

INTRODUCTION

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Institutions have always loomed large in the writing of early modern history. Even when most historians concentrated almost purely on political or religious history, institutions—parliaments, diets, law courts, the church—were inevitable features of the landscape, even if they were often examined mainly for their place in a political narrative. As social and economic history has become more prominent in the historiography, historians have looked again to institutions. Guilds, confraternities, charities, schools: all have given historians ways to explore the daily life of the common people, their material life, and their perceptions of the world.

One reason why historians have written about institutions is that there were so many institutions to write about. The early modern period, despite the depredations of the Reformation on ecclesiastical institutions, was overall a period of institution-building. In the aftermath of the Renaissance and the upheavals of the Reformation and the Catholic Reformation, the ecclesiastical dominance of cultural, educational and social institutions was broken. Secular institutions as well as Protestant ones flourished, while at the same time the Catholic church itself found innovative institutional ways to renew its position in European society. State-building also played a role. Even in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century, governments were already creating their own institutions to rival or even replace those of the church: one thinks, for example, of new secular provision of poor relief in the sixteenth century. The intense bellicosity of the age of religious wars down to the mid-seventeenth century greatly stimulated this process of state-building, with all its attendant institutionalization, not least in the military itself, as permanent armies emerged in the seventeenth century, with permanent regiments which in many cases evolved rich institutional cultures which can seem bizarre to the outsider's eye. At the same time, international trade and the expansion of European power into the outside world saw the creation of new kinds of economic organisations, both to conduct trade (commercial companies such as the Dutch East India

Company or the English Merchant Adventurers spring to mind) or to regulate it. And, for reasons ranging from state-building to the expansion of print, a new set of cultural institutions—academies, reading societies, public libraries, museums—began slowly to appear from the sixteenth century onwards. The eighteenth century in particular saw a great explosion of such groups, and indeed the history of the Enlightenment in some countries could easily be interpreted as, in part, a kind of institutionalisation of previously informal cultural practices and impulses.

Although historians have always paid attention to institutions, sometimes that attention has been rather narrow in focus. When an institution in itself has been the object of study—rather than, for example, cultural practices within it—the history in the past has often failed to go beyond a more or less dry or antiquarian chronology of that particular body's development or role, based on its ordinances and regulations. Institutions seen in this way have often been studied in isolation, without a consideration of the wider context within which they could be viewed. On the other hand, if studies have approached institutions from the standpoint of their social role, they have often been viewed from the outside, as agents of control, repression, or modernization on the part of the state. By concentrating on the formal mechanisms of power—the ways in which institutions were *supposed* to function, either in themselves or as part of the social framework—scholars have often ignored the ways in which institutions in the early modern period actually *did* function. They also have sometimes failed to consider the cultural assumptions of the people involved in them, which directly affected their operation and social role.

Even when these issues have been considered—and certain fields, such as the history of science, have started to think along these lines—the issue of institutions being considered on their own remains to some degree a problem. The goal of this volume is to begin to approach these questions. It originated in a 1999 conference at King's College London which explicitly sought to go beyond the study of any individual institution to a comparative approach. Although most of the essays still consider only one institution, and indeed each essay can be profitably read as a separate, self-contained entity, the overall goal has been to examine all the institutions considered here (and many more of other types) from the same standpoint, even though the institutions vary in time period, social and geographical context,

type, and purpose. In essence, what the participants in this project are suggesting is that many institutions of different types shared particular cultural practices, needs, and attitudes. Whether someone was a member of an army, an academy, or a university, similar formal and informal codes of behaviour informed the operations of their particular institutional communities. The essays in this collection should therefore be regarded comparatively, with similar themes re-appearing on the landscape of many widely varying institutions.

One of the most important issues for the members of any institution was establishing and maintaining a sense of the institution's identity. This could include a set of myths about origins, rules about proper conduct, a sense of an institution's purpose, the boundaries of the community (and consequently perhaps a sense of an "other" or set of others against which the institution could be defined), and relationships with the rest of society. Both the customary practices and norms of institutions and the values and purposes that lie behind those norms help to give an institution a sense of identity. It is fair to say that this theme of communal definition overlaps with most of the other themes in the book, and indeed virtually every essay in the book could be read from this standpoint. Here we have selected two essays which particularly concentrate on dilemmas about self-definition. Where, the authors ask, did these institutions find their purpose and the structure and myths on which they should pattern themselves? Why was this important? And how did this relate to their image in the outside world?

