

## CHAPTER FOUR. SOCIETY AS A PROCESS

*5,000,000,000 individuals in this world. Human society, humanity, is, of course, nothing other than the totality of these individuals. But these five billion individuals are not running about singly or in loose groups, as they are depicted in some older sociological theories, including Max Weber's theory of action. Practically all these people are organized in more or less fixed associations.*

NORBERT ELIAS, *Society of Individuals*

*The fundamental process takes place in the model of interpretation.*

JEAN-CLAUDE KAUFMANN, *Ego: pour une sociologie de l'individu*

At the foundation of the paradigms that have gained prevalence in contemporary sociology, we find lonely individuals and their actions. Although they may be equipped with different scopes of agency, and their actions may be socially-oriented to a varying degree, this does not change the fact that the starting point for most considerations of society is usually the isolated atom. Taken together, these atoms would comprise society, which emerges – by way of largely undefined processes – from “adding up” individual actions. The universality of this approach introduces into sociological theories – from the very onset – an abstraction that does not take into consideration the most fundamental quality of human existence.

After all, the fundamental experience of humanity is that of living in a group. From the moment of birth, our “natural” environment is constituted by other people, connected in specific ways through family ties and peer relations, and forming diverse social categories that comprise various kinds of societies. The sense of belonging to many, more or less permanent groups and collectivities is not only an addition to human social existence but its constitutive factor. Each person's individuality is shaped by his or her relations with other people categorized in terms of group membership, while the differentiation into “us” and “them” is one that establishes the world of both social and individual life.

This was emphasized already in the 1920s by George H. Mead, who argues that “the behavior of an individual can be understood only in terms of the behavior of

the whole social group of which he is a member” (1972, 6). He explicitly claims that “[w]e are not, in social psychology, building up the behavior of the social group in terms of the behavior of the separate individuals composing it; rather, we are starting out with a given social whole of complex group activity, into which we analyze (as elements) the behavior of each of the separate individuals composing it. We attempt, that is, to explain the conduct of the individual in terms of the organized conduct of the social group, rather than to account for the organized conduct of the social group in terms of the conduct of the separate individuals belonging to it” (7).

Mead’s followers have entirely disregarded this assumption.<sup>134</sup> Instead, they have extracted the concept of interaction from the context of interdependences created for individual actions by the “organized conduct of social group.” This move was certainly favored by the fact that the basic point of reference for interactionists in their attack on mainstream sociology was the normative paradigm derived from works by Parsons who – following Weber<sup>135</sup> – constructed his theory on the basis of the category of social action, building the concept of social structures on top of it. In the second half of the twentieth century the focus on individual was favored by interest taken in “human agency”<sup>136</sup> – increasing since the 1960s – which undoubtedly constituted a reaction to general changes in culture. Regardless of the reasons, however, maintaining this perspective not only introduced a false premise into the heart of all more general theoretical considerations but also made it more difficult to grasp the final “product” of

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134 One of the few examples of attempts at developing this theme – albeit not a very successful one from our perspective – is Tamotsu Shibutani’s *Social Processes* (1986), in which he tries to sketch a project of an interactionist sociology understood as a discipline that focuses on studying social processes. He defines the social process as “a pattern of joint activity that occurs regularly over time” (25). In practice, however, this boils down to analyzing processes by focusing on features characterizing the types of interaction that lay at the foundation of these processes.

135 As Norbert Elias (1978) suggests, it is precisely because Weber tries to draw a boundary between the individual and the social that he gives crucial importance to the concept of social action.

136 One attempt at synthesizing various concepts of individual actions from this perspective is found in an article by Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische (1998). Their theory is characterized by something quite typical of most sociological theories that work on the micro level: it considers interactions as individual events or – at best – as classes of events, i.e. meetings of atomized individuals, which find no continuation in space and time.

individual actions, understood in sociology as society, especially in the case of contemporary society.

Defined in systemic terms, society is usually viewed as a complex system described in terms of properties that are irreducible to characteristics of individual people. It is significant that such considerations of society often cause the concept of the individual to disappear from analyzes. Instead, scholars usually turn to the concept of social order described as a set of rules and institutions that would determine the framework of social life. In theories that focus on society as a social organization, individuals appear only as vehicles of social roles, officials at institutions, or elements of broader structural categories like classes. One could even say that this perspective does not leave any room to account for individual actions, which become – at best – an epiphenomenon of systemic rules.

In everyday practices of sociological research, the disparity or even sharp contrast between the two perspectives is not particularly painful, mostly because contemporary sociology has become increasingly specialized and multiparadigmatic. At best, one could argue that such coexistence leads to a specific “ontological dualism” (Poleszczuk 2002), in which the individual would be opposed to society. This also leads to the reification of society, which is ultimately perceived as an entity composed of structures external to individuals. As Norbert Elias vividly puts it, “the individual is at one and the same time surrounded by society yet cut off from it by some invisible barrier” (1978, 15). Sociologists are thus forced to cross that barrier every time they move from analyzes on the micro scale to ones on the macro scale.

The problem of relations between systemic properties and individual actions cannot be ignored while attempting to construct comprehensive systems that would provide a broader theoretical framework for sociology as a specific discipline within social sciences. At the same time, this is a problem that – given such extremely defined “boundary conditions” of sociological enquiry – cannot be solved satisfactorily without employing certain concepts that mediate between phenomena occurring on the macro level and those on the micro level.<sup>137</sup> Actions of individuals are too particular and diverse to derive from them any systemic properties without taking additional steps. These properties, in turn, are too

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137 We have drawn attention to this in an earlier work, demonstrating that the question of relations between both levels of sociological research is usually left unresolved, or even eliminated, by assuming an isomorphic character of relations between the level of systemic properties and that of individual actions. Cf. Marody 1991.

general to allow drawing direct conclusions about characteristics of individuals and courses of actions they take.

It seems that two such “mediating concepts” enjoy the greatest popularity in contemporary sociology: institutionalization and emergence. Both concepts assume that individual actions take precedence over systemic rules. Moreover, in both cases these rules are considered as derivative of two processes occurring within a given society: first, routinization, and second, standardization of actions through either consolidation of certain habits, or the emergence of certain more general patterns of behavior (cf. Berger & Luckmann 1991; Giddens 1986).<sup>138</sup> Finally, at the foundation of both concepts we find the emergence of some innovations at the level of individual actions. These novelties are then spread by way of imitation, allowing to describe processes of social change.

However, such explanations tend to disregard one well-described fact that is particularly emphasized in analyzes of other processes:<sup>139</sup> innovations do not spread randomly. Moreover, the ones that affect the level of systemic properties are bound to encounter resistance from those social groups that would prefer to preserve the system’s previous shape.<sup>140</sup> Thus, the process of institutionalization – through which systemic properties are supposed to emerge – turns out to be a process whose crucial component remains undefined. Consequently, the problem of relations between the level of individual actions and that of systemic properties remains unexplained.<sup>141</sup>

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138 We disregard here the fact that various attempts at formulating a general account of the two concepts usually employ circular definitions (ignotum per ignotum). For example, the textbook by Sztompka defines institutionalization as “the *emergence*, articulation and consolidation of normative structures, social rules, as well as patterns, norms and values” (2002, 432; emphasis added). However, the concept of “emergence” tends to be unexplained and based on popular intuitions. If it were to be made more precise, the concept would probably have to be defined using the term “institutionalization.”

139 Cf. for example Robert K. Merton’s analysis of deviant behavior in *Social Theory and Social Structure* (1968).

140 Certainly, at least some of the problems arising from the concept of institutionalization are related to the use of a language that obliterates the difference between – for example – “the invention of a fork” and “the introduction of a new legal definition of private property.” At a certain level of universality, the process of spreading each such invention could be described in the same way (cf. Sztompka 2002, 417–433), despite the fact that their consequences are radically different.

141 Of course, one may get around this restriction by assuming that the emergence of innovation is not accidental, but harmonizes with the logic of social development, which nevertheless leads to some kind of teleology and therefore involves many hidden dangers.

In fact, it cannot be explained because the problem is simply artificial. It does not stem from the nature of examined “objects” but it is rather the effect of adopting a particular research perspective. In other words, the necessity to explain relations between the level of individual actions and that of society’s characteristics is but a consequence of their previous dissociation by those theorists who, in their attempts to grasp the individual “atom” of social phenomena, have isolated individual actions from their societal context. After all, one cannot explain most individual actions without referring to the concept of society, just like the functioning of society cannot be explained without referring to individual actions. This means that the first step in any theoretical conceptualization of the two entities should involve – right from the start – restoring their mutual dependence.

#### 4.1 Levels of analysis

The difficulties that arise while attempting to restore the interdependence between individual actions and societal characteristics stem primarily from the lack of a language suitable for capturing this interdependence. Consequences of contemporary sociology’s “ontological dualism” include not only a shortage of terms referring to relations between the systemic level and that of individual actions, or a division of the discipline into macro sociology and micro sociology, but also the fact that each of those perspectives develops its own conceptual schemes that cannot be translated from one domain to another.<sup>142</sup> Even more serious consequences are related to the belief in the “sovereignty and ontic

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142 Attention to this was drawn already by C. Wright Mills, who emphasized in his criticism of Parsons’ theory that sociology overestimates “common values” as the binding material of social organization, which would be accompanied by underestimation of power and various forms of violence – concepts tied to the systemic perspective he himself represented. “Even in such sacred little groups as families,” he writes, “the unity of ‘common values’ is by no means necessary; distrust and hatred may be the very stuff needed to hold a loving family together.” However, it seems that he has fallen victim of a similar (though reversed) bias that distorted his perspective, when he wrote that “[a] society as well may flourish quite adequately without such a ‘normative structure’ as grand theorists believe to be universal” (2000, 40). As Crozier and Friedberg have demonstrated (1980), even the most rational forms of social organization – understood in the narrow, literal sense – succumb to changes, mostly adverse, under the pressure of interactions established by their members. This would mean that the “normative structure,” even if not universal, can be nevertheless important in explaining processes that occur at the macro level.

precedence of the subject,” which we have discussed in the previous chapter and which is increasingly shared by leading sociologists. Regardless of its possibly self-contradictory character, this belief conveys some hidden assumptions that cannot be reconciled with attempts to develop a systemic account of society.<sup>143</sup> Treating it as the outcome of interactions between independent, autonomous actors means – as Linnda Caporael observes – that human “sociality” becomes a by-product of individualism. In this approach, what motivates human actions is a broadly understood self-interest since “‘social’ refers to the exchange of costs and benefits in the pursuit of outcomes of purely personal value, and ‘society’ is the aggregate of individuals in pursuit of their respective self-interests” (1995, 1<sup>144</sup>).

