Alas, having seen Jutta’s contribution already I’m quite intimidated. My intentions (and capacities) here are not so ambitious as to provide an integrated essay of my own on the topic of institutions and identities, but rather respond to Jennifer and Dorry’s work on the same. Nor will I make more than an inadequate effort to integrate the two. I hope my pre-emptive self-criticism has shocked and awed.

Institutions, Identities, and Anarchies

Jennifer makes perhaps the single best argument I have seen to resurrect neorealism from the dead. By an extraordinarily imaginative application of ingroup-outgroup psychology and institutionalism, she puts together a neoclassical realist account that goes far beyond what neorealism has been able to do. But I think the project still ultimately collapses, as anarchy is still treated not as an institution, but as an “environment.” Anarchy is treated as a constant, not a variable. Its multiplicity of meanings is attributed to institutions, but only to domestic ones. This, for me, was a very valuable move, but I think it brings into serious question as a consequence the ability of Jennifer to continue to assert “the causal primacy” of anarchy. While anarchy continues to constantly instill the fear of death in states (I find this problematic, too), its self-help desiderata actually manifests itself in every possible foreign policy behavior: alliances, isolation, refusal to emulate powerful practices, etc. These “deviations” from neorealist orthodoxy are all explained through domestic institutions. This is good, but it eviscerates anarchy of its “environmental” status, I’d suggest. She recovers anarchy’s effects in domestic institutional contexts by ascribing a single dominant domestic identity to all states: autonomy. I find this very problematic, especially given the fact that states have many domestic identities, none of which could be assumed to be predominant. In what follows I treat each of the above issues in turn. But before I do, I want to stress, since a stream of criticism follows, that Jennifer’s work, in my opinion, is the single best I’ve seen by a neorealist to make that theory respond creatively and intelligently to the constructivist challenge. It really is a call for dialogue, rather than a mere defense.

Anarchy is an ahistorical and universal constant, not an institution.

In arguing this, Jennifer is asserting that the lack of a definitive enforcer of agreements among states is a context within which the practices of states occur. In other words, its not institutions or intersubjectivity all the way down, but there is a hard rock of anarchy which constrains what outcomes can ultimately be expected. I have a number of concerns about this.

Why is anarchy the only environmental constraint of interest? After all, as we will see, Jennifer argues that its self-help implications can be interpreted by states in every variety of ways. But why isn’t the state system itself a more meaningful environment? Most, (but not all) constructivists, readily stipulate to it, or at least bracket it, willing to concede that any constructivist IR theory may assume its existence. Arent there many other “environments” that could have been chosen as the bedrock of realism? Why is anarchy the one so privileged? I ask because the introduction of other institutions ends up making anarchy’s implications indeterminate.

It seems to me that anarchy is one of the least objectified aspects of the international environment, i.e., it is far more like an institution, that is, an objective reality that is transformed in a multiplicity of fashions through both intentional and unintentional interactions among agents into an ongoing social construction, than other aspects of the international environment. For example, as mentioned, the states system, but also sovereignty, great power dominance of world politics, and eternal poverty for the majority of the globe’s populations. These latter all appear to me as environments within which IR is more stably situated as objectified objective realities than the absence of a repository of power above the state.

One answer Jennifer gives is that anarchy ensures there are “hidden trapdoors” in international politics, that no state can ever know for certain who its enemies and allies are; security dilemmas are always possible, and so forth. But is this really true?
I think its true only if one assumes that anarchy has the same frightening meaning for every possible dyad of states. But we know that isn’t true. The old US-Canada eg, or British v. N Korean nukes. In fact there is a continuum of anarchy in interstate relations. Some states are completely certain that other states are open pits; no hidden trapdoor. They are just dangerous. Others are perhaps trapdoors; others are most certainly not. Jennifer’s use of ingroup-outgroup relations to explain why we do have institutionalized identity relationships of friend or foe implies in fact that anarchy is a socially constructed, contextualized, variable, not the ahistorical universal constant she stipulates.

Jennifer goes on to argue that states have no knowledge or control over the placement of these trapdoors. Don’t they? It seems to me that states often try to institutionalize “deanarchicized” environments between themselves and even hostile Others. What’s CFE in Europe all about, or any arms control agreement?

