstein argues that people with social skills act to reproduce institutions continually, but they can also act as "institutional entrepreneurs" creating "new systems of meaning" (2001: 106). Fligstein takes important steps towards symbolic interaction, however his work is conceptual and short on *actual* interactions. Fligstein suggests some of the things that people with social skill do to induce cooperation in others, but without examining actual interactions there is little sense of how people come to have social skill, why people perceive others as "skillful," how cooperation comes about, or to what ends (Hallett, 2003a,b). Without a full consideration of interaction, "social skill" remains something of a black box. Despite these shortcomings, Fligstein makes great strides in erasing the imagery of people as institutional "dopes" (2001: 100).

Another effort at SI appropriation is made by Lounsbury, Ventresca, and Hirsch in their study of the emergence of the recycling industry (2003). The authors recognize that because institutional logics have been treated as "analytically removed from the more active struggles over meaning" (2003: 3), it is difficult for institutionalism to understand emergence and change. Though meanings tend to be stable, meanings can change through political struggle, especially through social movements. To explain this, the authors draw from Goffman (1974) and Snow et al. (1986) to replace the imagery of exogenous "institutional logics" with endogenous "field frames" that consist of "broader structures of cultural meaning" that help to "stabilize power arrangements, interaction patterns, resource allocations, and particular arrays of practices." At the same time, "field frames" are subject to change via political discourse (Lounsbury et al., 2003: 6). Though the authors are successful in using the "frame" concept to link research on social movements and institutions, the level of interaction remains obscured. Without interactions, frames are empty.

In summary, recent work in the institutional tradition has reached towards SI in an effort to overcome the "people" problem. However, these efforts have been largely conceptual and institutionalism has yet to take full advantage of symbolic interaction. This is not surprising given the ways symbolic interaction is misunderstood. SI is misconstrued as an approach void of structure, where "anything goes" (Fine, 1992: 90–91) and it is associated with studies of the self (Mead, 1934; Goffman, 1959; Stryker, 1980). However, a lesser known branch of SI focuses on how interactions both organize and are organized by the social order. This "organizational" branch is found in the lineage from Blumer and Hughes (Hughes is also cited as a father of institutionalism – Scott, 2001: 10) to Anselm Strauss and Howard Becker, Peter Hall, David Maines, and Gary Alan Fine (among others). The *interactive* dimension of this work is not adequately addressed in the recent structure/agency debates (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998; Sewell, 1992), for the focus is not merely action, but *inter*action. As Hughes long emphasized, it is not simply what people "do" that matters, but how they do so "together" (Becker, 1986). This branch is well known within SI and in the study of

work and occupations, but it has not successfully penetrated organizational sociology where institutionalism dominates.

Where earlier studies have reached towards SI, we grab it firmly with two hands, using it as a lever to move the boundaries the have formed to constrain institutionalist thought. Whereas Fine has called for a symbolic interactionist sociology that takes institutions seriously (1996: 14), we call for an institutionalism that takes interaction seriously. To make this call, we return to a study familiar to organizational sociology – *Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy*. In the inductive spirit of SI, we use this *empirical* study of a gypsum mine to uncover new insights into the nature of inhabited institutions. This rereading strengthens the micro sociological scaffolding on which institutionalism has been built. It creates a more unified theoretical sensibility that is born out of local empirical observations and it points the way for new research.

Why *Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy?*

We return to *Patterns* with three motivations. First, *Patterns* was written before institutionalism and SI became divergent "traditions," and it is not constrained by the intellectual division of labor that developed between the two. As such, *Patterns* is an especially useful site for developing a model of "inhabited institutions" that moves boundaries instead of solidifying them. This potential was recognized by Burawoy in his review of *Patterns*, where he saw a possible replacement of the structure/agency dualism with a duality that transcends the view of people as mere "carriers of social relations, transmission belts of external inexorable forces" to instead "treat social structure as a complex of practices" (1982: 847).[4] *Patterns* is a locale in which we can find a richer understanding of the interrelations among institutions, interaction, and meaning.

Second, even though its interactionist moments have been neglected to date, *Patterns* is recognized as a pillar of institutionalist thought. DiMaggio (1988) cites *Patterns* prominently in his invocation of the "pathos of bureaucracy," and Perrow paraphrases *Patterns* at length in the opening of his *Complex Organizations* text (Perrow, 1986:1–3). The legitimacy of *Patterns* within organizational sociology ought to make the SI rereading all the more salient.

Third (and more generally), sociologists tend to have a certain "amnesia" when it comes to the works of the past, even classic ones (Gans, 1992). The imperative of "new" research propels us forward, yet the historical development of sociology equips us with hindsight and a reason to look back, not to forget. Oftentimes these classic works speak to contemporary debates (if only we would listen), and we situate this article in the genre of revisiting sociological classics for the purpose of gaining new insights.[5] Although this intent sounds admittedly trite, it is valuable nonetheless.

For all of these reasons, the importance of *Patterns* has *increased*, not declined. Two years removed from the fiftieth anniversary of its publication, it is time to open the book, not close it.

[4] Where we provide a symbolic interactionist rereading of *Patterns*, Burawoy provides a Marxist critique. In short, Burawoy criticizes Gouldner for insufficiently situating the mine in the labor process. The Marxist critique is somewhat ironic since Gouldner's work took a strong Marxist turn after *Patterns* (Gouldner, 1979, 1980).

[5] Other works in this genre include Handelmen's (1976) reinterpretation of Donald Roy's "Banana Time" and Burawoy's *Manufacturing Consent*, which revisits the shop floor in Roy's work over four decades years later. (Burawoy, 1979, 2003).

Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy: Intellectual context, purpose, and relevance

> This study... is shaped by the conviction that if the world of theory is grey and foredoomed, the world of everyday life is green with possibilities which need to be cultivated. (Gouldner, 1954: 29)

Patterns emerged from Alvin Gouldner's dissertation research, which began at Columbia and was carried out during a teaching appointment at the University of Buffalo. In *Patterns* Gouldner responds to the prevailing readings of Weber and the general (mis)treatment of Weber's work in the United States. At mid-century, the US reading of Weber's analysis of bureaucracy derived nearly exclusively from the brief excerpt in Gerth and Mills's (1946) anthology *From Max Weber*, not from the full corpus of Weber's work. Gouldner's critique of these readings takes two forms. First, he emphasizes the need to examine bureaucracy as it operates *in practice* as opposed to an ideal type. Gouldner sought to expand Weber's thought in concrete empirical terms, to "evaluate, "modify," and "redirect" Weber's theory of bureaucracy via an empirical study of a gypsum mine (1954: 9). In a companion article, Gouldner criticizes his contemporaries who presumed that bureaucracy was the result of technological change "without inquiring into the *motives and meanings* which these changes have for the people involved" (1955: 501 emphasis added). Gouldner's compulsion to subject theories of bureaucracy to empirical interrogation reflects the influence of his dissertation advisor, Robert Merton, and his emphasis on middle range theories and research that move sociology "from programmatic to viable knowledge of bureaucracy" (Merton, 1982: 919).