Meanwhile, as we have attempted to demonstrate in the previous chapter, and as Caporael emphasizes, there is enough evidence that “humans are obligately interdependent, not only for acquiring their daily bread, but also for the daily operation of their minds” (2). The founders of modern social sciences considered it so obvious a fact that they hardly devoted any attention to it. As Caporael observes, “when Adam Smith proposed the ‘invisible hand’ of self-interest, he took for granted that the butcher, the brewer, the baker – and their families who worked in the business – were organized in workshops, which were in guilds, which were in villages, which were in districts, which had seasonal fairs and religious celebrations. In the eighteenth century, the skills for butchering, brewing, and baking were accumulated through generations, passed from adult to child, and repeated in daily, weekly and seasonal cycles of activity. Butchering, brewing and baking demanded finely tuned sensory and motor coordination; familiarity with variable materials, tools and methods; a marketplace, of course; and coordination among these physical, mental and social components” (2). This

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143 As Zygmunt Bauman convincingly argues (1995), the concept of freedom cannot be articulated differently than by indicating the existence of such forms of dependence that are imposed by particular groups, and from which individuals set themselves free. In consequence, a subject cannot be “ontically precedent” to the group and simultaneously “sovereign,” i.e. freeing him- or herself from that group’s influence. This would be possible only when we assume the existence of a process that would (somewhat secondarily) subject the individual to the influence of his or her own “product” – the social group. This kind of assumption seems to be made by Anthony Giddens in his theory of dual structures (1986); however, he does not explain why “ontically precedent subjects” cannot control the products of their actions.

144 In references to the article by Linnda Caporael, which was published in an online magazine, numbers in parentheses refer to paragraphs, not pages.

mechanism of reproducing social life was part of common knowledge among thinkers working in that period. As a result, Smith could allow himself to ignore it in his discussion of the market.

The fact that most elements of this mechanism look different today does not mean that people ceased to depend on each other, or that they act on the market or in other spheres of social life as fully independent and autonomous individuals. The popularity of such a conviction in contemporary social sciences demonstrates, at best, the failure to acknowledge the difference between simplifying assumptions made by past thinkers in their models of social reality, and assumptions regarding the very nature of that reality. However, as a result of the above neglect, and given the continuous processes of social change, something that did not have to be made explicit due to its self-evident character in the past, cannot be articulated today – when that reality changed its shape (though not its nature) – due to the lack of a suitable language.

Offering a very interesting, comprehensive approach to the analysis of social phenomena, Linnda Caporael tries to develop the kind of language which would make it possible to analyze the interdependencies that bind people together in social life while setting aside the question of the “ontological precedence” of the individual or society. The model proposed by her rests upon two assumptions that are fundamentally different from those traditionally held in contemporary sociology.

Caporael’s first assumption about social life is that it ought to be regarded in terms of “nested hierarchical organization” comprising various levels of functioning joined in such a way that the (structurally speaking) “lower” entities of organization are “roots,” or a kind of a “nest,” from which “higher” entities grow, creating a basic “environment” of action for the former. Therefore, the functioning of a lower-order entity is fundamentally dependent on its functioning in the entire system, which constitutes the “interface” with the habitat. At the same time, changes at the lowest level of hierarchical organization (in this book – the level of individual actions) are incapable of directly affecting the entire system; in order to influence it in any way, these changes have to be first assimilated by higher-order entities.<sup>145</sup>

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145 One example of such a “nested hierarchical organization” in the area of biology is the human organism. At the lowest level, its shape and functioning is dependent on *genes* that determine the growth of *cells*, which are the building blocks of specialized *tissues*, which compose individual *organs* (e.g. stomach), which comprise *systems* (e.g. the digestive system), which finally form the entire *organism*. The natural environment – i.e. the habitat – directly affects only the level of the entire organism; a gene,

According to the second assumption, the organizing entities from various levels exist not as permanent beings characterized by fixed properties, but are ceaselessly reproduced in accordance with the temporal scale and rhythm appropriate for a given level. At the base of this process of reproducing lay certain specific relational linkages connecting a given organizational entity to its direct “environment” – the higher-order entity. Such linkages should not be considered – as in most sociological theories – to be a kind of a matrix that facilitates automatic transferring of features of society as a whole, or its constituent parts (classes, institutions, organizations etc.), to the level of individual actions. Rather, the nature of these linkages resembles a chemical reaction, which is possible only when all ingredients “meet” in a strictly defined context (environment). That is why relational linkages are a specifically understood *principle* of recreating a certain effect (the result of actions) in a certain environment.

Such an understanding of relational linkages lies at the foundation of Caporael’s concept of “repeated assembly” – the basic unit in analyzes of processes of social life.<sup>146</sup> She defines it as “recurrent entity-environment relations composed of hierarchically organized, heterogeneous components having

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for example, uses the cell as the “interface” between itself and the habitat. The cell is also the gene’s basic “environment” of action. Therefore, the influence of the habitat on genes is mediated by relations between all those levels of organization that separate the highest level (the organism) and the level of the cell. Conversely, damage to a gene could influence the entire organism only by affecting cells, which in turn affect tissues, and so on. This example is not meant to serve as a preliminary to constructing analogies between human organism and society, but rather aims to help in grasping the rather abstract terms of the assumption discussed here.

- 146 More precisely, it would be the basic unit for analyzing processes of life not only in its social dimension but also in the biological one. Caporael developed her model by taking cue from findings in biology and evolutionary theory. Throughout her argumentation she refers to those concepts that – in her view – simplify or even distort the truth by considering properties of human beings or their actions as a direct effect of genes. As she writes, “[w]e are no longer talking in the billiard ball universe of linear causes where we can imagine that genes cause or predispose traits, which are then modified by the environment. The analogy is closer to a shared language (relation) where (entity) speakers’ utterances are both caused by and cause other (environment) speakers’ utterances” (10). Finally, she derives the term “nested hierarchical organization” from those contemporary strands in evolutionary theory that attempt to restore Darwin’s original understanding of the evolutionary process as occurring at the level of the entire species, not that of individual representatives. Cf. also on this subject Kaufmann 2001.

differing frequencies and scales of replication” (11). For example, if we take language to be a kind of “repeated assembly,” we could say that for the linguistic competence to emerge on the individual level it is necessary, in each case, to establish a relational linkage between particular, genetically coded elements of the individual organism, which facilitate acquisition of language, and their exposure to a linguistic environment, which constitutes a critical component in the process of “assembling” those elements.

Phrased in this way, this account could seem – at first glance – to be a merely awkward reiteration of a broadly accepted claim that in order to learn a language it is necessary to be stimulated by the social environment. However, as Caporael demonstrates, the discussed definition assumes something that has been completely neglected in traditional approaches, namely the reproduction of not only human genotype but also the social environment. Thus, “both the genes and the language environment must be *inherited*. English speaking and Kikuyu speaking differ because the various elements have different cycles of repetition. One set, which includes genes, has a longer cycle of repetition relative to another set, which includes the language environment. Both sets are repeatedly assembled, but on different scales of time. The cycle of language environment (English or Kikuyu), in cultural-historical time, is nested within the cycle of other components, including genes, in evolutionary time. Although the frequency and scale of the cycles may be roughly distinguished, it makes little sense to separate language into an innate and an acquired component; both are parts of inherited resources” (17; emphasis added).

For Caporael, the concept of “repeated assembly” is crucial primarily due to its potential to explain the evolution of human forms of “sociality.” In her approach, sociality would be viewed as derivative of several basic types of “repeated assembly,” which are the product of a nested hierarchy of life’s functional organization, whose respective levels perform the function of the “interface” between individuals and their habitat. These levels include: dyad, task team (e.g. family or a group of people working together), *deme*<sup>147</sup> (a base group facilitating

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147 The term *deme* – derived from the Greek *demos* – is used in biology to denote a populace comprised by individuals living close enough to each other to ensure equal chances for all to form pairs and reproduce (Hull 1990, 433). In anthropology, the counterpart to *deme* would be probably “tribe,” while in the case of *macrodeme* it would be “tribal group.” However, since the original terms have a more universal meaning (which is important for later discussions), we have decided to call them (respectively) “base group” and “macro group.”

direct contacts among members), and *macrodeme* (or a macro group). These four “core configurations” do not represent groups in the literal sense, but they rather represent basic, general types of human interaction. They are “crucial” not only because they have been developed in the hunter-gatherer period of human history but also because they are *ceaselessly reproduced*, from generation to generation, in the course of people’s everyday activities. This stems from the fact that these configurations are a function of the physical parameters of human morphology and ecology. Consequently, each of them serves to realize a specific “modal task.” “From a strictly evolutionary historical perspective,” Caporael argues, “core configurations are affordances for the evolution of proper functions” (23).

