

INSTITUTIONS,
SYMBOLIC NETWORKS
AND THE TRANSINDIVIDUAL
CROSSING PERSPECTIVES.
AN INTRODUCTION

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1. *Theoretical framework* – 2. *First topic: autonomy and heteronomy in Greek anthropology* – 3. *Second topic: institutions and semiotic imagination* – 4. *Conclusions*.

1. *Theoretical framework*

Institutions are a much debated topic in many research fields: from law to social ontology, from anthropology to psychoanalysis, from philosophy of language to semiotics and linguistics. A consequence of this multidisciplinary interest has been a proliferation of terms and locutions as well as a large body of literature. So, in recent years, specific expressions have been coined and popularized in order to denote certain ideas on which most contemporary debates are centered. In particular, scholars from different theoretical perspectives have used a stratified lexicon, i.e. a wide variety of heterogeneous and interconnected forms. For example: a) “subject of institutions” – with special reference to the nature of the *social bind*, conceived as interdependence between complementary roles (cfr. at least DESCOMBES 1996, 2001, 2004); b) “symbolic network” – with special reference to the peculiar modes of existence of institutions, conceived as *normative entities* which are impossible outside of correspondences between signifiers and signifieds (cfr. at least CASTORIADIS 1975, 1977, 1978, 1996, 1997, 1999); c) “transindividual” – with special reference to the *relational common grounds* of institutions, conceived as *social tools* which mediate between individuals and a collectivity (cfr. at least GOLDMAN 1979; SIMONDON 2005; BALIBAR, MORFINO 2014). In short, these are some of the principal research topics examined in the context of such studies.

2. *First topic: autonomy and heteronomy in Greek anthropology*

The aim of this section of «Diritto&Questioni Pubbliche» is to investigate the nexus between such theoretical topics by addressing two key-issues: 1) the differences between Autonomy and Heteronomy in the context of human practices and experiences; 2) the relationship between the concepts of

“Institution” and “Semiotic Imagination”. In his paper, Jeff Klooger offers a detailed analysis of the «self-creating nature of humanity and the project of autonomy» by focusing on a pivotal moment in Castoriadis’ analysis of Greek anthropology: the comparison between the «Aeschylean Anthropogony and Sophoclean Self-Creation of *Anthropos*». According to the French philosopher, the Aeschylean idea that human skills are a gift from the god Prometheus is undermined by the vision of human beings expressed in the Sophoclean *Antigone* as “inventors” of their own skills. Klooger criticizes Castoriadis’ approach and argues by that «Castoriadis’ argument risks obscuring the difference between the unknowing self-creation most prevalent through human history and the knowing and deliberate self-institution of autonomy».

3. *Second topic: institutions and semiotic imagination*

The second question of this special issue is concerned with the relationship between «the concept of *institution*» and «the role of *semiotic imagination*». The existence of a deep link between such concepts is argued for in Antonino Bondi’s paper. The author explores the meaning and the extent of this link by taking into account possible points of contact between some theoretical propositions of the Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology and some insights of the Castoriadis’ theory of social imaginary. Bondi defines institutions as «a social imaginary creation, where the body of the individual subject, with its potential of semantic meaning, is» a creative device. Bondi substantiates this definition by referring to Descombes’ theory of institution, according to which institutions – more specifically, *semiotic institutions* – mediate between the participation of the individual in the «community life and the set of material and immaterial rules and roles» through which cultural perception and symbolic forms are binded to each other.

4. *Conclusions*

In conclusion, the two essays give, from different points of view, a valuable account of a set of theoretical questions that are at the centre of one of the more fascinating philosophical debates on the nature of institutions and human forms of life. We hope that the readers will find these articles useful and informative.

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