Second, Gouldner critiques the "metaphysical pathos" of fatalism and pessimism that is attached to bureaucracy in the work of Weber, Michels, Parsons, and Selznick. *Patterns* shows how some types of bureaucracy can mitigate the administrative domination presumed in earlier work.[6] This is where *Patterns* fits into the developing Marxist project that would consume Gouldner's later career. Maurice Stein, who was Gouldner's student at Buffalo and his research assistant during the study, explains: "our search was for ways in which the process of bureaucratization could be tamed before it subverted the human goals of socialism" (Stein, 1982: 891–892). Gouldner was engaging Weber towards a socialist end, but the Marxian influence was suppressed in Gouldner's dissertation because of fear of McCarthyism (Stein, 1982: 894) and his advisor's functionalist orientation (Stein, personal communication). In fact, Gouldner's dissertation included a Parsonsian analysis of group tensions, which reflected the influence of Merton's structural functionalism. Gouldner published this analysis in a separate book, *Wildcat Strike* (1955b), but turned vehemently against Parsonsian functionalism in *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* (1970).[7]

Functionalism and Marxism may have fallen by the wayside, but Weber's legacy is still vibrant, especially in organizational sociology. *Patterns'* engagement with Weber and its implications for contemporary institutionalism have enduring relevance.[8] Gouldner wrote

[6] While the mid-century readings of Weber focus on his discussion of the formal aspects of bureaucracy, Weber also discussed how informal relations of collegiality and informal customs and conventions can temper bureaucratic domination (Weber, 1968:271–283, 319–325). Though Gouldner would likewise focus on the informal side of organizations, he was among the many not yet aware of Weber's thoughts in this regard. Gouldner also develops the active, dynamic side of Weber's work, which had been filtered out in Parsons's interpretation and formulation of the "unit act" (Boden, 1994: 27).

[7] Interestingly, Gouldner never published the same type of strong critique of Merton's functionalism.

[8] We recognize that in what follows we detach *Patterns* from Gouldner's developing Marxist program, a move that he might decry. However, our concern in this article is with *Patterns* and how it helps us to think about inhabited institutions and contemporary organizational sociology, not Gouldner's Marxist project.

Patterns at a key moment in the development of organizational studies. Modern organizational theory was nascent and the border between studies of work and occupations and organizational research was porous (Stern and Barley, 1996). Gouldner's approach resembles the extended case method, where a researcher starts from a theory and revises and expands it based on empirical observations in natural settings (Burawoy, 1979, 1998, 2003). Gouldner's observations of work patterns, bureaucracy, and its institutionalization at the mine reflect this intellectual context and methodological approach.

The analysis that informs *Patterns* was enabled by a serendipitous moment in the field site: In the midst of the study, the manager of the mine ("Old Doug") died and was replaced by an outsider ("Vincent Peele"). Gouldner used this opportunity to provide an empirical account of the sources and effects of a new form of rational management at the mine, promoted by the main regional office and enacted locally in the succession from "Old Doug" to Peele. This bureaucratic logic grew in strength after World War II, when organizations of many types began to adopt the bureaucratic practices that had made the mobilization for war a success (Selznick, 1949; Baron et al., 1986). Gouldner reports:

> The main office executives told Peele of his predecessor's shortcomings, and expressed the feeling that things had been slipping at the plant for some time. They suggested that Old Doug. . . had grown overindulgent with his advancing years, and that he, Peele, would be expected to improve production. As Peele put it, "Doug didn't force the machine. I had to watch it. Doug was satisfied with a certain production. But the Company gave me orders to get production up." (Gouldner, 1954: 71)

The new management introduced a number of new rules and practices – hiring people outside of kinship networks, increasing the amount of paperwork, and rigidly enforcing disciplinary procedures – accompanied by a new emphasis on hierarchy.

However, these bureaucratic trappings were not simply a local solution to production concerns. Rather, they were an expression of rationalized myths of productivity and efficiency. Gouldner explains that "With the renewed pressure of postwar competition, the main office expected things to start humming; traditional production quotas were about to be *rationalized*" (1954: 71–72 emphasis added), and "Peele, therefore, came to the plant sensitized to the rational and impersonal yardsticks which his superiors would use to judge his performance" (1954:72).

While rationalized myths of productivity partly explain the bureaucratization of the mine, the shift in personnel is also central. Gouldner describes the administrative system used by "Old Doug" as an "indulgency pattern," characterized by worker-manager trust, low surveillance, and high autonomy. The indulgency pattern underscores a positive description of the informal authority, resources, and practices that had been in place at the mine, providing the context for Peele's entry as the new manager. The recognition that Peele entered not an absence of bureaucracy, but rather an active social world with clear markers of (local) status and legitimacy is vital. Gouldner explains that "Peele intensified bureaucracy not merely because he wanted to, not necessarily because he liked bureaucracy . . . but also because he was constrained to do so by the tensions of his succession" (1954: 98). Peele entered the mine as an outsider unable to tap existing informal network ties, but with a mandate to change productivity. As a result, the informal authority created by the indulgency pattern was closed to Peele, and the formal authority provided by bureaucracy was the option that remained.

Gouldner also attends to the conflicts that accompanied the bureaucratization process at the mine:

> Weber tended to focus on the contribution which bureaucratic methods made to the organization as a *whole*. . . (predictability and performance). But do bureaucratic rules provide equally efficient vehicles for realizing the ends of all strata within an organization? Do factory rules, for example, enable workers to predict things which are of most concern to them?" (Gouldner, 1954: 26)

In other words, what happens when the "means" and "ends" valued by workers and management clash? To answer this question, Gouldner expands his discussion of the indulgency pattern to consider variation between the work and management of the surface and subsurface mine. He argues that the administration of bureaucracy rests between the interests at stake – in the case of the gypsum mine, between the managers who sought efficiency, status, and handling the regional offices, and the mineworkers, who cared for safety, status, and control.[9] These conflicts produced three different patterns of bureaucracy: (1) "mock bureaucracy," where bureaucratic rules are in place but are largely ignored or inoperative, (2) "representative bureaucracy" where there is voluntary consent based on mutual interests and (3) "punishment-centered bureaucracy" where the focus is on the enforcement of rules regardless of their utility.