A given affordance allows for the emergence of specific types of “repeated assembly” described in terms of their “proper function.” However, this relation is not of a necessary nature – proper functions<sup>148</sup> are not automatically created because of the existence of some kind of a configuration. Still, once developed, they can be transferred both to lower strata of the hierarchical organization of life, or combined with functions typical for higher ones. For example, the development of language certainly improved micro coordination in dyads, but that achievement – when combined with standardized language – streamlined operations at the level of task groups, helping them in acquiring their proper functions.

The basic elements of the model proposed by Caporael are listed in table 4.1. The descriptions of “modal tasks” included in the table would suggest that the model applies largely to primal communities. However, such a conclusion would entirely contradict both the assumptions made by the author, and the potentials inherent in the model itself. As mentioned above, Caporael sees the key configurations she has distinguished as a reflection on fundamental “existential pressures” proper to humanity, whose realization always takes place in a defined specific *social* environment. Thus, since they were created in the course of evolutionary processes, they constitute the basic *modus operandi* of humanity

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148 Caporael does not use the category of function in the normative sense (i.e. as functional vs. dysfunctional), but in the mathematical one, which emphasizes the dependence of a specific result on having fulfilled the requirements necessary for it to occur. Some types of “repeated assembly” have no normative function because they are based on imagined relations (e.g. superstitious behavior among pigeons in Skinner’s experiments), while others can have a normative function for some time and then lose it, without making it ineffective due to force of habit (cf. the previous chapter).

**Table 4.1.** Core configurations (after Caporael 1995)

Core configuration	Group size <sup>a)</sup>	Modal task	Proper function <sup>b)</sup>
Dyad	2	Sex, infant interaction with adults & older children	Microcoordination
Work/family group	5	Foraging, hunting, direct interaction with habitat	Distributed cognition
Deme (Band)	30	Movement from place to place, general processing and maintenance, work group coordination	Shared construction of reality (includes folk psychology), social identity
Macro-deme (Macroband)	300	Seasonal gathering, exchange of individuals, resources and information	Stabilizing & standardizing language

<sup>a)</sup> Except for the dyad, the numbers quoted here ought to be considered as approximations with a margin of 33 per cent.

<sup>b)</sup> Different proper functions may emerge in individual configurations, but only one example is provided here.

as a species, transferred in time and recreated in various, entirely dissimilar areas of human activity. To illustrate this thesis, Caporael refers to the analysis of the organization of academic life done by David L. Hull (1990).<sup>149</sup>

Hull's work itself constitutes an extremely interesting example of numerous recent attempts to adapt the language developed in natural sciences to analyzes of processes that are, strictly speaking, social.<sup>150</sup> He adopts the perspective of the theory of evolution to analyze the development of science, indicating the existence of many analogies between concepts used by the theory of evolution, and ones that could be used to characterize academic work. Among other things, he draws attention to the importance of the "demic" structure of science for the so-called fitness of particular scientific concepts. According to him, scientists are

149 She mentions his work in the introduction as a source of inspiration for the model she has developed.

150 Another example is a 1980s trend in culture-focused research, in which changes of culture are analyzed in terms of "memes" (the basic replicators of culture, similar to genes, which are the basic replicators of organisms), which compete with each other for space in human minds (cf. e.g. Blackmore 2000). However, this metaphor refers to concepts that are considered in contemporary biology an instance of misusing the theory of evolution because they exemplify the "individualization" of the population-based model that lies at the heart of evolutionary theory.

divided into “populations” that devote themselves to studying specific segments of reality by using similar ideas or approaches. “Initially, in the history of science,” Hull remarks, “scientists work in relative isolation from their contemporaries. They build on past work but not band together to pursue joint research. Rather rapidly, however, the demic structure of science materialized and continues to characterize science to the present” (23). This creates a specific problem since – despite scientists competing for citations, prestige, and being “first” – in order to achieve these highly individualistic goals they are forced to cooperate.

This problem – which also emerges in theories of evolution, where altruistic behavior remained an unsolved puzzle for a long time<sup>151</sup> – is solved in the world of science thanks to the specificity of the organization of academic life. The “demic” structure of science defined by Hull comprises individual scholars, research groups, “conceptual demes” (or “schools”), and seasonal meetings of scientific associations. Taking into account the fact that individual scientists usually make use of works written by their predecessors (while reading Hull’s book, the reader forms a dyad with him), clear and detailed parallels become traceable here with the “core configurations” defined by Caporael on the basis of analyzes of hunter-gatherer communities.

In both kinds of collectivities, task teams are the level of organization that makes it possible to exchange, compare and combine information gathered individually by particular members of the task team after the division of tasks. This process contributes to the development of a specific “approach” at the level of the scientific “conceptual deme,” or the tribe, in turn drawing on conceptual schemas already developed at this level. The level of “school” or tribe is the one on which resources and information gathered by task teams are merged. It is also

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151 Today’s theories of evolution demonstrate that altruistic behavior can be explained by “inter-group selection”: whereas intra-group selection tends to eliminate altruism (since inside their own group altruists lose to other individuals), inter-group competition would actually promote it. This intuition was already voiced by Darwin himself in *The Descent of Man* (1871): “It must not be forgotten that although a high standard of morality gives but a slight or no advantage to each individual man and his children over the other men of the same tribe, yet that an advancement in the standard of morality and an increase in the number of well-endowed men will certainly give an immense advantage to one tribe over another. There can be no doubt that a tribe including many members, who, from possessing in a high degree the spirit of patriotism, fidelity, obedience, courage, and sympathy, were always ready to aid one another, and to sacrifice themselves for the common good, would be victorious over most other tribes; and this would be natural selection” (after Sober & Wilson 1998, 5).

the level on which the social identity of individuals is developed. Finally, in the case of both scientists and members of hunter-gatherer communities, seasonal meetings at the level of the macro group offer an occasion to exchange myths, gossip and information about more distant regions or groups. Such meetings also help standardize language (ethnic one or sociolect), exchange people (e.g. women among tribes, or new PhD-holders among research groups), and offer an arena for undertaking “competitive games.”

Indicating similarities between the organization of scientific life and that of hunter-gatherer communities does not aim to promote another striking metaphor of the “tribal” character of academic life. The intention would not be to mechanically translate a language used to describe certain phenomena (as developed in one area of science) into another language used to describe different phenomena, but to consider the extent of the “tribal character” of political, artistic or economic life. Hull’s book itself demonstrates that his conceptual scheme allows to produce explanations and formulate hypotheses that go far beyond analogies between characteristics of two kinds of collectivities. Similarly, despite referring mainly to examples from hunter-gatherer communities, Caporael is convinced that her model could be adapted not only to describe other types of collectivities but also to analyze processes of ontogenesis as well as processes occurring at the level of society as a whole.

We share this conviction. However, in order to fully estimate the possibilities inherent in this model it is necessary to “set it in motion.” Thus, we first need to closely examine its core configurations, especially the way in which they correspond to processes of socializing discussed in previous chapters. In other words, it is paramount to adopt this model – sketched in very general terms by its author – to the kind of matter that is typical for sociology, i.e. key issues analyzed by this discipline. Only then would it become possible to assess what could be gained from making the strictly theoretical assumption that lies at the heart of this model, namely one that involves analyzing social life in terms of its hierarchical organization, rooted in specific configurations of interaction, whose particular levels are focused on diverse tasks and perform different functions.

## 4.2 Dynamics of social life

Among the four configurations distinguished by Linnda Caporael, the dyad is the smallest unit of the “repeated assembly” of relational linkages – terms in which human actions could be analyzed. The basic function of the dyad is to produce *micro coordination* between the two elements that comprise it. It is vital to understand that these two elements do not have to be both human – it is possible

for a dyad to be formed by a person and an object, or any living being. In each case, the repeated relational linkages between positively reinforced (selected) elements of the dyad (e.g. two people, man and hammer, dog and dog owner) cause them to form a coordinated task team. It is also crucial that this kind of micro coordination is derived from intense, close interactions between individual entities that make up the dyad.

The use of the term “interaction” in this context might raise objections due to the above definition of dyad as possibly comprising not only two people but also a person and an inanimate object or a non-human living being. However, it is justified for at least two reasons. First, non-human elements of dyads are not merely passive objects, on which people act, but are responsive, at least by way of revealing certain properties.<sup>152</sup> An overly “intimate” interaction between my finger and a hammer can lead to painful injury, while “interacting” with a stray Rottweiler demands taking entirely different cautionary measures than contacts with our own lazy spaniel. Second, in many cases the objects we use are vehicles of somebody else’s intentionality (often accumulated for generations), while other beings also have their own experiences gained in contacts with people, or – to put it in other words – they have been “socialized” earlier on. While interacting with them, we need to adapt our reactions to the intentions of the people we do not know, the intentions “materialized” in shapes or properties of objects, and the ways in which animals react.

Two things need to be emphasized here. First, relational linkages characteristic for this level do not exist in the same sense as the “objects” that comprise their elements – their existence needs to be continuously sustained.<sup>153</sup> When different people, tools or dogs enter the dyad, they necessitate reconstituting these linkages. Second, once established, these linkages change the “nature” of the objects that form them. For example, a hard stone becomes a “hammer” when used in a specific way, a man with an axe becomes a woodcutter, while an infant becomes a cowed baby in contact with a domineering adult. However, these changes are limited to the particular dyad – in the context of others, a stone could still be a stone, an axe could serve the function of propping the door, while a cowed child could have its say.

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152 The general logic of scientific efforts is similar, consisting for example in questioning nature (e.g. in laboratory experiments), in response to which nature (sometimes) answers.