Jennifer spends a fair amount of time applying “natural selection” dynamics to IR, arguing that if states don’t engage in self-help, if they don’t emulate the most powerful states, “imitating what succeeds in amassing military, economic, political, and social resources,” they will be selected out. (I’m not sure what actually is included in the list of practices that would have to be emulated for the theory to be vindicated here. There is a falsifiability issue, I think, lurking)

But what if the “best practices” in the many less than fully anarchic environments between less than hostile dyads include cooperative dynamics, so that mutual cooperation, rather than competition, becomes the social practice that should be emulated? Couldn’t there be cooperative, rather than competitive, contagion effects? Perhaps survival is best assured through expanding the ingroup, rather than balancing against some outgroup?

Because the natural selection dynamic plays such a large role in Jennifer’s account, emulation of the most powerful state’s practices has a central role in the theory. But I think the evidence for what precisely must be emulated among the myriad of practices out there remains underspecified, so it is hard to know when the theory is working, and when it is not. Eg, does US isolation on the death penalty mean that the rest of the world is not emulating the survival practice of the most powerful state in the system? Does this mean Europe, Japan, etc. are all threatening their ultimate survival by not adopting this practice? If not, what are the practices that “must” be adopted? Perhaps Germany and Japan must go nuclear to survive? Or the 10% of GDP Israel spends on defense, twice the best practice of the US, dooms it to extinction?

Her discussion of Japan and Prussian practices in the 19th century implies to me that an alternative account of emulation would necessitate the exploration of the the “fit” between available practices in the most powerful states, and the discursive, institutional, identity terrain in any given state. Jennifer implies as much in her discussion of domestic institutions being the reason why emulation is multifarious. But if it is, then why aren’t identity, institutions, and discourse of primary causal importance, rather than anarchy? The latter appears indeterminate in its effects, despite being a pre-social natural environment, while the latter actually accounts for the outcomes we witness. Jennifer writes, on the contrary, that “anarchy is primarily, but indirectly causal, while processes (social practices, institutions, etc) remain secondarily, but directly causal.” I find this hard to accept after reading how the theory works.

Jennifer’s response here is that all domestic social practices are derivable from anarchy. Is this true? Are there no domestic social practices that are derivable from society’s interaction with itself and its state? Or from interaction between the state, its society, and nonanarchic parts of international politics? This doesn’t seem credible. Is Estonia’s European identity derivative from anarchy? Is imperial Russia’s Orthodox identity derivative from anarchy? Is the US’ democratic identity so derived? Is the connection between European racist identities and imperialism borne from anarchy? And so on. If we think these identities matter for how these states understand themselves and others in world politics, and they are not derivable from anarchy, then it seems anarchy isn’t necessary to account for the institutions, identities, and practices of states.

Jennifer does a wonderful job of differentiating her account of why states choose the foreign policies they do, based on domestic institutions and identities, from the neoliberal institutionalist functionalist account. It is worth paraphrasing this very important argument:

Decisionmakers have simultaneous and competing identities within the context of their group. The determination of efficiency is grounded in the practices from which state elite identities, interests, and behaviors are derived, so that even in obtaining survival for the
larger group (ie, making decisions on state security), decisionmakers make choices which have meaning for them only within ongoing group contexts. This is a powerful statement of the critical importance of domestic institutional and identity terrains for determining foreign policy choice, and choices not based on some apriori assumption of functional efficiency. What is unnecessarily added, from my point of view, is anarchy as the ultimate source of these domestic institutional identity contexts.

But there is more. Jennifer brilliantly links these domestic institutional milieux to international practice, showing the critical importance of discursive/identity/institutional fit. She writes that "emulated practices find domestic constituencies which themselves are institutionalized in some way so that identities, interests, and behaviors become tied to social practices, and so shape choices and judgements." This connection between international and domestic practice I think tells the story of similarity and difference among states very well. Moreover, Jennifer goes on to point out that even in the face of external threat, these domestic institutional arrangements might override the presumably objective desiderata of anarchy. But again, if so, what of the causal primacy of anarchy?