The three patterns of bureaucracy reflect Gouldner's attention to the public, intended aspects of bureaucracy, and to the less public, informal, unintended effects. Indeed, at the gypsum mine, bureaucratization and the resistance that it fostered led to the disintegration of Peele's management and a strike on the part of the workers, a case of Merton's "unintended consequences" par excellence, and hardly a model of efficiency. Weber's theory of bureaucracy dealt only with the "manifest functions of bureaucratic administration . . . to wit, that they are efficient techniques for realizing some goal" (1954: 25). This view, Gouldner says,

> is the publicly accepted rationale. . .[A] fuller explanation of bureaucratic survival, however, must take into account not only the publicly familiar and prescribed consequences, but also those that are unintended and not conventionally discussed. . . It would be entirely premature, then, to assume that bureaucracies maintain themselves solely because of their efficiency. (1954: 25–26)

In the hands of Merton and his students such as Gouldner, bureaucracy became the focal object for analysis, with "rational efficiency" a claim rather than a source of persistence.

By double fitting Weber's theory with his observations of the mine, Gouldner develops a supple, complex picture of bureaucracy. Instead of treating bureaucracy as a monolithic organizational form with "Gibraltar-like stability," Gouldner notes that Weber himself "thought of bureaucracy as a Janus-faced organization, looking two ways at once. On the one side, it was administration based on expertise; while on the other, it was administration based on discipline" (Gouldner, 1954: 22). Weber himself seemed to recognize multiple types, and Gouldner rejects the ideal typical image of bureaucracy as a rational, efficient organizational form, an image that some of his contemporaries had begun to take literally.

Gouldner also rejects Weber's description of bureaucracy as a formal structure of oppressive conformity – the infamous "Iron Cage." While punishment-centered bureaucracy is the form that is least attentive to the interactions that support informal administrative legitimacy,

[9] It is worth noting that many of the substantive issues around which these differences focused – e.g., safety – over time are the focus of formal, external government regulation and are the focus of considerable institutionalist attention (Schneiberg and Tim Bartley, 2001).

mock and representative bureaucracies are based on implicit and explicit agreements between workers and management, creating a more optimistic alternative.[10]

The influence of *Patterns* on institutionalism is widespread, if underappreciated. A key question for an institutionalist is "why bureaucracy as an organizational form for this mine?" In answering this question, *Patterns* displays the analytic power of the institutionalist approach. Gouldner develops a magisterial account of external sources for the formalization of controls at the mine, the pressures for increased production coming from the regional office and more diffusely from a national postwar focus on productivity and rationality, and the mythology of bureaucracy as the appropriate solution. He also recognizes the set of rationalized and rationalizing beliefs that accompany managerial succession, and the challenges of implementing change in the face of past practices. In this way, *Patterns* foreshadows institutionalist research on inertia (Hannan and Freeman, 1984; Bartunek, 1984), isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983), and the spread of formalized, modern personnel practices (Baron et al., 1986, 1988; Dobbin et al., 1993; Dobbin and Sutton, 1996; and Edelman, 1990, 1992).

Although contemporary institutionalism gives primacy to *external* resources and cultural meanings as opposed to local beliefs and values, *Patterns* has elements of both. What Gouldner describes as the "indulgency pattern" is the embodiment of craft knowledge and control (Juravich, 1985), a broader cultural logic that privileged worker skill and autonomy and was highly valued by workers at the local level of the mine. However, the diffusion of bureaucracy in the postwar era involved a different and contending cultural logic, that of accountability (Hallett, 2003b; Corwin, 1965; Blau et al., 1966; Miller, 1967; Hall, 1968). In this way, Gouldner's gypsum mine was a battlefield in which competing institutional logics collided (Heimer, 1999).

The tensions between these competing logics are not easily reconciled. However, what Gouldner identifies as "mock bureaucracy" – where bureaucratic rules are present but ignored – is one such attempt, and it foreshadows another key tenet of new institutionalism, "loose coupling" (Weick, 1976; Meyer and Rowan, 1977). What is "mock bureaucracy" if not a "loosely coupled" system of indulgency (worker autonomy) dressed in the ceremonial clothes of bureaucratic accountability? As an instance of loose coupling, the mock bureaucracy at the mine involved an implicit agreement where the workers let the management save face and have their rules as long as they looked the other way as the workers went about their daily practices. The loose-coupling associated with mock bureaucracy is a far cry from the "tight coupling" that had been a presumed characteristic of bureaucracy prior to the emergence of new institutionalism.

In summary, by answering the institutionalist question "why bureaucracy?" Gouldner details how it was promoted as a general solution by the regional office, how it was brought into the mine by a new manager, and how it was enacted in the context of an established indulgency pattern. Gouldner's observations debunk the presumed efficiency of bureaucracy by focusing on rationalized myths of productivity and the unintended consequences, conflicts, and couplings that surround bureaucratization. Taken together, these are the hallmarks of modern sociological institutionalism (Lounsbury and Ventresca, 2002; Scott, 1995 chapter 1; Stinchcombe, 1997).

However, as a parent of institutionalism, Gouldner's work has a strong rebuke of the offspring's subsequent path. Gouldner's field observations make vivid the dynamic nature

[10] This is where Gouldner hoped that bureaucracy could be tamed to serve human goals within socialism, instead of subverting them (Stein, 1982: 891–892).

of work and administration – a dynamic that is lost in the new institutionalist emphasis on macro environments and broad cultural logics. To the extent that bureaucracy can be called an "institution," it is one that is *inhabited by people doing things together* in the context of the organization. In criticizing the focus on bureaucracy as an ideal type, Gouldner foreshadows the criticisms that would emerge in response to new institutionalism some forty years later:

> The social scene described has sometimes been so completely stripped of people that the impression is unintentionally rendered that there are disembodied forces afoot, able to realize their ambitions apart from human action. This has colored some analyses of bureaucracy with funereal overtones, lending dramatic persuasiveness to the pessimistic portrayal of administrative systems. (Gouldner, 1954:16)

Once again, we are confronted with the "people" problem in contemporary institutionalism.

In contrast, *Patterns* brings people to life. By doing so, it engages another part of Weber's work – the concern with the meaningfulness of action. In the spirit of Weber's *verstehen*, Gouldner used field work to "get closer" to people and action. As a result, he found that bureaucracy could mean the indulgency pattern dressed in bureaucratic clothing ("mock bureaucracy"), voluntary consent based on mutual interest ("representative bureaucracy"), or the enforcement of rules regardless of their utility ("punishment-centered bureaucracy").