153 Certain colloquial phrases like “being out of practice” signify being “out of” a certain dyad.

What we encounter in a dyad is the mutual adjustment of its elements' actions and reactions within the framework of a repeatable "task." It is the character of a specific "task" that is responsible for the particularity of relational linkages created in a given dyad. Consequently, actions of individuals become complementary, making the dyad function – in certain conditions – "as one person." In other cases, it is the person and the object's properties that become complementary, making, for instance, the scalpel held by a surgeon become an "extension" of her hand, or giving the impression that a rider is "physically joined" to her horse. A relational linkage developed by a pair of lovers who – according to what self-help books claim – ought to learn about their bodies so as to be able to climax together, is different from that formed by a pair of professional dancers for whom the knowledge of the partner's body constitutes the condition for achieving a harmony of movements, which is assessed by jurors. Yet another kind of bodily knowledge is required in the infant-adult dyad, whose basic task is to keep the baby alive. For the adult, this means learning how to adequately read the signals sent by the child, while the child needs to accept that, for example, not every single need will be immediately satisfied.

What links the above examples of micro coordination is the fact that all establish a special kind of connection between the dyad's elements, which – as we argued in the previous chapter – has a complementary character. We argue that such connections are accompanied by a limitation of individual freedom that stems from the subordination of the actions of the dyad's members to the realization of a specific "task." Let us notice here that this limitation does not have to be an effect of the partners' emotional engagement.<sup>154</sup> It could also have a more instrumental character, involving for example willful, "rational" surrendering of a part of personal freedom to the "whole" or it can be established by one of the interacting actors by force. The coordination of actions achieved will have a different character in each case, but is invariably related to dependence, and – in consequence – to the specific "enslavement" of both parties, which are locked in mutual dependence. Simmel called attention to this, remarking that in a dyad "each of the two feels himself confronted only by the other, not by a collectivity above him" (1950, 123).

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154 It does not necessarily have to be positive. Stanisław Lem came up with the non-existent word "gniewiść," signifying a mixture of love and hate. One example of this is provided by the relation between a torturer and his or her victim. Similarly, gaining awareness of the complementarity of emotions and actions constitutes the first step in therapy for wives of alcoholics.

Interactions in dyads constitute the lowest level of the organization of social life, from which the second type of “core configuration” grows, namely the “team.” This term covers various kinds of social associations, including family, task teams, and people working in one organizational cell. Teams usually comprise 5–7 people and tools.<sup>155</sup> Whereas the basic function of interactions within dyads is to facilitate mutual adaptation among constituent elements, the level of team coordination is defined by particular tasks realized by specific groups in direct contact with their habitat – initially, only the natural one but along with increasing complexity of social life also comprising institutions (in the strict sense) and technological infrastructure, created at higher levels of coordination.

At this level of hierarchical organization, a more complex reality emerges – one that nobody can fully control.<sup>156</sup> As a result, cognition becomes “distributed”<sup>157</sup> – each member of the cooperating group of people has direct access only to some part of the other members’ experience, and no one possesses all knowledge. Moreover, each group member remains in a certain relation to some part of the larger social environment (e.g. father to men, mother to her family, children to their peers), which additionally differentiates views of reality. As a result, individuals not only differ from each other in terms of knowledge but also do not know what others know. Access to the knowledge possessed by others is therefore obtained indirectly through becoming engaged in joint action. As a

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155 It is worth drawing attention here that even brief engagement in a “task” can often transform a collectivity into a team understood in this way. For example, a gathering of people in a lift does not constitute a group, but when the lift malfunctions we can observe the development of “cooperation around a shared task,” which transforms the people involved into a task team.

156 For example, interactions in families are usually organized in pairs (father-mother, parent-child, child-child), so that other family members do not participate in them.

157 The term “distributed cognition” denotes a specific approach to the study of cognitive processes. Developed since the 1980s, it assumes – in broadest terms – that cognition is a function not only of the intellectual properties of individual minds but also interactions between minds and elements from their surroundings: other people, objects, events occurring at different moments, etc. Therefore, depending on the context in which it is used, this term could mean at least two things: first, it might emphasize the characteristic “distribution” (or dispersion) of information among elements that form the “cognitive system”; and second, it may underscore the fact that the portion of information that belongs to one element of the system is made available to other elements in the course of interactions that consolidate the entire “cognitive system.” Cf. a broader discussion of this in Hutchins 2000; Cole & Engstrom 2001.

result, such access is always selective because it is determined by the character of the actions taken.

Despite being “distributed” in a variety of relations, adaptations, experiences and actions – which leads to a lesser intensity of “repeated assemblies” than in dyads – a team can nevertheless create its own specific representation of a certain part of reality, one that primarily involves developing the vision of the task it is supposed to perform (regardless of whether it is the growth of the family, or drafting a quarterly balance) and defining its interests in terms of interests identified in its immediate social surroundings (i.e. the configuration from the next level of hierarchical organization). This representation is specific to the team also because its final shape is determined by the properties of those elements of “distributed cognition” that are introduced by each individual member of the team.<sup>158</sup> It is developed in the process of communication between members of the group, in the course of which at least some portions of “distributed cognition” are spread, modified and negotiated within the team. At the same time, its existence constitutes the condition for effective realization of tasks faced by the group, because referring to shared knowledge makes the meanings of facts and opinions (at least those related to shared tasks) comprehensible to all members of the team.<sup>159</sup>

Let us note here that – at the level of the team – the concept of “distributed cognition” reveals for the first time this feature of social reality which sociologists have called the “primacy of the whole over its individual components.” It is especially in Durkheim’s theory (cf. also Harré 1980) that this feature constitutes the basic aspect of social phenomena.<sup>160</sup> This is because representations of reality formed by teams may emerge from knowledge possessed by an individual but

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158 If the group includes – for example – a dominant person who believes in a conspiracy theory, the team’s main task may become to defend itself from the outside world.

159 In this sense, the nature of “distributed cognition” is basically similar to that of “social representations,” although the latter term – developed by Serge Moscovici (1981, 1983; Moscovici & Farr 1983; Trutkowski 2000, 2002) – certainly has a broader meaning. Clearly, each term emphasizes a different component in the process of negotiating common knowledge: the former takes the distribution of information as its starting point, while the latter takes it as its final effect. Nevertheless, both refer to the same process of creating *social* knowledge.

160 Actually, its existence manifests already at the level of the dyad – the lowest unit in the hierarchical organization of social life – through a specific limiting of individual freedom. However, as Simmel has demonstrated (1950, 122–144), the dyad has certain specific characteristics that obfuscates the social character of this kind of relationship.

cannot be reduced to it. They form a new quality that emerges in the process of negotiating elements of this knowledge among members of the group. They are social not only due to their genesis but also because of their “ontological status.”

It is also at the level of the team that the fundamental process of socializing new members occurs in relation to both newborns, as in the case of children socialized within families, and newcomers who arrive from outside to strengthen the team and are subjected to secondary socialization.<sup>161</sup> As theoreticians of “distributed cognition” emphasize (usually by quoting Lev Vygotsky), in both cases the process is carried out by acting in a specific habitat, whose characteristics determine both the scope of actions undertaken by team members and the contents of “distributed cognition” handed down within a given team. For this reason alone, the effects of a child’s socialization are bound to differ between those families that have only a TV set and a refrigerator and those that possess numerous other objects, that are – as Pierre Bourdieu put it (1986) – well-endowed with cultural capital. Similarly, “distributed cognition” differentiates socialization effects among middle and working-class families, manifesting for example in parenting values (cf. Kohn 1959; Schooler & Kohn 1983).

The process of socializing of distributed cognition at the level of teams depends not only on the experience of individual members and the nature of the tasks they seek to complete, but also on processes occurring at higher levels of life’s hierarchical organization, where the core configuration is a larger *deme*, called here base group. In sociological terms, this would correspond to the concept of community. The basic task of *deme* is to coordinate work or – to put it in broader terms – actions undertaken at the level of teams. In contrast to some self-imposing associations, this “managerial” task is not realized through direct management of work done by the teams, but primarily through creation of comprehensive *images of reality*, which cover both the “classifying” of reality in terms of specific objects, phenomena and processes, and the “endowing” of distinguished elements with specific properties, as well as indicating the actions that are generally imaginable, possible, desired, tolerated or forbidden.<sup>162</sup>

The key function of these images of reality is to make distributed cognition coherent in such a way that certain experiences of the collectivity’s members can become not only the kind of knowledge that is shared by all, but also the one

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161 Krzysztof Konecki (1992) provides an excellent analysis of this process in the context of a community of workers in an industrial plant.

162 In Caporael’s terminology, this aspect of images of reality is referred to as “folk psychology.”

in which everyone knows that everyone knows that... In other words, images of reality include and simultaneously constitute everything which is taken for granted, i.e. which does not demand any justification in the course of interactions. It needs to be emphasized here that, in accordance with assumptions made by Caporaël, these images of reality are not – as has been commonly assumed in sociological practice<sup>163</sup> – constructed directly from individual experience, but rather constitute the effect of transforming and adapting representations developed in team configurations.<sup>164</sup>

It is at this level of the organization of social life that a group of variously aged people of different sexes who live under the same roof acquires the name of “family”<sup>165</sup> or – in a different context – people engaged in work on this book become the Department of Social Psychology. It is also at this level that ways of solving problems, developed by teams in the course of performing specific “tasks,” acquire a normative status, turning into “principles of appropriate behavior,” “justice” and “methodology” – or, more generally, into criteria of beauty, good and truth (Giza-Poleszczuk 1991a). The inclusion of action patterns developed by individual “teams” into the set of images of reality constructed at the level of community must involve explaining to other members of these groups why they need to undertake such actions and not others, and “why things are what they are” (Berger & Luckmann 1991, 111). Moreover, these explanations ought to include not only indication of pragmatic efficiency of certain solutions, or objective features of specific “things”<sup>166</sup> but also references to outside justifications such as tradition, the sacred or rationality (Weber 1958). Such justifications constitute the essence of legitimizations that make certain patterns of action not only objectively available but also subjectively acknowledged by larger circles in

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163 This is not limited to practice only. Berger & Luckmann have laid the theoretical foundations for the development of a constructionist approach (1991), in which the “social production of reality” is depicted as a process that takes place in interactions among individuals.