Jennifer’s insistence on the latter is based in part on a fascinating discussion of the fear of death. She writes that we have a constant fear of death, and so survival is paramount, so self-help, etc. And anarchy of course perpetuates this fear. I've already written about de-anarchicized spaces in IR, so the fear of death is actually a variable, but what’s more, I think Jennifer goes too far in deducing implications from this fear in the first place.

She writes that death has an unknown nature that is universally motivating. It is beyond human capacity to change, avoid, or control. And, in a little twist of logic, if self-help disappears as a constitutive principle, it means death’s inevitability has somehow been overcome. I have the following objections to offer here.

First, who dies? Do states die? Not often. What are the state’s equivalents of genes, in any case? Why should we expect that evolutionary theory should transfer to IR? Moreover, death is not unknown at all. We know it is inevitable, but we take all sorts of measures to prolong our lives, like not swimming after a big meal. Don’t states do the same? Aren’t institutionalized identity relationships, the ingroup dynamics Jennifer stipulates, in fact preventive medicine against premature death? Moreover, even if death cant be avoided, its probability of occurring in my lifetime as steward of my state can certainly be reduced, and has been in myriad institutional ways.

Moreover, Jennifer opens the door, through the logic of ingroups and outgroups to the obsolescence of death, perhaps. She writes that the fear of death causes self-help and the creation of ingroups v. outgroups. But why cant ingroups continue growing until the outgroup is a vanishingly small group of maladapted states? Or why isn’t world federation possible against some existential threat, say environmental destruction, nuclear conflagration, etc.? Once the ingroup/outgroup logic is permitted under anarchy, it seems that anarchy itself is in danger of death.

Finally, Jennifer traces the fear of death to birth, concluding that humans must engage in self-help to survive as a species. But isn’t it true that at birth we rely on others, on caregivers? If so, wouldn’t the logic of IR actually be bandwagoning with the most powerful caregiver? Isn’t continuous dependence predicted by the experience of birth, not independence, autonomy, or self-help? Doesn’t psychoanalytic theory perhaps have some bearing here, viz., that just as humans experience intense anxiety having realized that they are not their mothers (gender differences bracketed here), and engage in all sorts of consequent pathological behavior to recover this lost and illusory unity in Others, don’t Realists perhaps have intense, even pathological, anxiety over the issue of perpetual dependence, and so pursue the self-delusory aim of independence, assuming anarchy so as to make the quest seem natural?

Let me turn now to Jennifer’s very innovative treatment of in/outgroup relations. Going beyond Mercer, she argues that all cooperative behavior we observe in IR is in fact accounted for by anarchy, as ingroups form in response to the fear of death. But of course, all noncooperative behavior is also caused by anarchy, right? So, in fact, what accounts for establishing the boundaries of ingroup and outgroup membership? I don’t think Jennifer offers an answer here, but it is immanent in her discussion of discursive, institutional, and identity “fit” and social practice. Don’t in/outgroups form in IR because of global identity politics, themselves embedded in the domestic institutional practices discussed by Jennifer above? Moreover, if there are ingroups in
IR, as Jennifer stipulates there are, then what has happened to anarchy? Clearly, its operation must be suspended, to a greater or lesser degree, within ingroups, while accentuated between hostile groups. Again, institutionalized identity relationships are doing the heavy lifting in this theory, anarchy again and again appearing more as a distraction from observed regularities than as a productive explanation.

Moreover, all this in/outgroup distinction talk is far too neat, as it assumes there is a single axis of identification between groups. What if outgroup memberships varied? On some dimensions, eg, Israel is part of Europe’s ingroup, on others it is not. And what if different institutions within a state had different in/outgroup distinctions, such that the US Department of Commerce treats Japan as an outgroup member, but Treasury as an ingroup. Or what if there was a difference between the state and society, such that the society saw others as an ingroup (such as Irish-Americans and the IRA), but the state saw them as an outgroup (terrorists). And what if there is a shift in coalitional politics at home such that different identity relationships altogether are empowered electorally, and hence institutionally? And what if different issues result in different configurations of identity relationships? And so on. In other words, ingroup/outgroup relations are an important variable for an institutional account of IR, but need to be deeply contextualized.