Unfortunately, the living, breathing nature of institutions that is seen up close is obscured by the distance of current work. *Patterns* contains wisdom that has become decoupled in contemporary, more stylized accounts of institutions. With its focus on external logics, contemporary institutionalism could not anticipate the three different patterns of bureaucracy that Gouldner observed. These different patterns do not inhere in the "institutional logic of bureaucratic accountability." Instead, they *emerged* as mineworkers grappled with this logic in their *interactions with each other*. To understand these interactions and their implications for an "inhabited institutions approach" we turn to the symbolic interactionist reading of *Patterns*. In doing so, we *do not* reject the institutionalist tradition that has grown from the work of Gouldner and others. Rather, we seek to expand it by cultivating interactionist insights that have been under-recognized. We treat these traditions as complementary, not competing.

The symbolic interactionist reading

> The meaning of [*bureaucracy*] has to be formed, learned, and transmitted through a process of indication – a process that is necessarily a social process. Human group life on the level of symbolic interaction is a vast process in which people are forming, sustaining, and transforming [*bureaucracy*] as they come to give meaning to [*bureaucracy*]. [*Bureaucracy has*] no fixed status except as its meaning is sustained through indications and definitions that people make of (it). . . In short, from the standpoint of symbolic interactionism human group life is a process in which [*bureaucracy is*] being created, affirmed, transformed, and cast aside. (Blumer, 1969: 12)

In this excerpt we have taken the liberty of replacing the focus on "objects" found in Blumer's original text with a specific object, bureaucracy, to summarize how a symbolic interactionist might view the topic. To arrive at this vision and an understanding of "inhabited institutions" in *Patterns*, an interactionist would take Blumer's three premises as a starting point:

1. Human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them.

2. The meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows.
3. These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters. (Blumer, 1969: 2)

From this perspective, the question is "how is bureaucracy interpreted, and how are the different meanings of bureaucracy derived from worker-worker and worker-management interactions?"

To answer this question, we must come to grips with the kinds of interactions that prevailed at the mine prior to and during the introduction of bureaucracy. The form of symbolic interaction that most directly engages these organizational concerns is the "negotiated order" approach. Founded by Strauss (1978), the negotiated order approach holds that social order is the result of dynamic interactions or "negotiations" between actors. To quote Fine:

> In observing organizations from a distance, we may believe we see a stable, unchanging system of relationships. Yet, the negotiated order approach has sensitized researchers to the fact that these relations are ultimately dependent upon the agreement of their parties and that they are constructed through a social, rather than entirely policy driven, process. (Fine, 1984: 243)

To say that social order is the result of interactions is not to say these interactions are voluntary. Interactions create (and recreate) social order, but they take place in contexts that enable, constrain, and shape them (Maines,: 1982: 275 Maines, 1977; Fine, 1992; Hallett, 2003a).[11] Key here is the prior negotiated order of the mine (the order into which bureaucracy was introduced).

In describing this prior order, Gouldner discusses how the mine was "enmeshed in a network of kinship relations" (1954: 56). The workers themselves describe how "the supervisors here have known each other for a long time. They grew up together. The same with a lot of the men. You walk around sometimes and talk over old times" (1954: 39). Because so many of the workers knew each other personally, interactions were informal. As a result, "everybody's sociable" and Gouldner describes "friendly and highly egalitarian relationships between supervisors and workers. 'You see,' explains a mechanic, 'the bosses associate with the men. They will drink with them at the saloon or restaurant, and there is a fine sentiment" (1954: 39).

It is through these interactions that the prior order of the mine was negotiated. These interactions precluded domineering management tactics and hierarchies, "For a man cannot easily behave in an impersonal, sternly rule-prescribed fashion toward his kinsmen, or for that matter, toward his old friends" (Gouldner, 1954: 56). To quote one of the foremen, "You can't ride the men very hard when they are your neighbors" (1954: 56).

If the negotiated order is not disrupted, it is continually reproduced, taken-for-granted, and maintained through the routinized interactions of the participants (Fine, 1992; Becker, 1995; Snow, 2001, 2003). Gouldner labels this taken-for-granted order the (previously mentioned) "indulgency pattern," where routinized interactions involved responsiveness by the management towards the workers, leniency and the flexible application of rules, second chances, and a blind eye towards pilfering (1954: 47–56). The indulgency pattern created an abundance of informal legitimacy for the management in the eyes of the employees (Gouldner, 1954: 55, 77). Through the routinized interactions of the indulgency pattern, the "meaning" of work

[11] This view resembles Giddens's argument that social structure is both the medium and the outcome of agency (Giddens, 1979: 67, 1984).

at the mine was established. To work at the mine meant to be loyal and trusting (1954: 41), and, compared to work in other mines and factories, the job was defined as a good one (1954: 47, 56).This prior order and its associated meanings were disrupted with the passing of "Old Doug" and the arrival of the new manager, "Vincent Peele." With the new management came

> Evidences of increasing bureaucratization. . . . Formal rules that had been ignored were being revived, while new ones were established to supplement and implement the old. Emphasis upon hierarchy and status were rupturing the older informal ties. . . . A cold, impersonal "atmosphere" was slowly settling on the plant. (Gouldner, 1954: 69)

These changes were *made felt through changing interactions* between the workers and the management. Gouldner states that the new manager ("Vincent Peele") was "ignorant of the magic words of condolence and congratulation," and he had no social "connective tissue" with the employees (1954: 84). Gouldner also describes the different interaction styles of "Day" (an assistant manager under "Old Doug" who was demoted by Peele), and "Digger," (the assistant manager hired by Peele to replace Day): "Generally, Day was a worker among workers, easily and informally relating himself to his subordinates; Digger, however, was every inch the captain of his ship" (1954: 62). A field note excerpt gives this picture 7 detail:

> I had to report to Johnson (supervisor of the board building) to find out if I could interview him. I found him in his office with Peele and Digger working on new job classifications. Digger had a very direct manner, and had taken command of the situation. He said to Johnson, "Get out your list, I want to check off the names." Johnson got the list out. Digger asked questions about who held what jobs. Johnson replied in a "yes" and "no" manner. Digger then gave Johnson the list of men he wanted classified for new jobs. (Later) In the sample shop, Digger came in asking for Day. He had a wood item he wanted painted. He gave it to Day, followed him around as he got the paint, watched him get it, and then stood over Day while he did the painting. (1954: 62)

The change in interactions created a change in the negotiated order, threatening the indulgency pattern and the associated meaning of work, and life, at the mine.