164 This relation naturally has the character of a feedback loop: at the team level, representations are developed within the framework of a given image of reality, which is enriched with new experiences that, in turn, contribute to its change.

165 It may happen that representations produced by a certain “team” are rejected at the level of community, making some kinds of groups be tagged as “shacking up together,” with children raised in them called “bastards.”

166 Such explanations are directly related to experiences from the level of that team which developed a specific solution or thing. This means that they could be questioned by members of other teams.

a given community;<sup>167</sup> thus, they can become the fundamental tool for the realization of the task of coordinating work in teams.

This process of legitimization is naturally arbitrary, because it utilizes already existing elements of images of reality – elements which provide an *interpretation*, not description of reality – whose roots lie in all-encompassing visions of the world created in the act of “foundational holism” in a given community. In reference to the discussion contained in Chapter Two, it could be said that the process of developing images of reality must be preceded by the process of ascertaining, at the level of community, of such general cognitive frameworks that make experiences gathered in dyads and teams meaningful, thanks to which these experiences are in turn legitimized. Regardless of whether such general cognitive frameworks are rooted in religion, based on scientific claims, or grounded in political views, accepting them is a *sine qua non* condition not only of the process of introducing coherence to collectively developed images of reality but also of the very functioning of individual minds.<sup>168</sup>

The above statements carry several vital consequences, which demand further examination.

First, they entail the necessity to treat the described model of hierarchy-based organization of social life as one that accounts for its dynamic, not its genesis. In other words, the fact that the lowest level of organization is that of dyad does not allow to draw the conclusion – found at the foundation of today’s widespread interpretive paradigm – that interactions between autonomous individuals constitute the basic level from which particular, historically known forms of sociality emerge. In the model adopted here, the level that is essential to the process of socializing is that of *deme* – i.e. community – and not the one of individual interactions. This conclusion is rooted not only in relations between images of reality developed at the level of the base group and cognitive processes occurring at lower levels of organization but also in other assumptions made in this model, including the following one: “groups would reproduce by fissioning, not by dispersing individuals or dyads” (Caporael 1995, 21). It follows from this that the mechanism at the base of social change ought to resemble one of division of

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167 As Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann rightly emphasize (1991), “knowledge” is always ahead of “values” in the process of legitimization. It needs to be recalled that in the model assumed here “knowledge” comes from a lower level of the organization of social life than the one on which “values” are created.

168 Let us recall here that, in the philosophy of science, this kind of interpretation is ascribed to the so-called Gödel’s theorem, i.e. the claim that within every system there are true statements that cannot be derived from that system’s axioms.

cells rather than the evolutionary growth of individually developed inventions. New forms or kinds of sociality do not emerge thanks to individual innovation – with novelty gradually spreading in wider circles<sup>169</sup> – but by new communities “fissioning” from already existing ones, the former being organized around more or less different images of reality than their predecessors. A classic example of such a process is provided by Max Weber in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905).

This does not entail, however, a total negation of the influence of individuals on social changes. Protestant ethics would not be created, after all, or would be completely different if it had not been for Calvin, Luther or other “dissidents.” Nevertheless, this fundamentally alters the very basis for explaining the dynamics of social life. In light of the assumptions we have made before, its dynamism needs to be interpreted in terms of forming subsequent (or parallel) “foundational holisms,”<sup>170</sup> which are collectively created and supported through actions taken by members of a given community or society. It thus becomes vital to ask about the factors and mechanisms lying at the foundation of the process of reproducing groups, because it is the emergence of new communities that provides impetus to the creation of new images of reality (or to the introduction of far-reaching modifications in already existing ones), and contributes to the transformation of this reality in the course of actions undertaken by members of those communities.

Second, interpretations of reality accepted within groups play a fundamental role in the process of forming *social identities*, which is the second – besides the development of images of reality – important function of the base-group level

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169 This has been unequivocally confirmed by research done within the framework of so-called dynamic social psychology (cf. Vallacher & Nowak 1997; Nowak 1996). It shows that processes occurring in differentiated systems lead to the grouping of those individuals who share similar views or patterns of behavior. To put it metaphorically, individuals who have different views than those held by people from their immediate surroundings (or who differ in terms of patterns of behavior) are incapable of “surviving” in such an environment – they would need to change either themselves or their surroundings.

170 We put this term in quotation marks because – especially today – these foundational visions rarely have the character of an overall negation of the dominant image of the world. What we usually encounter is a desire to introduce or just accentuate one or several assumptions (as in the case of the move from the normative paradigm to the interpretive one in sociology), or those “values” that members of the base group consider to be crucial in a certain area of reality (as in the case of the “mushrooming” of various groups within feminism; cf. Gromkowska 2002, 51–78).

of human interactions' core configurations. The positioning of the process of developing social identities at this level of the organization of social life might be surprising, especially in light of numerous works on the subject of its formation, which ascribe the task of constructing identities not only to so-called small groups (their counterpart in this model would be teams) or dyads (this is, after all, the meaning of Giddens' claim about the importance of so-called pure relations for the formation of identity), but simply to the individual. It ought to be recalled, however, that the basic tool for the formation of individual identity is difference (Jacobson-Widding 1983; Tajfel & Turner 1986), because the answer to the question "Who am I?" always implicitly contains an answer to the question "Who am I *not*?" Establishing of the dimensions of differentiation is an inseparable element of the collective process of constructing reality.

Thus, regardless whether the answer is formulated in terms of psychological states and properties ("I am intelligent;" "I am possessed"), or in terms of representing specific groups and social categories ("I am a member of the Bison Club;" "I am a sociologist"), the ideas that stand behind them refer us back to those aspects of our experience that have to be first selected as crucial by the community in order to become meaningful to us in a personal way. What is more, if collective processes of constructing reality include not only classifying its aspects but also interpreting them, it is the differences in interpretation that constitute the fundamental line separating both the in-group from out-groups, "our world" from "their world" or the meaningful from the meaningless. In this way, they define the basic frame of reference for meanings ascribed to individual experiences, choices and actions.<sup>171</sup> That is why they constitute the basic framework for developing social identity.

Third, due to the arbitrary character of each image of reality, it is the question of its sustainment that becomes paramount. As Peter Berger observes in his analysis of religion as a specific case of such an image, "[w]orlds are socially constructed and socially maintained," which means that "[t]heir continuing reality, both objective (as common, taken-for-granted facticity) and subjective (as facticity imposing itself on individual consciousness)" (1967, 45) depends

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171 This aspect of the concept of social identity is particularly emphasized by Manuel Castells: "By identity," he writes, "[...] I understand the process of the construction of meaning on the basis of a cultural attribute, or related set of cultural attributes, that is/are given priority over other sources of meaning" (2002, 6). The typology of identities he proposes – which includes legitimizing, resistance, and project identity – directly refers to questions related to the mechanisms of the emergence of new communities, which involves the emergence of new "foundational holisms" (as discussed above).

not just on individual faith, but on the conformity of actions taken by his or her community's members and institutions with the fundamental assumptions inherent to that image of reality. In other words, the reality of God is confirmed by people gathering in temples, priests performing rituals and leaders leading armies against infidels.<sup>172</sup> Similarly, the reality of the hierarchical organization of social life would be confirmed by scholars researching dyads, teams and *demes*, as well as institutions funding research and Departments of Hierarchical Organization of Social Life opened at institutes of sociology, etc.<sup>173</sup>

Since the maintaining of a given image of reality relies mainly on actions that conform to it (which sometimes demands huge efforts on the part of individuals), communities have to develop some means of social control. Disciplining methods include a wide range of measures: disapproval expressed in non-verbal communication, verbal condemnation, societal ostracism, punishment by isolation, and even physical extermination. Their application depends on the degree of the misdeed, which, in turn, is a function of the weight of the "offence" (judged from the perspective of a given image), the force with which the image is maintained by a given society, and the degree of threat posed by the violation of a particular image to its sustainment in the community.

A more detailed analysis of consequences entailed by these findings for the understanding of how contemporary society functions is provided in the last chapter. At this point, however, we shall return briefly to the description of Linnda Caporaël's model. Its fourth and final level of core configurations of interactions is that of the macro group. This level is characterized by the slowest

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172 Perhaps, this is what Durkheim had in mind when he wrote that "gods can no more do without their faithful than the faithful can do without their gods" (2001, 257–258).

173 The dispute about the existence of social classes, which rekindles in sociology from time to time, convincingly demonstrates that certain entities, which seemed very real several decades ago, today begin to appear increasingly "transparent." Still, nobody seems to be questioning the existence of "values," which are invoked not only by sociologists, but also by journalists, politicians and common people. The reality of bacteria, which most of us have never seen, is certainly sustained by hosts of doctors, who treat diseases caused by these microorganisms, by public health experts who warn us against them, and by the habit of washing hands and fruit, enforced since childhood, etc. We do not wish to argue in favor of the material inexistence of certain properties that indicate class affiliation, of certain actions and beliefs that operate as indexes of value, or of certain small beings called bacteria. Still, their material existence does not constitute a sufficient or necessary condition for their coming into existence in the social world.

tempo of “assembly,” while its fundamental aim is to organize exchanges in communities: exchanges of women or, more broadly, people, as well as information, goods, etc. The *macrodeme* should not be identified with what is traditionally understood as society. It is rather the domain of interactions, established at periodical gatherings of communities or its representatives. In this sense, examples of macro groups would include, on the one hand, periodical meetings of tribes for the purpose of potlatch, conferences held by scientists sharing findings in their discipline, gatherings of members of parties or associations, during which they choose their authorities and programs, and – on the other hand – regularly held fairs (including church fairs), regional nobility councils, parliamentary sessions etc. The proper function of such assemblies is to standardize language, which involves not only its homogenization within a given ethnic community, or systematization of the jargon employed by a given professional circle, but also – or perhaps primarily – the homogenization of concepts used to describe reality, and their related meanings.