My last substantive commentary is about Jennifer’s argument that autonomy is institutionalized domestically and acts as a domestic reproducer of anarchy internationally. She, citing Reuss-Smit and Ruggie, points out that autonomy is a constitutive part of any state’s identity, and is institutionalized through domestic practices at home. This may indeed be true, but arent there any other domestic identities that are also institutionalized? And dont some of these perhaps work against autonomy? Eg, dont democratic, dynastic, religious, ethnic, and ideological identities sometimes establish identity relationships with some other states (ingroups) such that autonomy is sacrificed? After all, one theoretical implication of Ruggie’s article was that states are constituted in complicated manners, historically speaking. The autonomous identity was one part of the post-Westphalian package, and is a variable, not a constant. Jennifer’s empirical evidence for the power of autonomy is the weakness of the EU. Im no expert, but I can say that Russia, under both Yeltsin and Putin, especially so under the latter, regularly sends presidential advisers and parliamentary staffers to Brussels to help them write domestic Russian legislation. Id argue this is part of Russia’s domestic European identity discourse, and mitigates any discourse of autonomy.

Let me conclude with a quote from Waltz that Jennifer uses: “if might does not make right, the some institution has intervened to lift them out of nature’s realm.” Precisely so.

**Institutions, Identities, and Bodies**

In Dorry Noyes’s, what I can only call beautiful, work on the Patum in the Catalonian town of Berga, we find a story of how an institution, in this case the festival of Corpus Christi, embodies identity relations within ingroups and between an array of in and outgroups. Here I wish to concentrate on Dorry’s treatment of the environment, the workings of the Patum as an institution, its relationships to ingroup and outgroup identities in and beyond Berga, the discursive “fit” between daily practices, institutions, and identities, and finally, how feelings relate to identity. Let me apologize immediately for bludgeoning all the careful nuance and subtlety out of Dorry’s writing so as to make statements that are more ham-handed than her text actually permits.

I think Dorry’s treatment of Berga’s moreorless fixed, uninstitutionalized, unobjectified, environment is truer to being an extra-discursive field than is Jennifer’s conceptualization of anarchy. What are these “constantly operating” environmental features with which the Patum as an institution is continuously engaged? There are several. The town's limited resources and consequent zero-sum competition for the same, its geographic isolation, its history of civil war, dictatorship, liberalization, European integration, and contemporary globalization. All these moments, while of course understood through local institutions and identities, provide a background and a common collection of referents for Berguedans. Dorry put it so nicely: Berguedans “belong to a world that cannot sustain itself and must destroy it to enter the world that can sustain them.” Doesn’t this “environment” severely bound the probabilities of what can plausibly be institutionalized identities in Berga?
What Dorry’s work raises here is a very difficult issue for social constructivists, I think: what is outside discourse? what is outside intersubjective reality? Well, there is an objective reality we generally stipulate as to be meaningful only within discourse or daily practices of social construction. But perhaps that robs our theorizing of something potentially critical that both Dorry and Jennifer are centering in their work: the existence of relatively fixed, sometimes material, as in distribution of economic or physical resources, sometimes not, as in a common historical experience, as in civil war or dictatorship. I don’t have the space to elaborate on this as much as I wish, but I want to say that these environmental fixtures, if you will, may sketch the boundaries of intersubjective terrain within which theorizing about local generalities makes more sense than it would if we privileged contingency and agency, instead.

Dorry’s work on the Patum shows us so many ways in which an institution works. Most generally, she argues that this festival of fire, movement, song, and inebriation “incorporates individuals into active community membership,” i.e., it makes Berguedan identity for its participants. Even Dorry herself becomes a Berguedan through participation, or socialization, not unimportant for a small town with a growing immigrant population, and not without parallels to the ingroup membership expansion noted by Jennifer above, and not too hard to compare to EU demands for European practices from waiting Europeans to be.

But the institution is also reflective of power struggles within a factionalized Berga, as well as between Berga and Barcelona, Berga and Madrid, Berga and Europe, Berga and the forces of globalization, i.e., the institution reveals identity relationships themselves. For example, the battles of good and evil or placa and balcony literally embody these political divisions.