In her contribution, "Mathematical Martyrs, Mandarin Missionaries, and Apostolic Academicians: Telling Institutional Lives," Florence Hsia explores some of these themes by looking at Jesuit missionaries to China in the seventeenth century. Because mathematics, astronomy, and scientific instruments interested the Chinese more than Christianity, the Society's Chinese mission had an important scientific component. Hsia consequently places their story, and her way of telling it, within the historiography of early modern science, which has, perhaps more than many fields, begun to consider the nature of institutions and normative practices within them, including the concept of the construction of "personae" in early modern science. Hsia notes the similarities between one vision of Jesuit activity (a vision which, in fact, competed with other potential models for missionaries) as a parallel with the work of academicians at the Académie Royale des Sciences in Paris, with whom the Jesuits in fact collaborated. The

scientific work of certain Jesuits, Hsia argues, made it possible for them to construct an entirely new kind of persona for a missionary. This case study makes a larger point about institutional identities: although an institution could construct its own identity and impress this upon its members, it was also possible for members of institutions themselves to alter the communal identity through their own actions or their own views.

One influence on how the Jesuits' corporate identity was expressed depended on which audience they were addressing; academicians would naturally have been more sympathetic to an academic self-presentation than would some of the more disapproving within the Society of Jesus. This question of audience also features in another essay about the self-definition of institutional communities, Ian Gadd's "Were Books Different? The Stationers' Company in Civil War London, 1640–1645." The Stationers were a commercial company like many others of the period in London (another, the Goldsmiths', is studied in another essay in this volume, by Janelle Jenstad). Gadd examines the Stationers in a period of commercial and political crisis to see how, given their essential similarities to other companies, they perceived themselves and explained themselves to others. He found that, when it suited the company, its members appealed to the specialness of books to set themselves apart. Other trades were "more sordid and ignoble"; books affected national politics and, they said, if the Company was not given the authority to regulate their production, this could fan the flames of political conflict. Yet at other times the Stationers found it useful to suggest that they were simply one of a large number of commercial companies. Like Hsia's Jesuits, Gadd's Stationers actively pondered their own image, their specialness in their own eyes, and their own definition vis-à-vis other institutions, or vis-à-vis sources of authority. This is a theme we will see repeatedly in the essays in this book: articles reflecting on the disciplinary régimes of various institutions, their rivalries, even their corruption and subversion, all, in some sense, turn back on corporate groups' notion of their identity, their self-presentation, and the way that was sharpened by comparison or competition with some form of "other."

The very fact of "othering" suggests that we cannot see institutions in isolation. All kinds of institutions—from companies to law-courts to confraternities—operated in a complex corporate web, in which not only any individual member might well belong to numer-

ous institutions, but the corporate bodies had by necessity to interact with each other. In some ways the structure of early modern society invited conflicts; a variety of institutions either had the right to operate in the same sphere as others, or had similar interests or plans which forced them to do so. The importance of context is brought home by three essays concerning the cooperation or rivalry of institutions operating in similar spheres. Gayle Brunelle, in her essay, "To Beggar Thy Neighbour or Not? Mediation versus Vendetta in Commercial Disputes in Early Modern Rouen," examines competing judicial institutions in sixteenth-century France, an era which saw the creation of numerous overlapping and confusing jurisdictions. Brunelle describes a special kind of commercial court, the *jurisdiction consulaire*, which operated completely differently from other types of civil courts, in its ethos, its methods, and its results. Because the goal of the court was speedy and smooth resolution of disputes among merchants, who could not afford the punitive and expensive cases handled by other civil courts, the *jurisdiction*, Brunelle argues, was successful in its literal competition with those courts for cases which could theoretically have been tried in a variety of venues. At the same time her essay hints at a more informal corporate identity, that of the merchant community, reminding us that not all institutions were formally constituted.

Brunelle's description of rival courts in fact invokes a particular community eager for harmony and peaceful resolution of disputes. Christopher Carlsmith's work on early modern Italy also takes note of surprising cooperation, this time among institutions that could conceivably have come into conflict. His article, "Cooperation and Conflict in the Schools of Bergamo, 1550–1650," looks at three different types of institutions in the town of Bergamo concerned with the issue of education: the confraternities, the Church, and the Commune. It was not that these institutions did not have different plans and goals (and indeed sometimes were torn about their own priorities), and in some instances they were in fact in competition. But Carlsmith stresses that education in Bergamo was more of a network of initiatives, some experimental and innovative, and that because of the importance placed on education by these differing groups, there was a surprising amount of coordinated activity and cooperation even in a time of ideological conflict.

