SOCIAL RELATIONS AND POWER

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Abstract

This paper presents an explanatory typology of social relations which moves forward from those habitual and known by social disciplines, and labels the three types: *actions – strategies – institutions*. We set out to research characteristics, specificities, relevance of and differences between each type, as well as their interactions and interweaving, which make up the complexity of social relations. Moreover, mutual interdependence between the said social categories is established, which corresponds to a new conceptualization of *power*. This avoids traditional reductionism and rescues rarely taken-into-account capacities and determinations. The pair "social relations and power" makes up a necessary and indispensable framework to tackle the various problems of the social world.

Key words: action; strategy; institution; power; relations.

Introduction

Societies are worlds of social relationships which can be dealt with from different perspectives, each of which intends, in a greater or lesser degree, to describe and explain – and, within some theoretical variables, "understand" – the characteristics, dynamics, structures and processes of the complex human societies. The social world is a presence and a paradoxical unknown factor, since it shows and hides, exhibits and overshadows, offers and retains, produces and subtracts, enriches and impoverishes, equals and differentiates, though with outstanding variations according to the adopted designs.

The theories, doctrines, ideologies, beliefs, ideas and practices attempt to get to know, to interpret -or modify- this complex social space through different viewpoints and ways to come to grips with it. It must be admitted that, in spite of all kinds of successes and failures, these are always forms of intellectual approach to social universes which are extremely hard to inquire and transform.

Societies are complex social structures- stable, unstable and conflictive, in different proportions, according to the historical conditions of time and space. They are inherited, reproduced and changing social formations as well as partly unconscious and "naturalized", and partly deliberate. And they go through restructuring and transformation processes throughout their histories, in terms of their own dynamics and contextual states.

As time goes by, societies seem to increase in complexity and confusion. Few of them, usually the most developed ones – though many tribes seem to share this state too – manage to establish a certain degree of coherence and articulation between their parts, even between dominating economic, political and cultural sectors or groups and the rest of the society, despite all their excesses and mistakes. Many others - in fact, the vast majority - fail to succeed in escaping the predominance of unarticulated and unbalanced states, as a general trend. Therefore, theories must continue revising their questions, postulates and chains of hypotheses so as to try to contain and explain a much too "vibrant and noisy"(1) social universe, which always seems to run ahead.

The crossing of the realities of the "nation", "State", "capitalism – liberalism" and democracy and its result, in a historical perspective, and the proliferation of different signs and projection "worlds of life" with their own percentage of power have both created scenarios and situations partly organized, thriving and open as well as partly tortuous, violent and contradictory, which make knowing the place and value of each thing and its articulation in the group difficult. Many writers have attempted models or approaches to observe the societies that overcome such overshadowing and have pointed out their "freedom", "equality" or, conversely, their "exploitation", "classes", "empire". They have also referred to the "structures", sometimes "structured – structuring", the "institutions" – sometimes "instituting – instituted", the "imaginary", the "disciplining", the "risks", the "liquidity", the "power", the "panic", the "social reality" and so on. In spite of their exuberance, these attempts seem to barely graze the complexity of social life. One of these is proposed as we offer a specific and synthetic morphology of social relations supported by power.

This position intends to clean the field invaded by categories, concepts and some "trap – words"(2) which obstruct a "complex and simplified idealization" of the problems to tackle. It also tries to form a basic nucleus of variables whose selection and structure enable a better understanding of the basic tissue of social relations. Social life is a complex web of institutions and organizations, ideas and beliefs, strategies and actions. The social disciplines, the humanities, philosophy, creeds, art and ideologies, either apart or in original combinations, try to explain and understand that complex reality and to create viewpoints, which also poses the need to create a world of knowledge-power adequate to these requirements.

New Field

At this point there is the possibility to construct an area of knowledge which not only revisits the existing social problems from a new perspective but which also discovers new problems not put forward till now. The construction of this space gathers some

characteristics which have already been discussed in Bourdieu's theory of fields, but it also takes others which differ from them and complement a picture otherwise much too slanted by ideology and desire. This field has, along the lines of the aforementioned author, some significant advances which deserve to be taken into account and whose ignorance have managed to transform groups of knowledge in ivory towers. One of those aspects points out that a field is formed within a site of struggle and competition. Then, there are power games and contestants who dispute, by means of strategies, the possession of the existing assets. Hence, within each field there exists a set distribution of assets and rival strategies determined to maintain their possession or trigger a change of possessor of the desired object (3). Consequently, there are some contestants who dominate and some others who want to enter and change the situation. Moreover, all fields have their own code, which must be known in order to gain access to and compete in it. (4)