The Patum as an institution stood in relationship to other institutions. The Patum, as well as singing at football games and hiking in the countryside, was a vehicle for the expression of anti-Franco and anti-Castilian sentiments within the relative safety of an institution that was protected by other institutional forms. I raise this because it goes to my point above that the state, as depicted by Jennifer, is in fact a bundle of often contradictory institutions and identities, spawning a variety of identity relationships with others, both within and outside the country, such that it is impossible to stipulate the effects of any environment too precisely or confidently. In Dorry’s case here, for example, the state’s police is institutionally constrained from repressing “subversive” actions by the institutional sites of these very actions.

If in this case an institution protected another institution’s capacity to invert the former, Dorry offers another kind of case, where institutions reinforce each other. Schools and municipal governments, through their sponsorship of collective performances throughout the 1980s only strengthened the reproductive power of the Patum, football games, singing, and other institutionalized daily practices of resistance.

The Patum’s supreme achievement was to create “wholeness” for its participants, to overcome the many identity differences prevailing in Berga, to provide a time and place where all these differences could be performed, acted out, lampooned, caricatured, but experienced all the same, yielding at the end a common institutionalized experience that would prevail the other 51 weeks of the year over a perhaps more potentially disruptive terrain of daily practice that wasn’t quite so “whole.” I wonder aloud here whether or not this isn’t a possible constructivist account of international institutions (without, alas, the orgiastic qualities) that, through the daily practice of arriving at cooperative outcomes, transforms the identities of participants such that in the lived world outside these institutions, differences that would otherwise matter, recede in importance, unless consciously invoked.

But I also wonder whether this wholeness was achieved without the loss of identity. I found a certain contradiction in Dorry’s depiction of this issue. On p14, she writes that “the Patum relies on multivocal pluralism rather than....offering single collective emblems empty enough for a particular content to be projected into them, it provides a heterogeneous ensemble of concrete references allowing multiple points of entry into the whol and multiple stances within it.” I took this to mean that the Patum had avoided the Enlightenment error of homogenization of difference in order to suppress conflict, and had instead succeeded in attaining the postmodern Holy Grail of pastiche, of simmering difference within an arena of multiple acknowledgements. But then I was struck several times with Dorry’s rendition of a quite different accomplishment of the Patum. On p24, the Patum “invoked the lowest common denominator of the body” repressed by the dictatorship. The Assemblea de Catalunya “limited its explicit agenda to the three items abstract
enough to be agreed upon: Liberty, Amnesty, Statute of Autonomy." (p25) And on p27, "as with
the Patum, in all these events the great majority of the symbolism was abstract enough for a
political significance to be deniable and for Catholics and Marxists, working class and upper
class, native and immigrant to identify with some dimension of the event and participate actively."
I would be most interested in knowing whether the Patum has evolved to becoming an
abstraction into which people can identify their particular identities without conflicting with others,
or whether it still is an institution within which these conflicts can be actively embodied and
performed. (I have a different kind of question for Dorry: is it impossible to compare Berga and its
Patum to a similarly situated (environmentally speaking) town without the Patum?)

I have (artificially) separated a discussion of institutions from that of in/outgroup
dynamics, though they are in practice inseparable. What strikes me here is how Dorry’s
exploration of these relationships reveals much of what I was trying to criticize above, viz., the
multiparticity, multifariousness, and contextuality of these relationships adding up to more than a
binarized Self-Other relationship between two actors, or states.

Though Dorry doesn’t include the subsequent chapter about them in this excerpt, she
identifies two types of Berguedan relationship with outgroups: networkers and integristes. The
former “liberal” view wants to erase Berga’s external boundaries to Barcelona, Madrid, Europe,
and the world, while reinforcing individualized identities. Integristes, on the other hand, wish to
maintain what is Berguedan, admitting new members to the ingroup to the extent they participate
in daily Berguedan life, but not permitting the dilution of that identity through relations with the
outside.

The group identity literature cited by Jennifer above speaks of ingroup homogenization
occurring along with differentiation from an equally homogenized outgroup. But Dorry’s remarks
on “multivocal pluralism” implies ingroup heterogeneity. Indeed, to keep the unity of the group,
heterogeneity, given all the deep identity differences inscribed on them by history and physical
context, must be preserved within the Berguedan ingroup. This speaks to my comments about
the multivocality state above. The Patum itself institutionalizes this multivocality, permitting popular
narratives to celebrate mules, devils, and Moors, while elite narratives celebrate the givers of
order.