Through these changing interactions, the new management was directing the negotiated order towards "punishment centered bureaucracy," where the focus is on the enforcement of rules for their own sake. Chief among these rules was the enforcement of "no absenteeism." During the era of the indulgency pattern, employees could occasionally skip work with little justification or prior notice, particularly when gypsum orders were slow. Absenteeism cost little in the way of productivity, and counted much towards the informal legitimacy of the old management. However, the new management strictly punished absences, and the rule was formalized by extensive paperwork, sending a shock through the employee ranks (1954: 208).

However, the workers were not passive recipients of these changing interactions. Instead, they responded with their own interactions that valorized the prior negotiated order. Gouldner describes how the workers created a "Rebecca Myth,"[12] that idealized Old Doug and the indulgency pattern. In their interactions with each other (and with the researchers), the workers held Peele to the standard set by Old Doug:

[12] Gouldner takes this term from Daphne DuMaurier's novel about a young woman who married a widower but was vexed by his memory of his first wife (Rebecca), whose virtues were incessantly celebrated by the husband (1954: 79).

> Peele's the opposite of Doug. . . . He's always around checking on the men and standing over them. As long as production was going out Doug didn't stand over them. Peele is *always around* as though *he doesn't have faith* in the men like Doug. (1954: 81 emphasis in original)

> When Doug was here, it was like one big happy family. Peele is all business. (1954: 81)

> When Doug was here, all you had to say to Doug was, "Say, Doug, I need some board for the house." "Take a truck or a box car and fill 'er up," he would say. "But git it the hell out of here." With Peele, you have to pay for any board you take. (1954: 81)

These interactions served to criticize Peele while elevating Old Doug to mythical status.

As a mode of interaction, the "Rebecca Myth" kept the memory of the indulgency pattern alive, and these interactions were a form of resistance that culminated in a wildcat strike. Instead of having a monolithic meaning, the meaning of bureaucracy was actively *negotiated* in these interactions. As Gouldner explains:

> Even if supervisors see subordinates as failing in the performance of their role-obligations, the adoption of bureaucratic solutions will depend, in part, upon an estimate of whether they will *work*. The mine supervisors had to ask themselves, would the introduction of bureaucratic discipline into the mines, and an emphasis on strict conformity to work regulations, *succeed here*? (1954: 142)

By understanding that bureaucracy is negotiated both in reference to the prior social order and in reference to interactions among workers and between workers and management, we can better explain why Gouldner found variations in the practice of bureaucracy, each with different meanings. In addition to the "punishment-centered" form, Gouldner discovered the previously mentioned "mock bureaucracy" (1954: 187). A chief example involved a "no smoking" rule which was formalized, but not enforced, except when an inspector came to the site. Both the new management and the workers agreed to this arrangement, and when it was breeched, punishment occurred through informal interactions. As one worker explained, "There are a few guys who didn't even stop smoking when the inspector comes around. They are troublemakers, and *we let them know where they get off*" (Gouldner, 1954: 186 emphasis in original). Where punishment-centered bureaucracy was interpreted as a challenge to the old indulgency pattern, "mock" bureaucracy was interpreted as the indulgency pattern dressed in bureaucratic clothing.

Where "mock" bureaucracy involved an implicit negotiation between the workers and the new management, "representative bureaucracy" involved an explicit agreement. Chief among the examples of representative bureaucracy at the mine were safety rules. To quote Gouldner, "A complex system of 'paper work' and 'reports,' so symptomatic of developed bureaucracy, was centered on the safety program." However, Gouldner also found that the safety rules involved "the day-to-day *participation* of the workers in its administration" (1954: 204–205 emphasis in original). Through worker-management interactions, the safety rules were both enforced and obeyed (1954: 204). Moreover, these interactions had the latent function of building solidarity in relations that had been antagonistic. To quote one of the new managers:

> It is really wonderful how things can be worked out in this safety field. You must know Tenzman? He's regarded as a troublemaker. But when he got involved in safety work and discussed this with his supervisors, why they came away saying, 'He's not a bad guy after all.' He gained a lot of respect for himself. . . . You get into industrial relations in this work. And I'm continually pleased by the things that come out of it. (Gouldner, 1954:201)

The agreement and solidarity of "representative bureaucracy" emerges from these interactions.

In sum, we see that the symbolic interactionist asks the question, "What does bureaucracy mean?" The key to answering this question lies in the recognition that institutions such as bureaucracy are not experienced apart from social interaction. Workers and management are confronted with bureaucracy, but it is in the crucible of interaction that institutions are infused with meaning, and ongoing interactions forge the connections that provide the supple, durable quality of institutions. Rereading *Patterns* through the lens of symbolic interaction does not diminish Gouldner's goal of identifying types of bureaucracy. Rather, this reading recognizes that these types are produced *in interactions* through which different responses to and meanings of bureaucracy are negotiated. Moreover, these negotiations take place in a context of constraint. Just as rules imposed by the management constrain the workers, the managers are constrained by the prior social order (indulgency pattern). The meaning of bureaucracy is negotiated around these constraints, and through interaction bureaucracy is "inhabited" and takes on three different meanings. In the first instance, bureaucracy means "punishment," but this meaning is further negotiated and twisted through resistance that valorizes the old indulgency pattern. The interactions that comprise "mock" bureaucracy likewise keep the meaning of the indulgency pattern intact, though these meanings are symbolically dressed in bureaucratic clothing. Finally, "representative" bureaucracy makes negotiations explicit, and involves voluntary consent.

Three signposts of an "inhabited institutions" approach

Though contemporary institutionalism recognizes the divergent interests of workers and management as well as broader cultural logics, it lacks an apparatus for examining how bureaucracy is actively negotiated and experienced in local interactions. These interactions generate the multitude of meanings that constitute what bureaucracy "is," affecting its local consequences. This is the contemporary relevance of *Patterns*: Institutions are not inert cultural logics or representations; they are populated by people whose social interactions suffuse institutions with force and local meaning. The symbolic interactionist reading of *Patterns* provides much needed leverage for understanding the "inhabited" nature of institutions, and it moves the boundaries of institutionalism to encompass a richer appreciation of action, interaction, and meaning. These local dynamics are the micro foundations on which institutionalism has been built. Instead of ignoring them, an "inhabited institutions" approach embraces their role. Joining contemporary institutional concerns with interactionist insights reveals three signposts for new research on inhabited institutions, of which *Patterns* is exemplary.

Embeddedness of institutions and interaction

The recognition that life is embedded in obdurate social relations and contexts is central to the inhabited institutions approach. *Patterns* captures these twin aspects: on the one hand, the recognition of local negotiated orders that situate and define how the workers view the work; on the other, the location of the plant in existing community relations and the extra-local corporate structure of the General Gypsum Company and the bureaucratic pressures therein.