Because the fundamental task of the macro group is to facilitate exchanges, standardization of language must include the determination of their basic metrics, i.e. the “currency” used to define the value of exchanged goods. Whether these are seashells or banknotes, numbers of citations or sophistication of lectures, they need to be more or less consciously accepted by all communities that are part of the macro group. Rules of exchange are also subject to standardization, taking the form of common law (as in the case of the principle “eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth,” which nevertheless allows for using specific equivalents) or of an elaborate legal system that involves institutions whose tasks include the prosecution of violations of these rules (as in the case of today’s Hague Tribunal informed with a set of regulations defining the concept of war crime). Such rules of exchange standardize the course of “competitive games” played by members of particular communities at the level of the macro group.

Regardless of their specific character, all four levels of core configurations of interactions share certain features. It would be fruitful to distinguish them here.

First, they describe *levels of interaction*, and not particular groups. Although the discussed model clearly asserts that social life ought to be analyzed in collective terms, and though descriptions of particular levels often feature terms referring to group categories traditionally distinguished in sociology, one ought to remember that these categories are in no way meant to classify such collectivities. The latter should be treated rather as an arena or environment for interactions that occur within it. The question whether a particular phenomenon

analyzed by a researcher is related to a team, a *deme*, or a *macrodeme* ought to be answered separately for each case at the empirical level.<sup>174</sup> What is more, in particular empirical contexts each level of interaction may engage representatives of different, “substantially” distinguished social groups, which may simultaneously be members of different, parallel “communal” levels of assembly.<sup>175</sup>

Second, it follows that the basic unit of analysis in such a model is not constituted by individual people or groups as such, but by “*repeated assemblies*” of *interaction*, which include not only people but also objects (artefacts). Moreover, such assemblies have to be repeatedly created anew by way of recreating relational linkages connecting their individual elements. It also needs to be recalled that each such “recreation” is concrete, specific, and thus unique. We never eat the exact same breakfast, even when we always have croissants with jam or fried eggs; every day at work is different, even if we spend the entire day postmarking envelopes. This means that a source of changeability is hidden in the very rhythm of life, in the pulsation of “repeated assemblies,” because if every act is different, it has different consequences. In this sense, the horizon of a given relation (and of actions that arise from it) changes, expands or narrows also as a result of practice and shifts of context.<sup>176</sup> Categorizations encapsulated in language express a high degree of probability in terms of accurately describing reality rather than offer any actual classification and account of its elements. They are always temporary and context-dependent (situationally or historically), although one should never forget that despite their provisional nature they might make it difficult for language users to perceive something differently than through the lens of their own language.

Third, the assumption that “repeated assemblies” of interaction constitute the basic unit of analysis entails the necessity to scrutinize phenomena occurring at any level of the organization of social life in terms of *units of coordinated activity*.<sup>177</sup> This radically departs from traditional sociological approaches to the

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174 At the level of empirical research, it becomes also necessary to determine the size of individual “collective environments,” i.e. teams, *deme* and *macrodeme*.

175 For example, members of Warsaw’s City Council should be classified – at first glance – as a kind of *macrodeme*, because they represent various kinds of “communities” in the form of particular political parties. However, in certain contexts – e.g. if we wish to study the functioning of the Association of Polish Cities – they ought to be treated as a kind of “community” that creates its own image of reality, its own modes of legitimation, and a distinct identity.

176 This aspect of reality is reflected in commonly used expressions, e.g. “and then the play changed into a drama” or “as soon as he arrived, I was all fingers and thumbs.”

177 This approach has been broadly adopted in many concepts of management developed today.

concepts of institution and institutionalization. The former needs to be regarded in terms of processes rather than structures, while the latter demands considering the question of how the level at which institutionalization takes place is nested in actions taken at a lower level.

For example, when analyzed as a “system of coordinated actions,” a company would have to be defined as a process of transforming materials into end products. This process occurs thanks to the recreation of rhythmically repeated relations between people and things, between particular individuals and particular objects. Individuals are part of this process, aspectually “complementing” operational schemas (relational linkages) and developing their specific adaptations in dyads. In this light, individuals are not actors who perform their roles, or pawns in structural divisions; rather, they are part of a dynamic system whose functioning may be influenced by both their specific skills, the use of which is assumed by the system, and those skills that, from the perspective of the functioning of the entire system, seem irrelevant or might be even disadvantageous.<sup>178</sup>

Similarly, when analyzing processes of institutionalization, it needs to be remembered that the concept of “nested hierarchical organization” (which lies at the foundation of the entire model) means that sets of coordinated actions from higher levels do not function spontaneously since their operation has to be “nested” in lower layers of the organization of social life, comprised by their own proper sets of coordinated actions.<sup>179</sup> And conversely, since higher levels of coordination constitute a sort of direct “environment” for lower ones, the situation when they do not adequately perform their function of the “interface” with the habitat bears consequences for the functioning of lower levels of organization,

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178 This is why the theatrical metaphor is not entirely accurate, despite the fact that it helps to grasp specific aspects of human activity. People do not play their roles in accordance to a fixed script, but rather enter into systems of coordinated actions. It suffices to alter at least one element of such a system (e.g. when an object is displaced from its proper position, or when a new figure appears on the stage) to initiate the process of adapting roles (or, in extreme cases, of completely changing them) in response to the system’s new properties.

179 It is worth to recall at this point the recurring phenomenon of postcolonial societies’ return to tribal modes of organization upon being “relieved” from alien institutions that usually operated using naked violence. A democracy that is not authentically rooted in the units of lower order (families, local societies, and free associations, which constitute the “interface” between individuals and state) cannot be an effective tool for making the “collective will” common.

which have to establish their own direct contacts with the habitat.<sup>180</sup> Numerous consequences neglecting such dependencies can be traced, for example, in the Polish transformation of 1989. The institutional reforms introduced in a top-down manner were not appropriately nested at lower levels of the organization of social life, although they simultaneously initiated such processes of institutionalization that, in turn, modified – unfortunately, usually in an undesirable direction (cf. Marody & Wilkin 2003) – the functioning of higher levels.

Making processes of institutionalization dependent on already existing systems of coordinated actions means that it becomes highly probable that newly emergent systems “accumulate” such patterns of interaction that have been developed within prior systems.<sup>181</sup> It stems from the fact that processes of interaction both bind people together and emerge from already existing relations. This entails, fourthly, the necessity to devote closer attention to the creation of *linkages* among individuals in the course of these interactions. The problem becomes particularly significant on those levels of coordinating interactions that are higher than the level of dyads, i.e. the levels on which individuals take actions within clearly defined groups (teams, communities or macro groups).

We shall revisit this problem further in the book. However, we wish to draw attention here to the fact that although the model we follow assumes that new linkages are established always on the basis of already existing “products” of core configurations of interactions – images of reality, social identities, or language – the use of such “repeated assemblies” to establish new linkages between people at the same time creates an additional mechanism that lends more dynamism to social life. Its significance increases along with the changes of historically known forms of sociality.

### 4.3 Analyzing processes of historical changes

At first glance, the discussed model’s key concept of a “repeated assembly of interactions” may seem close to the concepts around which sociology’s two fundamental paradigms – normative and interpretative – are organized (Wilson

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180 Historians of the family emphasize the special dependency between the family and the state: a weak state is usually accompanied by a strong family, and vice versa. In the former case, the lack of an appropriate “interface” forces units from the lower level to directly interact with the environment.

181 This phenomenon is often called “path dependency.” Its primary effect is that processes of social change have to be analyzed in a way that takes into consideration a *broader historical perspective*. Problems arising from this are discussed in further chapters.

1970), namely those of “patterns of behavior” and interactions as such. The former is linked to “assembly” by way of its iterative character, whereas the latter – through the fact that they are focused on joint actions, and not on individual behavior. Despite such similarities, however, the concept of “assembly” differs fundamentally from its predecessors, at least in several respects.

First, the above concept does not concern forms taken by individual actions<sup>182</sup> but rather their consequences, which consist precisely in the above “repeated assemblies” created in the course of interactions. For example, micro coordination can take many forms, depending on the dyad’s component, the character of adaptations and the features of the social environment (the level of teams); however, in no case can it – as we have demonstrated – “congeal” in a form transferred from one situation to another. It is not a norm, or an algorithm of action, but a dynamic system that is subject to never-ending micro changes. Second, the concept of “repeated assembly” always engages at least two elements (the dyad), which are analyzed in terms of their mutual adaptation. In other words, no room is left for the emergence of any “autonomous subject” reflexively pursuing her goals.<sup>183</sup> The individual is always socially oriented, at least in the sense of her actions being invariably dependent, at least to some degree, on the actions of the partner(s) in interaction<sup>184</sup> – even if the latter obediently accepts the definition of the situation created in the course of that interaction. Even when we observe a single individual, her behavior has to be considered as an effect of her past adaptations, which have somewhat shaped it. Third, the scope of these adaptations is not accidental or shaped solely by individual needs, “utility,” or preferences, but rather – in line with the assumptions made here – is limited

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182 In the case of the normative paradigm, the basic form for patterns of behavior is the social norm, a concept that emphasizes *how* a given action should be carried out. In the case of the interpretive paradigm, the focus on form is best visible in ethno-methodological analyzes, and in Goffman’s analyzes of the “presentation of self in everyday life,” which underscore the importance of ritual, playing roles, defining frameworks of behavior, etc.

183 This does not mean, however, that individuals cannot strive to achieve goals that are important only for them, or attempt to acquire “full” control over own actions. Nevertheless, the question of agency or of the importance ascribed to personal goals can be considered only from the perspective of consciousness, which makes it the domain of psychology and social psychology.