Ingroup-outgroup dynamics also usually presume some kind of binary opposition with a
constitutive Other, as is laid out above by Jennifer. But Berguedans, apparently conscious of this
potentially dangerous political problem, use originary myths of an essentialized Berguedan Self
safely situated far in the primitive past to avoid any contemporary Otherization: with Franco or the
local rich and more powerful. As Dorry put it, the “Patum felt primitive.” This primordialism
appears to be a brilliant device to avoid contemporary identity fissures that might prove
dangerous to the whole. So, while the Patum embodies the triumph of disorder and opposition, it
does so by invoking a “time before order had divided the community,” so power could not inscribe
itself on this chaos. It should be noted, however, and consistent with conventional in/outgroup
works, the construction of a primordialist Berguedan Self did differentiate Berga from Others:
other Catalans, for example.

To paraphrase a conclusion from Dorry’s own words, the Patum reconciled voluntarism
and primordiality, “incorporating into a whole that seems to have always been there.” She writes
that this process seems to realize the nation without imposing it by force. But then she points out
that performative notions of identity are more coercive than an essentialist one, because there is
great social pressure (on immigrants for example) to become part of the whole if they can. If
difference is essentialized, then of course they could never become members. But my question to
Dorry is is this really so? And what of the earlier promise of multivocality?

How do identities stick? Why do some institutions reproduce identities better than others?
These are the questions of fit. Why does the institution of the Patum work? Perhaps it responds
to environmental demands, or is at least consonant with them. In my earlier discussion, I offered
that if we wanted to explain the adoption of social practices internationally, we might inquire into
the “fit” between discursive, identity, and institutional terrains. I would like to apply this hypothesis
to Dorry’s work here.

Fit, in my understanding, is the compatibility between lived daily practices, identities, and
their institutional embodiments (and now, educated by the work of Jennifer and Dorry)
environments, too. Berga and the Patum have a close fit, explaining perhaps its perduring
character. Dorry writes that Berga for Berguedans is less imagined than it is experienced. This fact of daily social interaction distinguishes it from projects with less fit, say, the universal Catholic Church or Franco’s Spain. She argues that these “hegemonic projects in the form of imagined communities foisted on the Berguedans” all suffer from a “deficit in lived interaction.” This could be a very important hypothesis: lived daily social practice trumps imagined community. And it is consistent with Anderson’s argument that imagined communities are uniquely modern nation-building exercises, rather than more local phenomena. And it links back to Berger and Luckmann’s arguments about the emotion of primary socialization, such that daily interaction trumps later, less affective, forms of socialization.

Dorry writes that many elements of the Patum, but especially the songs, dancing, and movement, more generally were "in the blood." She was obviously not talking genetics here, but was referring to the fact that the performance of the Patum fit with daily social life for Berguedans the other 51 weeks of the year. Attending a football game and being in the plens at the Patum “felt alike. The Patum, football games, concerts, March of Liberty reinforced each other and were reaffirmed in the intervals between them by the endless singing of mountain excursions and group dinners.” The Patum was “a tune you couldn’t get out of your head.” Isn’t this what we mean by a close fit between identity, practice, institution?

So, maybe the best practices exhibited by the most successful great power/s will be most likely adopted if they have a fit with the daily lives of the citizenry of other states?

My last set of comments concern the “odor of the Patum,” its feelings. I want to try to relate this back to the feeling of anxiety caused by the belief in anarchy’s univocal demand for state autonomy and self-help. Don’t we think that any decisionmaker in a great power feels a certain exhilaration or at least relief or comfort in the seemingly autonomous exercise of power that comes along with making threats, using military force, prosecuting wars, coercing other states, etc. Can we perhaps acknowledge that the expenditure of blood and treasure feels better for great power decisionmakers than expanding a community of cooperating states? Perhaps the latter is just too emotionless a task, too mundane a mission? Its the (mostly) fraternal unity of the war room that has the odor of great power politics.