The first chapter of the book ("The plant and its community setting") locates the mine in the work processes and technology of producing gypsum, in the corporate and geographic structures of the General Gypsum Corporation, and in the community of Oscar Center.

Gouldner and his informants describe it as a community where "everybody's sociable," where "Everyone belongs to the [Volunteer] Fire Department. . . The young men play on the [Church-league] softball team and date the same girls. . ." (1954: 34–35). However, Gouldner noted that during his observations "the ebb of ruralism may be witnessed":

> The countryside was becoming industrialized and the farms mechanized. Canning, gypsum, paper, and other light industries moved in and grew. Farmers retired their horses, took to tractors, and adopted all manner of mechanical loaders, balers, and silage apparatus. Commercial farming was started; farming was becoming more of a business, like any other, and much less of a distinctive "way of life." (1954: 42–44)

On the one hand, these easy going, sociable, nostalgic community relations were carried into the mine and were manifested in the indulgency pattern that had been negotiated between the workers and the prior management ("Old Doug). For years, the interactions that constituted the indulgency pattern provided the definition of the situation at the mine. On the other hand, the growth of industrialization brought bureaucratic accountability to the fore, setting the stakes for the contentious interactions between the workers and the new management.

By embedding bureaucracy in both the extra-local context of industrialization as well as the local-context of the mine, *Patterns* links institutional and interactionist concerns. *Patterns* is exemplary of an inhabited institutions approach that calls for research that is doubly embedded, with an inherent micro-macro connection.

Meanings local and immediate, broad and public

The symbolic interactionist engagement with meaning is explicit, and it is seen as the product of situated interactions. The contemporary institutionalist concern with meaning is more implicit and treated in the abstract, as public culture. A holistic account of inhabited institutions requires that we consider both.

In the "old" institutionalism, the "meanings" that people assign to their actions are seen as a function of interests and structural positions within a hierarchy (e.g., middle managers like Peele and the variety of mine workers assign different meanings to their work because of their divergent interests and positions). The new institutionalism extended and refocused these concerns, bringing into view more directly the concern with meaning and cultural practices (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Lounsbury and Ventresca, 2002; Armstrong, 2002). This work gives less attention to the intraorganizational dynamics vivid in case studies like *Pattern*s. Instead, the new institutional lens gives more attention to external categories of meaning: "the market," "the family," "the state." These broad institutional categories frame organizational dynamics and establish the conditions of possibility for action in contemporary, rationalized, political and organizational contexts (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; 1991; Meyer and Rowan, 1977; Scott and Meyer, 1983, Friedland and Alford, 1991).

However, the extra-local focus that has become the hallmark of new institutionalism leaves under-explored the rich set of contingencies that Gouldner found at the mine; the fine-grained observations that led to the theorizing of punishment-centered, mock, and representative bureaucracy as distinct patterns of meaning. In *Patterns*, bureaucracy does not exist apart from the workers and the management, and it is through their interactions that bureaucracy is given its force and meaning(s).

At the same time, a focus on inhabited institutions must not neglect the wider systems of meanings that provide, authorize, and organize the elements of on-going activity. *Patterns* helps us to see that institutional logics, such as bureaucracy, *do* matter for organizations. The managers and workers in the gypsum mine were confronted with this logic. It *did* penetrate

their interactions: Though they stood over it to a degree, they had to deal with it in some way – they could no longer sustain the indulgency pattern as it was. Yet it is through social interaction that they negotiated the contours of this logic. The result is "bureaucratic," but not uniform, and through interactions three different meanings were generated (mock, representative, and punishment-centered). Actors are not simply the "carriers" of institutional forces (DiMaggio, 1988; Scott, 2001: 79, 131); rather they are the shapers of those forces (Creed and Scully, 2001). At the same time, those forces *matter*. This connection only becomes evident when we consider both extra-local *and* local meanings. *Patterns* is exemplary of such an approach.

A skeptical, inquiring attitude

The inhabited institution approach takes a skeptical, inquiring attitude towards the assumed operation of organizations, using a variety of empirical data to reveal a world that is complexly-textured. Instead of accepting the ideal typical image of bureaucracy on face, *Patterns* uses a wealth of interview, observational, and documentary data[13] to interrogate Weber's conceptualization. Gouldner was skeptical of the assumed properties of bureaucracy and how it operates in a real, as opposed to ideal, sense. This skeptical, inquiring attitude is common to institutionalism, which has successfully debunked the image of organizational structures as efficient and rational (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Likewise, SI grew as an approach because of its skepticism of abstracted, deductive models of presumed causes which may *or may not* correspond to empirical reality. Influenced by Blumer and Hughes' preference for direct observation, interactionists use this inquiring attitude in an effort to get closer to empirical reality (Colomy and Brown, 1995: 29; Athens, 1993: 171).

Although skeptical, the inhabited institutions approach views the world through the lens of "cautious naturalism": it is recognized that even though the world is socially created, people treat the world as "real" and "natural," and act accordingly (Gubrium, 1993: 100). As a result, useful (if imperfect) insights are gained from empirical observations that capture both structural and constructivist moments (Bourdieu, 1990: 122).

Nothing in this methodological sensibility mandates an exclusively micro focus or a macro one. Quite the contrary: Current debate poses as a central theoretical task the reconciliation of micro and macro, as well as structure and agency. The inhabited institutions approach underscores that this is partly a question of *methods and research strategy:* what you are able to notice, and how you are able to make sense of those data, in light of your research strategies. These divisions are too often an artifact of methodological constraints on the collection and analysis of empirical data (Boden, 1994: 3). However, as Stinchcombe and others have noted, the social world is not "flat." Instead, social worlds are variously and multiply linked. The empirical linkages that have primacy over time, or at crucial moments, shape the reconciliation of these divisions. *Patterns* makes this reconciliation seamless. First, it works from Weberian ideal typical forms and does comparative, within case, analysis. Second, it is closely attentive to the micro interactions that organize and ground the three forms of bureaucracy in everyday practice. Third, it squarely locates the mine in the local community and broader trends reshaping industry. This overlay of realities and the attention to the linkages – if a remarkable accomplishment and a particular kind of methodological directive – is the goal of the inhabited institutions approach. Instead of creating methodological boundaries on theoretical (or political) grounds, the inhabited institutions approach is more likely to

[13] The collection of which is thoroughly described in an appendix written by Gouldner and his colleague, Maurice Stein (1954: 247–269).

generate studies that mix methods to engage these core interests. It is an approach that can use statistics that speak to the broad environmental context in which the situation is embedded. It is an approach that considers the history of a situation. It is an approach that observes how people act, in situ, in the real world.