184 Paradoxically enough, this assumption does not differ in any way from the one made by Mead. However, symbolic interactionists clearly shifted their focus from processes of mutual adjustment of individual actions to outcomes of such processes, i.e. definitions of situation (cf. Blumer 1966).

and defined, on the one hand, by those ways of regulating relationships among individuals that are prevalent in a given type of society on all four levels of interaction, and – on the other – by the main principle organizing social order, which determines the specific kind of society in question. In other words, the scope of adaptations is defined and limited by both ways of understanding socialization discussed in Chapter Two. Finally, or fourthly, this model could potentially explain the transformations of a once created form of sociality. This makes it a promising theoretical point of departure for describing processes of social change.

The last statement demands further expansion. At the foundation of the model proposed by Linnda Caporael, we certainly find analyzes of primary communities, which is confirmed by the vast majority of examples she uses, as well as by the descriptions of at least some tasks assigned to particular levels of configurations of interactions (cf. tab. 4.1, p. 137). Basically, one could say that Hull's work – which she quotes as an important source of inspiration – is used in her work mostly to establish the equivalence between primary communities (in the anthropological sense) and ones that are “primary” in the social sense, i.e. those that share with the former the basic function of establishing a shared vision of reality. Caporael also uses Hull's work to demonstrate her own model's potential for analyzing phenomena and processes typical for contemporary society, ultimately achieving an ambiguous effect, to which we shall return later. However, if we limit ourselves to primary communities in the narrow sense, we should pay attention to three kinds of relations – matching our findings in the previous two chapters – which may play a significant role due to the evolution of this form of organization of social life.

The first one is the relation that links a given system of coordinated actions (in this case *the community*) with *the habitat*. It is crucial chiefly because it affects to a large degree the collectivity's size, consequently affecting the transformations of its internal organization and structure. As Jared Diamond has demonstrated (1999), unfavorable features of the habitat constituted the main factor that decided about the lack of development and the survival to this day of small hunter-gatherer communities, consisting basically of multi-generation families: several adults, children and elderly moving within a territory they controlled. Describing one such primary community that still lives in New Guinea, Diamond argues that their lasting commitment to a nomadic lifestyle stems from the fact that “the region lacks dense local concentrations of resources that would permit many people to live together, and that (until the arrival of missionaries bringing crop plants) it also lacked native plants that could have permitted productive farming” (1999, 270). He concludes by saying that “[b]and numbers

are kept low by diseases (especially malaria), by the lack of raw materials in the swamp (even stone tools must be obtained by trade), and by the limited amount of food that the swamp yields for humans” (270).<sup>185</sup>

Along with the adoption of a sedentary lifestyle, which started agriculture and animal husbandry (estimated by archaeologists to have happened ca. 10,000 years ago in particularly fertile areas), the size of population began to increase. The tribes that emerged then comprised several blood-bound groups (clans) and included hundreds of people. However, all members of the tribe would know each other and be related by blood. It is an important factor, because it decreased the probability of arguments inside the community. In other respects, the tribes would not differ much from bands. Without formal leadership, the differences in position would be still related only to sex, age, and personal characteristics. Status would not be inherited by individuals, the system of mutual obligations would not favor accumulation of wealth, and the economy would be based on the exchange of goods among families and individuals.

However, the relation between new ways of exploiting the habitat (agriculture) and the growth of population had an autocatalytic character. According to Diamond, it “catalyzes itself in a positive feedback cycle, going faster and faster once it has started” (111); furthermore, the tempo of population growth slightly exceeded that of the increase in food production.<sup>186</sup> This necessitated searching for new means of increasing production, which in turn led – when successful – to the increase in the size of population. This process had two important consequences. First, it favored the development of tools and new methods of production. Second, it led to the emerging of centers of power, and initiated the process of social differentiation since in those collectivities whose numerical

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185 In terms developed by Diamond, the band is the smallest and most “primary” (in the evolutionary sense) type of social organization, which was probably prevalent in the period of developing the “foundational holism.” It would typically comprise 5–80 people, most of whom would be related. “Bands lack many institutions that we take for granted in our own society” (1999, 268). Territory would belong to the entire collectivity and there would be no stable economic specialization (aside from tasks tied to age and sex). Without any system of governance, leadership in the band would be informal and won only through individual abilities such as strength, intelligence and military skill.

186 According to data gathered by archaeologists, “first farmers in many areas were smaller and less well nourished, suffered from more serious diseases, and died on the average at a younger age than the hunter-gatherers they replaced” (Diamond 1999, 105). However, there were more of them, which gave them an edge in contacts with others.

strength passed a certain threshold, kinship ceased to be the mechanism regulating relations between individuals, exacerbating the risk of internal conflicts, which caused chiefdom to emerge along with the distinction between the rulers and the ruled.<sup>187</sup> At the same time, a separate population category emerged – i.e. clerks and craftsmen – who worked for the chieftain and were paid with tributes offered to him.

This is already a different type of social organization, because it fundamentally restructures the population and the system of forces operating within it. The egalitarian though certainly differentiated community was replaced by a hierarchically structured collectivity, in which certain categories of people occupied lower levels of the social structure, while others were elevated to the top and furnished with the authority to issue orders. This entails the transformation of the second crucial relation, namely one linking the system of coordinated actions, i.e. *the primary community* and the images of reality it generates, or (to employ terms that shall be used in further analyzes) its *collective representations*. The emergence of chiefdom was accompanied, on the one hand, by a necessary change in these representations so that they could embrace the transformation of social identities, and – on the other – a necessary legitimization of the new social order, which usually led to the transformation of the older system of beliefs into an institutionalized religion supporting the chieftain's authority.

Institutionalized religion not only legitimizes the new social order but also “brings two other important benefits to centralized societies. First, shared ideology or religion helps solve the problem of how unrelated individuals are to live together without killing each other – by providing them with a bond based on kinship. Second, it gives people a motive, other than genetic self-interest, for sacrificing their lives on behalf of others” (278). The “interest of others” – a general interest – leads to the third crucial relation, which links *collective representations and the habitat*. Certain elements of these representations had to be modified earlier due to the emergence of actions that originated in the above-mentioned development of tools and methods of agricultural production, which accompanied the shift from a nomadic lifestyle to a sedentary one. Thus, one could generally say that new actions related to the transforming of the habitat always create a kind of “anomaly” in the predominant image of reality; therefore, they need to be somewhat incorporated into it. At the same time, however,

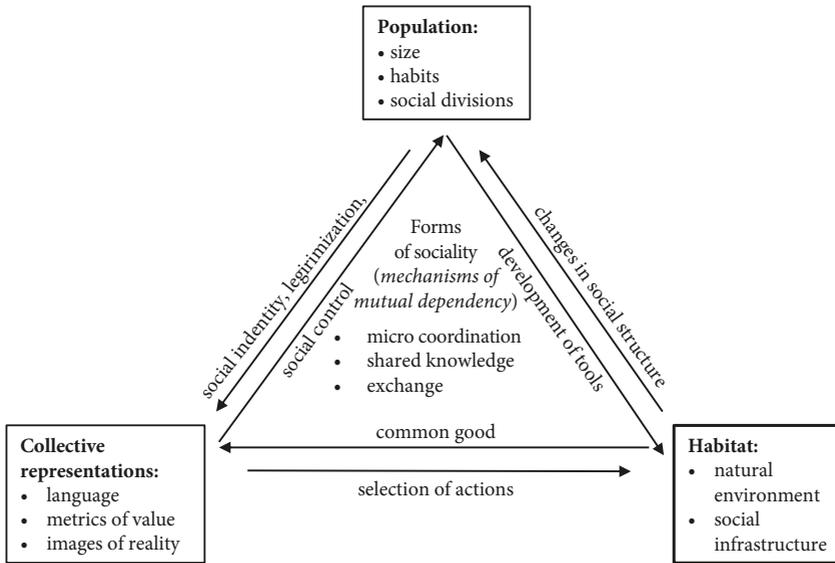
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187 Diamond makes the following comment about this process: “[w]ith the rise of chiefdoms around 7,500 years ago, people had to learn, for the first time in history, how to encounter strangers regularly without attempting to kill them” (273).

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**Fig. 4.1:** Relations between main factors influencing processes of socializing and their changes

parallel transformations in social representations, arising from changes in the collectivity's structure, redefine the concept of the common good, which is defined in the context of the habitat's features that change, among other reasons, due to human actions.

All of these relations are presented in fig. 4.1.

This scheme shows that the concept of society – defined earlier in this study as the dominant form of sociality – ought to be placed not “over” or “besides” individuals, but rather “amidst” all that which is created as a result of their actions: ones performed at various levels of the hierarchical organization of social life, in a particular habitat transformed by them, directed and legitimized by particular types of social representations shaped by the influence of both the habitat and the collectivity. In other words, society would emerge from relations that link the population, the habitat and social representations.

One essential feature of the model proposed by Linnda Caporael is, therefore, that it obliterates the dichotomy of the individual and society. In her approach, analysis of direct relations (often oppositional) between these two entities is replaced by analysis of interactions between individuals at various levels of

“sociality.”<sup>188</sup> The assumption that each of these levels is nested in lower ones, along with the assumption that functions created at any of the higher levels can be used in the course of interactions occurring at lower levels, eliminate both the danger of becoming reductionist and the danger of “losing sight” of individuals in analyzes of macro systems.

At the same time, however, it might seem that this model achieves this advantageous effect precisely by eliminating society – at least in the sense given to this term in contemporary sociology. It does not entail anything that we have come to associate with the concept of society as a social system: institutions, social structures, apparatuses of power and coercion, economic and educational systems, etc. The place of society understood in this way is taken in Caporael’s model by various kinds of base groups. Owing to the functions ascribed to them (the creation of images of reality, the coordination of team efforts and the defining of social identities), they should be simply identified with communities, i.e. as groups comprised by individuals tied with social bonds, which constitute the basic level of social integration and the source of sociality.