The networks of activities and interests Christopher Carlsmith describes, and the importance of context, are most amply evident in

the essay by Susan Brown, “Policing and Privilege: The Resistance to Penal Reform in Eighteenth-Century London.” Brown’s analysis of attempts to reform penal institutions such as Bridewell portrays a large variety of competing interests and—linking back to earlier sections of the book—identities and institutional cultures at play. An institution like Bridewell, Brown points out, was “contested terrain” in a series of culture clashes among the City’s governors, officials within the institution, and the actual inmates. Like Carlsmith, Brown portrays a network of penal institutions which formed a sort of system. But more important for her is the manifest struggle for control over the operations of penal institutions among groups, themselves often linked with institutions such as local government or charities, with differing sets of priorities: civic tradition, religious reform, the authority of the City Corporation, the implementation of ideas of various municipal charities, the retention of old cultures of authority within prisons, and so on. The most surprising institutional culture Brown portrays is that within the prisons themselves. With a longstanding tradition of self-government and autonomy among inmates, a real corporate identity (mirroring, at times, that of civic leaders), and an at best blurred line between inmates and officials, this itself was going to be a potent point of resistance to a harsher disciplinary régime. Brown’s essay shows once again that an “institutional culture clash,” as she puts it, can raise questions about an institution’s identity, purpose, and practices, and can demonstrate not only that different institutions tried to fulfill similar functions or occupy similar cultural spaces, but that a number of different and competing subcultures can exist within the orbit of any particular institution.

What it meant to belong to an institution is not always self-evident. While corporate bodies used different rhetorical strategies to make claims for their purposes and role in the world—as we saw, for example, with the Society of Jesus and the Stationers’ Company—one of the ways such a body would attract loyalty from particular members would be to make clear distinctions between members and non-members. One way this could be achieved is by “othering,” a process Kristine Haugen describes later in this volume: defining what an institution (or a member of an institution) is not, in order to say what it is. Disciplinary procedures, as we will see later, helped to clarify such boundaries. Many institutions also developed ritual occasions or visual or aural displays to give participants a sense of belong-

ing and identification with the corporate group. In the next two essays, we hear about ways that local government in early modern England helped to identify who did and did not belong, and, moreover, used iconography or display as a means of giving participants a sense of community.

Steve Hindle addresses the question of inclusion and exclusion in his “‘Good, Godly and Charitable Uses’: Endowed Charity and the Relief of Poverty in Rural England, *c.* 1550–1750.” Hindle’s institution is the parish. Like Susan Brown, he makes clear in his description of the operations of both private charity and the poor rate at village level that a multiplicity of interests and identities were involved. Parish officers, Hindle points out, could find themselves playing different and competing roles as distributors of private and public alms. But Hindle’s most important point for our purposes is the way that charitable bequests increasingly defined what made up a member of “the honorary poor.” It was not enough to be destitute or elderly; increasingly, to receive such charity one had to fit particular standards of piety, sobriety, and subservience. The essay makes plain how important charitable trusts were in demonstrating authority relations within a parish; the definition of who was a worthy pensioner was not only a form of “othering,” but also a means of defining the structure of local society. But as Hindle points out, the increasing identification of recipients of charitable doles as people who, though dependent, were specifically marked out (sometimes with special badges or clothing) as sober and industrious had marked effects on parish life. The poor were inculcated with particular values and, at the same time, they felt integrated into local society through their membership in this select group.

Victor Morgan’s institution in “A Ceremonious Society: An Aspect of Institutional Power in Early-Modern Norwich” is even wider than Steve Hindle’s: the entire city of Norwich. Like Hindle, Morgan explores ways that local people could be made to feel part of an integrated whole. Using a specifically anthropological analysis, Morgan looks at a rite of passage—the changeover of one mayor to another on the festive Guild Day. While Hindle concentrates on legal definitions of the sober poor and their day-to-day identification with their community, Morgan thinks more about the sensory experiences that might make spectators on Guild Day feel a part of things. Morgan argues for a concentration on the ritual and ceremonial for the life of early modern institutions, and once again, we hear about con-

text: the need to understand in what sphere of power relations, institutional networks, and, in this case, meanings and symbolic associations people experienced their institutional life. This article considers particularly the role of certain sounds in the Guild Day ceremonies to elaborate on the kind of images this would engender in the minds of hearers and spectators as they took part in the transfer of power in their community.