Following these signposts will lead to a "peopled" approach (Fine, 2003), one filled with dynamic interactions that are constitutive of what institutions "are" at the ground level. It is an intellectual home where institutions are recognized for their double construction: institutions provide the guidelines for social interactions ("construct interactions"), but institutions are also constituted and propelled forward by interactions that provide them with force and meaning.

What might future research that uses this approach look like? Though the approach does not mandate any one form of research, we recognize that it places some practical constraints on data collection. Multi-method studies are rare because there is a paucity of researchers who have both the skills and the inclination to do them. It is possible for ethnographers to consider the affects of extra-local cultural meanings and social structural constraints,[14] but it is difficult for quantitative researchers to consider the mediating and constitutive role of social interaction without doing fieldwork. The inhabited institutions approach does not privilege agency over structure, yet the imperative to observe interactions has the unintended consequence of promoting methods typically associated with agentive perspectives. Moreover, the imperative to study extra-local as well as local embeddedness places practical limitations on likely research sites. Perhaps the easiest way to study these micro and macro linkages is to study organizations, as organizations serve as an "elevator" between levels of analysis (Glaeser, 2000: 22).

While this research will not be restricted to organizational ethnography, this will be a tendency. One example of this is Fine's (1996) study *Kitchens*. Where we have used SI as a lever to expand institutionalism, Fine explores the other side, aligning SI with concerns traditionally associated with institutionalism. Using data collected through an ethnographic study of four restaurant kitchens, Fine argues that "An interactionist approach need not eschew organizational and system constraints" (1996: 2). Fine embeds his restaurants in the "institutional environment" of the restaurant industry, noting that restaurants are "integral symbols of a free-market economic system" (1996: 8). Despite their similarities, restaurants have unique qualities that fit competitive niches that are not fungible, introducing aesthetic concerns into economic reality (1996: 10, 11). Thus, at the local level, different kitchens have different definitions of the situation. It is within this multi-layered context that cooks infuse their work with meaning. Some of the meanings follow from structure (i.e., the status of a restaurant), but social interactions also have a constitutive role:

> While the conditions of the job [read structure, institutions] contribute to satisfaction, friendships also help to determine the quality of work life. These restaurants are characterized by deep and real friendships [read interactions] that tether workers to the organization. . . The workplace – the kitchen – becomes a staging area in which meanings are generated, often through talk, but these meanings do not merely float in an undefined space but have effects on relationships and patterns of action. Talk and action come to constitute the workplace. The construction of a meaningful workplace in turn shapes organizational outcomes. (1996: 222)

[14] Not only Gouldner in *Patterns* but also Nina Eliasoph and Paul Lichterman (Eliasoph, 1998; Lichterman, 1996; Eliasoph and Lichterman, 2003) to name just a few.

By doubly embedding kitchens, and by considering meanings both extra-local and local, Fine debunks the myth that hot, sweaty, dirty, economic labor is void of cultural "artistic" concerns: Cooks express the meaning of their work in part through "tastes" that are communicated in social interaction (1996: 14), and these meanings affect the labor product we consume – food.

Where Fine's skeptical, inquiring attitude reveals the artistic side of the craft of cooking, Becker (1982) debunks the essentialist, aesthetic understanding of artistic production. Drawing heavily from Hughes and the SI approach to social order mentioned earlier, Becker argues that "art" is not about individual artists, or essential characteristics, but rather *people doing things together*. As such, the "principle of analysis is organizational, not aesthetic" (1982: xi).[15]

Becker is renowned as an ethnographer, but his *Art Worlds* (1982) is more historical and comparative in its orientation. Becker compares a number of cases of "artistic" creation to demonstrate that art exists within a "network of activity" where people "cooperate" to accomplish "bundles of tasks," in a division of labor. Becker embeds the mundane work of artistic creation in social interactions. For example, painters are not lonely isolates, rather they interact with dealers, collectors, and museum curators, all of whom shape the final product (1982: 13). However, Becker also embeds art in conventions (established artistic practices):

> Conventions place strong constraints on the artist. They are particularly constraining because they do not exist in isolation, but come in complexly interdependent systems, so that one small change may require a variety of other changes. A system of conventions gets embodied in equipment, materials, training, available facilities and sites, systems of notation, and the like, all which must be changed if any one component is. (1982: 32)

While Becker does not explicitly engage the institutionalist literature, his work has much to do with institutionalism.

Thus Becker's treatment of art is doubly embedded in local networks of interaction as well as extra-local conventions that, when taken together, constitute an "art world" (1982: X). Moreover, it is through the interplay of these two levels that the meaning of "good" art is defined. Becker did not intend to "inhabit" institutions, yet his work contains the signposts of such an approach.

The inhabited institutions approach enables us to cluster seemingly different studies into a common area, revealing similarities in studies of restaurant kitchens (Fine, 1996), art worlds (Becker, 1982), and Gouldner's gypsum mine. Returning to *Patterns* and these studies helps us to point the way towards new research in this budding approach.

Conclusion and implications

Contemporary institutionalism finds itself grappling with an important question: "What are we to do about people?" In an effort to answer this question, institutionalism has started to reach towards symbolic interaction. However, these efforts have been tentative and largely conceptual, and the value of symbolic interaction has yet to be fully recognized by institutionalism. To broadcast its value, we return to a classic in organizational studies, Gouldner's *Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy*. We use a symbolic interactionist rereading of *Patterns* as

[15] For a similar study of "genius," see Farrell (2001).

a lever to move boundaries that have formed to constrain thought about institutions, action, interaction, and meaning.

Five decades after its first publications, *Patterns* remains an empirical exemplar of an inhabited institutions approach that is now visible through the hindsight of institutionalism and symbolic interactionism. The inhabited institutions approach focuses on *embeddedness*, not only in terms of the interaction rituals of the immediate situation (micro-level), but also formal organizational structures, and the broader conditions of possibility (meso- and macro-level). The approach focuses on *meaning*, not only in terms of macro-logics such as "bureaucracy," but also in terms of the interactions through which the contours of these logics are negotiated to create different meanings and lines of future action at the micro-level, actions that have consequences for the situation (or organization) in question. The approach takes a *skeptical, inquiring attitude*, using empirical data to interrogate presumptions while getting closer to reality.