This is certainly not an objection against Caporael’s model, since it is sufficiently “legitimized,” as it makes it possible to explain the dynamics of social life *in its particular areas*. However, this becomes a fundamental problem if we take this model as a point of departure for explaining social transformations analyzed in terms of *types of social organization*, i.e. in terms of the transition from the traditional to the modern and postmodern society, even if the existence of the last kind is still hypothetical.<sup>189</sup> It is therefore paramount to

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188 It seems highly probable that the method of analysis proposed here will be accused of neglecting human intentionality, free will, and agency, thus constituting another variant of cultural determinism. Indeed, the discussed scheme does not leave room for the kind of individual agency understood as being “ontologically primary,” because the theory of mind assumed here (cf. Chapters Two and Three) argues that individual intentionality is always the outcome of interplay of meanings present in culture (considered as a repository of social memories) and of the use made of those meanings by individuals. However, such an understanding of intentionality has nothing in common with any variant of “cultural determinism” and leaves a lot of room (especially today) for individual decisions stemming from individualized perspectives on reality, one’s unique position in the world and the rules that govern that world. As we demonstrate in previous chapters, even if it is necessary for our minds to use cultural contents, both the nature of the main carriers of culture as social memory and the very structure of our brains still leave a lot of space for invention in processing these contents.

189 Contemporary sociology does not question the existence of the traditional and modern order as distinct principles of coordinating actions, although their definition

consider whether and in what way the concept of society could be included in the discussed model given that “society” is a term referring to historically developed forms of sociality, organizing the functioning of particular communities, institutions and subsystems.

Clearly, this cannot be done simply by assuming that society is a more general variant of community. Regardless of difficulties with cogent arguing in favor of such a claim, and regardless of the fact that it remains unknown what the *macrodeme* level would be in that case, this assumption leads us back to the starting point of this chapter, namely the problem of the relation between the individual and society. Nor is it a viable solution to assume that society constitutes a kind of a federation of communities; in that case, the concept of community would have to cover extremely diverse forms of social structures (from families to classes and markets); moreover, it would remain uncertain what integrates a social entity defined in this way.

It seems that a much more fruitful path to pursue would be to assume that the above schema (fig. 4.1.) presents – on the historical plane considered here – a model of socializing human actions that is proper to tribal communities, thus representing the simplest instance of this process, which could be further developed along with the increase in internal diversity and intricacy of human collectivities. In tribal communities, we observe a strict overlapping of three qualitatively different kinds of orders that characterize contemporary societies: social, political and economic orders. It is only in the tribal community that teams of men and women, which realized different tasks, as well as families, clans, chieftains, warriors, and shamans, create one institutionalized order bound together by a sense of a collective “we” (social order), taking together decisions that are crucial for the tribe (political order) and jointly utilizing the resources at its disposal (economic order).<sup>190</sup> Already in chiefdoms – the kind of organization of social life that chronologically follows the tribal community<sup>191</sup> – we deal with early autonomization

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is constantly modified and perceived increasingly often as an idealization and not a literal account of historical processes. The subject of dispute here is whether currently observable processes of change constitute a new kind of social order (perhaps merely prefiguring it) or local variants of the modern order.

190 A sort of a summary of research on contemporary tribal communities, and of analyzes of paleoanthropologists can be found in Diamond (1999; especially Chapter 13). Lévi-Strauss takes a similar approach (cf. Charbonnier 1969). The latter also emphasizes the role of elaborate ritual systems in eliminating potential conflicts that could prevent reaching agreement in all of these orders.

191 We are referring here to the distinction proposed by Jared Diamond (cf. Diamond 1999, 316–317).

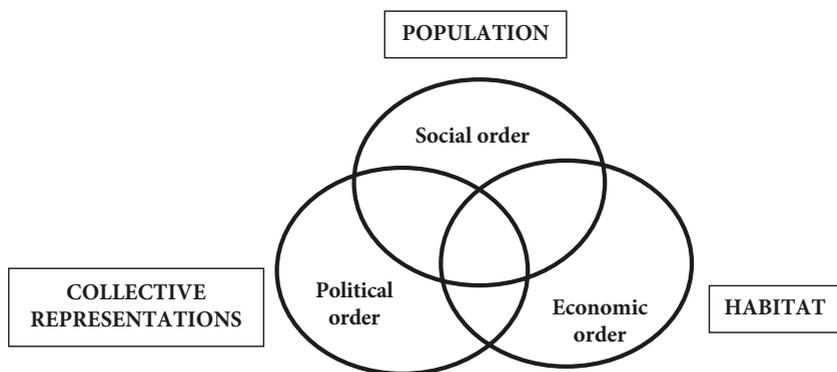
of the political order since decisions that are crucial for the fate of the entire tribe are made by the chieftain, whose position is heritable. Moreover, at this stage of changes there emerges a close relation between religion and political power since one of the functions of the religious systems was to legitimize the decisions of rulers, who would thus gain influence over the shape of collective representations.

This process of functional autonomization of three basic types of orders gains momentum with the rise of ancient empires, or “agrarian bureaucracies”<sup>192</sup> (a term that better reflects their nature), characterized by centralized power, poorly developed land ownership and an elaborate system of redistribution. The process developed continuously, culminating in the form of organization of social life that characterizes the modern society, where the sustenance and reproduction of each type of order would be guarded by separate social institutions. One could say that each of those types of order concentrates and simultaneously generates specific *systems of interaction*, which are subordinated to the creation and re-creation of three basic dimensions that jointly constitute a given form of sociality: the social order serves to reproduce the population in its mental dimension, inscribing biological reproduction into a previously developed framework of the psychic apparatus, or of the “social character;” the economic order is responsible for the reproduction of the habitat by transforming some parts of the natural environment into a socialized milieu; and finally, the political order is focused on the reproduction of collective representations, which are the key tool in integrating and mobilizing resources across the entire society in situations of threat or expansion. Therefore, each order “cuts out” a different kind of collectivities in society (cf. fig. 4.2.): the social order – collectivities whose main function is socialization (the family, social group, education system); the economic order – collectivities aiming at production and exchange (companies, banks, markets); and finally, the political order – collectivities engaged in defining the common good (political parties, churches, ideological movements).

Naturally, this division has a purely analytical character. In reality, each domain distinguished in fig 4.2. is connected through numerous links to all others, while particular collectivities may serve functions ascribed to all of the above orders (though to a varying degree). Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that each order also has its unique features and dynamics, which can be analyzed only in

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192 The term was suggested to us by Jacek Kochanowicz.



**Fig. 4.2:** Basic systems of social reproduction

terms appropriate to it.<sup>193</sup> More importantly though, a given form of sociality (i.e. a given type of society) is, in each separate case, the outcome of interactions which take place not just among individuals – after all, they can belong simultaneously to collectivities that are part of different orders – but rather among institutionalized systems of interaction developed within each particular order.

Accepting this approach to the analysis of changes in types of sociality entails two important consequences.

First, since it follows from the previous chapter that socializing of human actions may occur only on the basis of social bonds, the historical process of functional autonomization of particular systems should be accompanied by the emergence of some forms of communities – let us call them “base” communities – which would not only produce a certain range of social representations, shared by all members of a given system, but also have at their foundation some kind of a social bond.<sup>194</sup> Therefore, it becomes possible to assume – already at this point, and regardless of the direction in which we shall develop the basic model of socializing processes (cf. fig. 4.1) – that at the foundation of that model we have to find some forms of such base communities.

193 This is what lies at the foundation of economics, political science, and cultural anthropology – disciplines focusing on the analysis of the specific character of particular systems in human societies.

194 One example of such a process is provided by science, as analyzed by Hull (1990) and used by Caporaël to illustrate possible applications of her model. Let us also draw attention here to the fact that the process of functional autonomization of particular

Second, the above description of the three basic types of relations found in this model clearly shows that – by their very nature – they exist in a state of delicate balance. As mentioned earlier, each “reiteration” of a given form of “repeated assembly” is particular and specific – i.e. unique – which means that each may potentially contain elements that not only distort the process of reproduction but also seriously modify the character of these “assemblies.” Therefore, the process of multiplying base communities (assumed above) is bound to increase their potential to change to an astonishing degree. It would therefore follow that if a given type of sociality (society) were to acquire a more legible form (not to mention being reproduced), a general idea holding together the entire system would be necessary. It would keep aberrant behavior of individuals within safe limits, both on particular levels of interaction and within each of the distinguished orders. In other words, it is necessary to create a certain kind of meta-community binding all, or at least the majority of members of a given society, by producing a collective “we” and by subordinating their actions to the superior concept of the common good.

The “idea of society” defined in this way is impossible to identify without reference to historical data. The next three chapters of this book are devoted to analyzes of transformations occurring in three areas of social life: the family, work and the public sphere. The choice of these areas was determined primarily by their relation to the three basic orders distinguished above, which are crucial for the functioning of all kinds of societies. However, there was also another reason behind this choice, namely the conviction that each of those areas is specially related to some type of society. The family or, to put it more precisely, clans or houses, constitute the basic unit in the social organization of traditional society. Work or production form the “identity” of the modern society. Finally, the public sphere, or rather problems with negotiating the common good, are the *signum temporis* of processes related to the transformation of the contemporary, “postmodern” society. Therefore, a more detailed analysis of changes which occur in the course of historical evolution in these three areas could shed light on the very processes of social change, thus helping to identify more general factors that might lie at their foundation.

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orders constituting contemporary societies is usually analyzed in sociology in terms of differentiation of social roles. However, the concept of social role reduces the entire problem of sociality to the relationship between groups and individuals socialized by those groups, entirely disregarding the process of the *social* production of all that comprises a given understanding of roles and related duties.