Displays such as Guild Day, or the processions of confraternities or guilds in ceremonies such as joyous entries, were one way that institutions could show a public face to the world. In our pondering of the role of context in institutional life, we have already noted that communal identity in part turned on relations of an institutional community with the outside world. The need for a particular external face to an institution shaped in part strategies of self-disclosure such as the Jesuits' particular choice of myths, while at the same time the desire to preserve the mysteries of a group or trade might well dictate a secrecy that was in itself both a dilemma and a potential source of bonding. The dilemmas over publicity versus secrecy could, at certain moments, be bound up in a complex of forces to do with commercial advantage, attainment of local power, and even wider debates about the implications of free communication for society at large. Eve Rosenhaft's article, "Secrecy and Publicity in the Emergence of Modern Business Culture: Pension Funds in Hamburg 1760–1780," captures such a moment. She describes two pension funds, one patriarchal, charitable, and disciplinary in character, the other, which was built on the ruins of the first, open to all and devoted, at least in part, to openness in its business relations. While addressing a variety of other themes that run through this book, such as the social, political, and institutional context in which the funds operated, the complex web of roles and motives of people involved in these institutions, the communal identity the pension funds generated, and the controls on behaviour implicit in their operations, this article devotes itself to the question of whether or not the running principles of the funds was a matter for public scrutiny. This issue was a live one at the time. On the one hand there was a feeling that competition made such disclosures unwise; on the other—and this is what makes this situation perhaps special to the late eighteenth century—the Enlightenment sense that society requires free communication to be able to progress. Even the fund whose principles tended toward openness had its own reasons to promote

secrecy instead. Rosenhaft's pension funds raise a host of issues about the changing roles of public opinion, the market, and the intersection of science, politics, and business at the end of the eighteenth century. At the same time, they call attention once again to issues of internal and external identity, display, and control so evident in many of the institutions discussed in this volume.

Display and control are inextricably intertwined for Janelle Jenstad, whose essay, "Public Glory, Private Gilt: The Goldsmiths' Company and the Spectacle of Punishment," delves equally into themes of external propaganda and discipline within an institution. She describes a London livery company at the turn of the seventeenth century which seems to have been in need of both. The Goldsmiths' Company might well have made similar claims to those of the Stationers; like printers, their product was a part of national political life, as the nation's coinage was intimately associated with their trade. This was one of the Goldsmiths' problems, because their knowledge of currency gave the company a bad image; they suffered from frequent accusations of abuses of the coinage. But, Jenstad points out, if the company had problems with its external publicity, it faced internal difficulties as well. She describes a company riven by a changing trade, with craftsmen increasingly alienated from the wealthier retailers and financiers who actually ran the company. Just as ritual was used in an event like Guild Day in Norwich to make people feel included in an institutional community, the Goldsmiths' Company felt compelled because of these problems to use rituals to enforce discipline. Theatrical use of shaming had two functions, Jenstad argues. Since problems were both internal and external (a similar situation to that described by Eve Rosenhaft in Hamburg), rituals of discipline had to meet both needs simultaneously. Not only were craftsmen reminded of the authority of company officers, despite the rifts between the groups, but public displays of discipline also could demonstrate to a suspicious public that the Company was well-regulated. The question of whether certain punishments were to be public or private was a matter of some concern for an institution with an uneasy relationship to the outside world. For some punishments it was better that they be private; it was a sort of defeat for the Company to see its members disciplined publicly by the city, for example for counterfeiting. Discipline was a delicate matter; in this sphere, as in so many, institutions had to consider both internal effects of shaming on the bonds and consciousness of community

and external ones of public image in a network of interlocking institutions and authorities.

These themes are equally evident in the examination of academic culture in eighteenth-century Paris by Reed Benhamou. In "Discipline and Punishment in the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture," she speaks specifically of the socialisation of academicians and students, pointing to an emulation of seventeenth-century courtly norms of civility which, although outdated by the mid-eighteenth century, were clearly thought crucial to the social status of the academy and its members. Discipline here was a civilising process. But once again, part of the story was one of relationships to context. The academy measured itself against the less socially distinguished St. Luke's Guild, and the attempt to emulate the supposed aristocratic manners of patrons was in part a way to distinguish itself from this rival institution. And as Benhamou points out, one reason for certain types of discipline was the problem incurred when individual transgressions could be mistaken for institutional ones. Thus in the same way as Jenstad's Goldsmiths' Company, the Académie Royale de Peinture concerned itself with external display as it went (reluctantly) about the business of keeping its members and students in line.