Thus, this new field will have the group of "social and power relations", but these relations are not fortuitous or dispersed groups. They are not atomic particles distributed at random. On the contrary, though not denying their potential for uncertainty and chaos, these relations take shape on a level determined by certain special characteristics. This level refers to the principles of social relations formalization, organization and, particularly, differentiation; and this gives room to a tripartite configuration of social relations based on the playing of the following categories: *action – strategy – institution*, as well as to a new configuration based on the articulation of these three categories with the "power" vector. That is to say, there is articulation and link between the three and four categories within an active and reciprocal game, where removing or omitting would be to mutilate the explanatory status. In other words, the first trilogy is supported by the "engine" of its exercise and confidence, by its "capacity" to be: power.

Then, this quartet defines the field and the morphology of social relations and power. Sloterdijk(5), among others, points out the importance of putting forward morphological instruments to better explain political and cultural processes. He claims that applying these kinds of concepts is key to the sciences of culture since it provides formats which allow the incorporation and separation of confusing information, as well as the provision of coherence, to the discourses about reality.

All the big fundamental issues are always implied in social life, and appear especially as "background"(6). The most significant ones are, undoubtedly, the issues of class society, the economy and the market; the issue of politics and the State; that of the symbolic world, language and culture; and the issue of poverty, misery and inequality. There are also ethnic, national, racial, religious, territorial and class problems, whose

struggles, conflicts and articulations set conflicts, ruptures and agreements of all kinds in motion. With all this appears the framework of intersections and deceits of the four fundamental processes of modernity: the processes of democracy, the State, the nation and capitalism, with the intervention of liberalism, socialism, communism and "populism", among other variants, according to the socio-historical cases. All these issues are included in the framework presented in this paper, with contents and events.

Morphological Hypothesis

Our main hypothesis claims that social relations are permanently built and rebuilt, in different places, among the determinations of the institution, the strategy and the action, and under the strong support provided by the capacity of power. That is to say, these relations present varied combinations of characteristics which make up the triad. This position implies that a Social Theory with a new perspective, a new point of view which can go beyond the nowadays predominant "institutional" one, which is explanatory but reductionist as well as morphologically correct thought insufficient, needs to be developed. The proposed viewpoint must revalue a fundamental set of activities and social interventions – partly deliberate – which construct and destroy, stabilize and destabilize, change and transform different social processes and events, and take them back to a theoretical status. All those events are generally outside the social forms called institutions. We have called that set of activities and interventions "strategies" and "actions" due to the distinctive traits that these social phenomena possess.

Moreover, strategies and actions are usually predominant in several situations, since they are the ones which keep institutions current and alive; and they are also the ones that introduce changes and transformations even when the normative forms are kept. This is why, many times, institutions work as empty shells whereas strategies and actions offer the living movement of social processes. Besides, strategies and actions help institutions live in a way which differs from the one expressed by the legitimate norm. Institutions also structure and legitimize strategies and actions. However, none of this could take place without the determining presence of power.

All this relational material would be lost without the existence of a social theory capable of searching for, not only the formal order, but also – and specially – the real conflict order. These situations are accentuated when the institutions lose energy and become formal frames with little or no life. In this case, strategies and actions improvise as they go along, taking alternative paths and proposing new interrelations, changes and forms. All this builds a foundation on the structures of power.

Let us see these differences:

I. Institutions

The institutional approach is the most significant one in social sciences, and nothing seems to escape its persuasive dominance. The most varied social paradigms and theories center around the issue of "institutional forms".

Either to left r right, these attempt to find the principles of the desired social order as well as to discover the mechanisms of the legitimizing domination of the exploitation social systems. Social philosophy claims, through Popper, that the institutions are models of abstract or theoretical character, whereas Winch insists that "institutions rule over the behavior of the members of societies"(7). There is, undoubtedly, within social sciences a long traditions of studies on institutions. Tradition has enabled all social forms, especially the most consistent and stereotyped ones, to advance in the gaining of knowledge; but it has also dodged, neutralized or ignored the questions connected to unstable, changing, new and original processes.

