

*“The limits of language are the limits of
my world.”*

Ludwig Wittgenstein

*“Marriage is a great institution, but I’m
not ready for an institution.”*

Mae West

*“Marriage is a wonderful institution,
but who wants to live in an institution?”*

Groucho Marx

*“To steal from a brother or sister is
evil. To not steal from the institutions
that are the pillars of the Pig Empire is
equally immoral.”*

Abbie Hoffman

*“An institution is the lengthened
shadow of one man.”*

Ralph Waldo Emerson

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OUR CURRENT CULTURAL PREDICAMENT

In 2007, the American subprime mortgage market collapsed, tanking both the global economy and America's faith in its institutions. Trust in key institutions - newspapers, banks, organized religion, and Congress, for example - hit historic lows, and in the decade since, that trust has not recovered. Falling steadily since the 1970s when such public attitudes began to be polled, Americans today live in times that appear unprecedentedly distrustful, and there are no signs of a reversal. The overwhelmingly divisive campaign, election, and Presidency of Donald Trump appears to have been sparked by this erosion of the public trust and, so far, it continues to con-

tribute to it.

Public trust is important, and in fact, it is vital to sustaining any community and any democracy. People have to feel that they can count on each other, that the decisions they make together will support their mutual interests, even when they disagree. People have to trust that their bankers'/elected officials'/doctors'/police officers' intentions are to serve as defenders of their interests, and not to harm them or scam them for private gain. Public trust is hard to rebuild, and deterioration of it can be self-reinforcing when the heartless and opportunistic, like Donald Trump or any number of megacorporations, exploit gaps in confidence to expand their influence and power.

It should not surprise anyone that

we are here. Years of neoliberalism have gutted the capacities of existing institutions. Almost every President since Reagan has employed rhetoric and supported policy specifically designed to erode public trust, and create a wedge between public institutions and the public so that private enterprise can fill in the gap. Neoliberalism - whose influence has extended far beyond the United States - has come up alongside globalization and new forms of imperialism, rapid technological advancement, rapid ecological collapse, rapid civil rights advancements in some places, and rapid Islamist and conservative advancements in others. These global phenomena and others have, for many, undercut bedrock assumptions about human existence and the roles of traditional institutions

in meeting their basic needs.

What is the role of creative practice in times as uncertain as these? Perhaps, first and foremost, it is to connect us once again to what is essential, the material, spiritual, and interpersonal forces that sustain our lives. Second, perhaps, is to situate ourselves, to set ourselves again in a location, to understand where we have come and where we are, to map the areas surrounding us, and then, from there, to learn new ways of articulating our needs and our desires and to chart new paths towards them. This glossary is a tool for that.

HOW TO USE THESE CARDS

This deck of flashcards is a key for a map that is always partially obscure and partially in discovery. Its intention is to name nuanced distinctions in such a way as to increase our sensitivity, and therefore our agency, within a crucial field of practice.

How do we build, nurture, or resist institutions in uncertain times? Our first step is to explore, expose, articulate, and validate; to comprehend the nuance of our objectives. We need to see what's there! And then we need to see what could be. But our language, and our lack of language, dictate the spectrum of our comprehension. Therefore, here in these flashcards, Inter Institute proposes names to more accurately account for the forms,

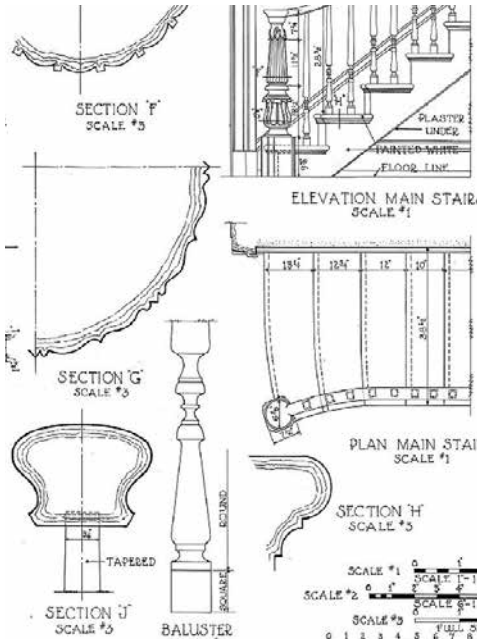
formats, functions, and purposes of existing institutions, and possibly also to prefigure entities that do not yet exist, that are somehow substantially different from what any of us know or might have known.

Like every meta-institution, language is filled with the remnants of historical collisions and hard-headed ignorance. But language is also our best tool. By relanguaging, we can treat our current cultural predicament as a puzzle to be solved through the unlikely intermingling of ideas, new pairings and juxtapositions that offer fresh insight on much of what we typically take for granted.

This book is only one small intervention in that direction. It will take many more to get where we need to go.

WHAT IS AN INSTITUTION?

*stable, valued, recurring
patterns of behavior*



In common use, institution applies to any deliberately created individual organization, often pursuing a social purpose. But for sociologists and social theorists, institutions manifest in both formal organizations, such as the U.S. Congress, or the Roman Catholic Church, and, also, in informal social order and organization, reflecting human psychology, culture, habits and customs, and encompassing subjective experience of meaningful enactments. Formal institutions are explicitly set forth by a relevant authority and informal institutions are generally unwritten societal rules, norms, and traditions. The creation of an informal institution is often regarded as an instance of emergence; these institutions arise, develop and function in a pattern of social self-organization beyond

conscious intentions of the individuals involved. Formal or informal (or both, as in marriage and money), they govern the behavior of a set of individuals within a given community.¹

So what is an institution? It is a habit that choreographs a custom. It is social architecture. It is an instance of cultural infrastructure. It is as much the Oral Law and it is the Written Law. It participates in the daily redefinition of our world according to us.

1 Too much of this top paragraph was taken from directly from Wikipedia to avoid citation. (“Institution.” Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, 20 Feb. 2017. Web. 26 Feb. 2017.) Wikipedia is itself a very interesting co-institutional form, one that accumulates and produces a new kind of knowledge that is horizontal, anti-authorial, and dynamic. Citing Wikipedia is like citing our vast collective, and growing, intelligences.

And then, what is not an institution? Some of the trouble of knowing comes from how few words we have to distinguish them, and how soft and loose and failing they thus are. One word to describe multitudes only helps to obscure them from us, and in times like these it should be the calling of all cultural practitioners and concerned citizens alike to make clear, make known, and make plain so we can understand areas of strength and points of leverage.

WHY FLASHCARDS?



Flashcards are an educational tool and learning drill designed to aid memorization through active recall. They are most commonly written on index cards, which were famously invented by Carl Linnaeus - the man who formalized the modern system of naming organisms - to manage his vast amounts of data. One side of each card bears a question or prompt,

and the other side an answer. They have proven especially useful in the learning of new vocabulary, but can be used with any subject matter bearing a question-and-answer format.

This deck of flashcards aims to help the user learn new vocabulary that can help in new institutional engagements. For these cards, it isn't entirely clear which side contains the question, and which the answer. One side displays the name of an institution and its definition; on the other side is an example of this institution. Front and back, in the case of this deck, are interchangeable.

Users are also encouraged to add to these flashcards by using any of the blank cards included at the back of the deck.

INSTITUTIONAL PREFIXES
GLOSSARY OF

Inter Institute

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