As we look forward to new research on inhabited institutions, it is worthwhile to think about how Gouldner was able to conduct such a prescient study. As a piece of scholarship, *Patterns* reflects Gouldner's interests, initiative, and labor, but it also reflects the academic infrastructure from which it was produced. *Patterns* was written before institutionalism and SI became divergent "traditions," and it is not constrained by the intellectual division of labor that developed between the two. But it was not produced in an intellectual vacuum. Gouldner, along with a team of advanced undergraduates led by Maurice Stein, conducted the research for *Patterns* while teaching at the University of Buffalo, which has a long Marxian, leftist tradition. At the same time, Gouldner's dissertation advisor (Merton) was a functionalist. However, Merton's functionalism was not uncritical. Chriss (1999: 42) notes that via "the utilization of the critical potential of Weberian theory, Merton provided a critical perspective in organizational studies without having to invoke Marx, while simultaneously maintaining allegiance to standard (albeit modified) functionalist theory." Aligned with his emphasis on the "middle-range," Merton wanted to avoid macro abstraction and develop more systematic and empirically informed understandings of bureaucracy. This was his charge to his students Selznick (1949), Lipset (1950), Blau (1955), and Gouldner. Stein (1982: 891) states that while collecting the data for *Patterns* "we were working within the Mertonian conception of the dialectical interplay between theory and research."

Merton's students did case studies as a practical matter. As Selznick explains, it was something they could do "on their own." At mid-century, quantitative analysis was not prominent in organizational research, "so the alternative was to get into something in detail" (Selznick, personal communication). The case of the gypsum mine had special relevance for Gouldner's Marxist inclinations. Gouldner and Stein gained access to the mine through their union and communist party contacts. To quote Stein: "We were looking for a class conscious proletariat" (personal communication). *Patterns* is an empirical piece with an acute theoretical awareness of the tensions between modern rationality and human freedom (Lemert and Piccone, 1982: 742), or social structure and human agency more generally.

What has disappeared over the years is *not* the theoretical interest in reconciling structure and agency. Over the past two decades, the relationship between structure and agency has received considerable theoretical attention. What has become less common since mid-century is the use of organizational case studies that give detailed empirical flesh to those relations. By the time Maurice Stein went from being Gouldner's undergraduate at Buffalo to an advanced graduate student at Columbia in the early 1950s, the tide had shifted to-

wards quantitative analysis (Stein, 1964: 214–218).[16] This tide brought forth important new directions in organizational analysis, but it also created erosion.

Although we hope that some sociologists will follow our call for research in this "inhabited institutions" approach, we are not so naïve as to believe that this article will create a sociological melting pot. Institutionalists and interactionists will (and should) continue to ask different kinds of questions, answering them from different perspectives. But realigning boundaries will enable these traditions to grow. For institutionalists, Gouldner's discussion of the informal indulgency pattern – elaborated through the lens of symbolic interaction as a social order that is negotiated through interactions between workers and management – provides an interpretive context in which the institutional logic of bureaucracy is navigated at the local level. Because of this context and the interactions through which it is constituted, we can better understand how the meaning of bureaucracy is negotiated through interactions between the workers and the new management, spawning not a monolithic organizational form, but rather three variations: mock, representative, and punishment centered bureaucracy. Although these interactions may be a taken-for-granted part of the social order, we as researchers must *not* take these interactions for granted. Indeed, the most taken-for-granted aspects of organized life are the products of ongoing interactive work (Brown, 1978: 371).

For interactionists, Gouldner's discussion of the spread of bureaucracy – elaborated through the lens of new institutionalism as a logic that provides categories of meaning in which action is formulated – provides a corrective to the caricatured image of people interacting without restraint (Coser, 1976; Snow, 2001; Hall, 2003; Gusfield, 2003). Although it is true that the specific meanings of bureaucracy are negotiated at the local level, it is also true that what is negotiated *is bureaucracy*, and this larger logic confronts both the workers and management as an obdurate feature of their world. This broad cultural structure is complemented by more immediate organizational structures: the formal authority structure of the mine enabled Peele (the new manager) to impose on the workers. Thus, what is negotiated is not only mock or representative bureaucracy (representing the mutual interests of the workers and the management), but also the punishment-centered form. There are interactions and institutions that are brought to life through them, but these interactions are not always voluntary, and to understand these interactions we must account for these enabling, constraining, and constituting structures. Organizational structure is not (and should not be) reduced to the status of a routine accomplishment of everyday life. It is not something that is merely achieved and enacted in social interactions, which is the treatment that it receives in some ethnomethodological accounts (Boden, 1994). Although these important implications deserve to be discussed in an article-length piece, suffice to say the SI needs institutionalism as much as institutionalism needs SI.

Finally, we would like to suggest that this article has value for the discipline more broadly. Sociologists tend to have a certain kind of "amnesia," forgetting the contributions of mid-century scholars in the drive to generate "new" theories and findings (Gans, 1992). Yet these classics can be a vehicle for refreshing the approaches that developed in their wake. These works are valuable in themselves, but they can also be a means to a valuable end. They are a locale in which members of different tribes can think together. At a time in which sociology

[16] Stein (1964: 215) recounts one of his nightmares, as a graduate student in which Mills reads the first sentence of *The Sociological Imagination*: "Nowadays men often feel that their private lives are series of traps." Lazarsfeld immediately replies: "How many men, which men, how long have they felt this way, which aspects of their private lives bother them, do their public lives bother them, when do they feel free rather than trapped, what kinds of traps do they experience, etc., etc., etc." Mills succumbs, and the two of them collaborate to write *Americans View Their Mental Health* instead of *The Sociological Imagination*.

is increasingly specialized, this common ground is not only a source of solidarity, but also a fertile venue for the growth of vigorous new directions (Fine, 1992; Hall, 2003: 45).

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About our contributors

Tim Hallett is Assistant Professor of Sociology at Indiana University. His research interests lie at the intersections of social psychology, organizations, and culture. He has published research on symbolic power and organizational culture (*Sociological Theory* 2003), on how emotions "blow up" in organizations (*The Sociological Quarterly* 2003), and the social construction of leadership (with James Spillane and John Diamond, *Sociology of Education* 2003). He and Marc Ventresca have also published work that reexamines the microsociological components of the "coupling" concept in new institutionalism (*American Behavioral Scientist* 2005). Hallett's current research examines the social organization of "turmoil" in urban elementary schools. He is also doing a project on the dynamics of organizational gossip (with Brent Harger and Donna Eder).

Marc J. Ventresca is University Lecturer in strategy, entrepreneurship, and international business at the Saïd Business School and a Fellow of Wolfson College, University of Oxford. He is concurrently a research fellow at the Center for International Security and Cooperation, Stanford University. His research explores issues in the economic sociology of strategy and expertise. Ventresca's recent projects examine the institutional politics of governance innovation in global financial markets and the role of states, professionals, and entrepreneurial markets in the evolution of US/UK information services industries. He earned his Ph.D. in sociology at Stanford University and has served on the faculty at Northwestern University, University of Illinois, University of California-Irvine, and Copenhagen Business School.