In many of these articles, we are able to analyse the norms, values, and strategies visible in institutions because problems or crises lay those processes bare. The last set of essays, on the theme of corruption or subversion of institutions, concentrates on just those problems. James Shaw's "Justice in the Marketplace: Corruption at the Giustizia Vecchia in Early Modern Venice," suggests that in fact we must see corruption as in some ways integral to the workings of the early modern state. The situation he describes in Venice, where he examines a lower court dealing with commercial matters, is similar to that outlined by Gayle Brunelle in her discussion of the normal civil courts in Rouen: because officials saw their jobs as private property, there was every reason to be corrupt, and indeed those who rented their offices were forced into corruption because of the high price of the rent. As Shaw points out, however, the concept of the purity of justice existed alongside this corrupt régime, and it was at times espoused by a higher court whose noble judges were of higher social station than the lesser nobles occupying the bench in the Giustizia Vecchia. These facts recall to mind several other familiar themes. The Giustizia Vecchia was in competition with other courts, which were trying to take away its powers; and the conflict in part

turned on differing conceptions of the purpose of the court (that is, of its definition). Judicial corruption entailed the use of policing and judicial procedures primarily as a means of making money; higher authorities attempting to regulate the court wished instead to rule efficiently. This was, Shaw says, at heart a struggle for power within the elite as those advocating authoritarian rule wrestled with the manifestations of the more inefficient republican régime. But as he makes plain, as long as private interests were culturally intertwined with public ones, this court and many other early modern institutions would continue along the same path as the *Giustizia Vecchia*.

Kristine Haugen's essay deals not with corruption but subversion. In "Imagined Universities: Public Insult and the *Terrae Filius* in Early Modern Oxford" she teases out the meanings behind the peculiar role of the *Terrae Filius*, a master of arts who at a yearly public academic ceremony in Oxford extensively mocked the lives and mores of individual academics in a Latin oration. Haugen's question, a question asked of other carnivalesque ceremonies in early modern society, is what function this mockery played for an institution that chafed under the ridicule and yet, while ritually expelling the individual *Terrae Filii* each year, did not abolish the appearance of the figure itself until the turn of the seventeenth century. Haugen's interpretation suggests that the *Filius* was in fact positing the existence of an ideal Oxford that actually did exist, an ideal from which unfortunately certain dons sometimes appeared to deviate. Because the dons were presented as anomalous, Haugen argues, the ridicule actually turns into a kind of advertisement for the university, which, presented in its ideal form, remains unflawed. This kind of subversion is thus not really subversion at all, but a return to themes of the definition of institutional communities. By "othering"—identifying what the university is not—members of the university, and outsiders, too, would gain a sense of what the university actually was. For a select group who could attend the Act and understand the Latin speech, the *Filius* acted as a focus for both external propaganda and internal bonding. Indeed, the kind of privileged information and inside jokes doled out in the *Terrae Filius*' speech would have made communal boundaries obvious. Those who understood were part of the community; those who did not were outsiders. The fact that the speech was perceived as a source of comment on the university from the outside world is suggested by its abolition when Oxford began to be suspected of being at once subversive and pedantically crude.

For more general suggestions on how we should think about institutions in early modern society, we should turn to our three commentators at the end of the volume: Joanna Innes, Keith Wrightson, and Anthony Grafton. But even our own brief introduction to the essays has, we hope, drawn attention to certain themes in the institutional history of the period. The basis of this book is an assumption that, at bottom, many early modern institutions followed similar normative paths, ones that can, therefore, be compared with each other. They concerned themselves with similar things: self-definition, ways of commanding loyalty and obedience from members, ways of displaying themselves to the outside world, ways of dealing with competition from rival institutions, ways of channelling corruption or subversion. Although we have used particular institutions to illustrate particular themes, it will be immediately clear to readers that all of the themes could be discussed for each institution. And there are more commonalities than this. Every institution, we learn from these twelve examples, conducted its affairs in the wider context of a more or less dense network of political forces, social groupings and competing loyalties, and this fact was bound to affect its operations. Every institution, moreover, depended on the interaction of the identity of the community with the individual characters and actions of each of its members, and sometimes these actions could change the identity of the institution itself. This will have been further complicated by the frequent crossing-over of loyalties of any individual who might come into contact with a multiplicity of institutions: a guild, a confraternity, a school, a neighbourhood association. Many institutions, in defining their own actions and roles, looked to other institutional models (the court of Louis XIV for the Académie de peinture; the Corporation of London for debtors in Ludgate Prison). Institutions and their members led complicated lives in the early modern period. These essays will, we hope, provide an introduction to some of them.