The "institutionalist" point of view present in several theories, even rival ones, has focused its interest on the study of the repetitive or recurrent forms of social events. Some of the theories, in fact, link this with legitimation processes. There is no doubt that the said position offers an attractive enough support: it is easier to explain what happens and to predict future social phenomena from where there are repetition and accepted norms. This also allows productions closer to the status of "hard" sciences, i.e. closer to explanations and predictions derived from the existence of laws of nature. Of course, in the lives of societies such laws do not exist, despite all efforts to discover or "invent" them. Rather, there are statistical tendencies, empirical generalizations, institutional recurrences and strategic and action emancipations, all of which are supported by other kinds of facts and data also determined by power. Their likeness to the "blind" laws of nature may lead to confusion and unreal extrapolations.

The natural sciences have worked as a paradigmatic model, in the Roman- Latin sense, to the social disciplines. And this desire to be like or close to them has led to the belief that institutional recurrences can substitute unreachable laws. This has occurred within the decline of the states of uncertainty, changing and critical; of chain reactions; of sudden and unexpected findings; of exponential growths; of change of paths; and of the disordering (and ordering) chaos; as well as of all the social actors' indefatigable actions to produce and sustain historical constructions and destructions, in the short, medium and long run. This heterogeneous web, sometimes persistent and many times unstable and destabilizing, has been locked inside a reductionist institutional operation.

The importance of institutions in the life of societies is indisputable, and that is not criticized here. What is questioned here is the creation of a "static" disciplinary frame

which excludes other significant events. A vision centered around social formalities and "reproduction" factories ends up underestimating the huge wealth of the social material as it occurs. The dominant approaches in social sciences have diverted the attention of these "forms of life", whose game patterns interested the second Wittegenstein(8). Berger and Luckmann (9), in phenomenology, and J. Searle (10), on the realist side, have also dealt with this topic in their social constructions of reality. We have done this as well, in previous works (11) in a different direction. Berger and Luckmann state that "an institutional world is experimented as objective reality" (12), and along those lines, they ratify that the institutions constitute "typifications" of the actions, the actors and the kinds of actors. These institutions have their own historicity, tradition, social control and, in many cases, sanctions (13). They also mention in another passage that "(...) every institution has a body of transmitted recipe knowledge, that is, a knowledge that provides rules of appropriate institutional behavior" (14).

John Searle (15), one of the so-called philosophers of "ordinary" language, stands on the opposite side, as indicated in the title of his work. He differentiates between raw events and institutional events. The raw events are those which exist independently from any human institution. Historical events, on the other hand, refer to cultural and social issues which exist inside a system of constitutive rules. Moreover, the raw facts need the language institution to be known, even if they exist independently from it.

This author offers an answer to the reality-power-politics-language relationship. Both in his aforementioned work and in *Language and Power*, he asserts the deep language gravitation over the production of social events, thus confirming the presence of language both in the construction of society and in the institution itself, i.e. language as the institution of institutions.

We can neither overlook Oxford's philosopher and linguist J. Austin, when he confirms in his work *How to do things with words*, among others, the role of language in the production of institutions and other social realizations.

The politics theorist A. Panebianco also states that the "institutional approach" centers around the study of patterns in social relations and, in the case of politics, of specific inter-party and organization relations (16). K. Deutch also claims that the institution is a pattern of habits, expectations and roles which have a tendency to produce a more or less lasting and systematic effect on society (17). In this way, "regulation" theories introduce institutions as a group of habits and procedures which work through coercive and stimulating schemes. These conditionings lead social actors to the generations of behaviors that reproduce domination (18).

R. Lourau proposes an "institutional analysis" comprising both the theoretical perspective and the institutional intervention process. He claims that the concept of

institution is in a crisis and that it must be revised, while he criticizes and collects its historical antecedents. Institutions are polysemic, equivocal and problematic. He connects them with other concepts, through theories and authors, and he analyzes the terms "structure", "function", "integration", "social system" and "personification" among others. Lourau borrows an idea from C. Castoriadis, and differentiates between the "instituted" (what is established, current norms) and the "instituting" (as an instance of dynamic meaning, doing, interventions, etc). However, and despite all his warnings, the author fails to escape the predominance of the instituted.

In his last theoretical production, Lourau establishes a triad between the "instituting", the "instituted" and the "institutionalization". That is how social forms are polarized, in Hegel's style, and how new ways in the dialectic game of affirmation, negation and negation's negation are born (19). It is clear, at least to us, that the three categories remain tied in spite of the attempts to dynamize them to the concept of institution. They are the starting points of the purposes of change, rupture and the new established order.

It is believed that there exist two concepts of institutions - a wide and a restricted one. M. Weber adheres to the latter, and he explains it as follows

> We will call "institutions" those communities which present the state of things: 1) in opposition to the voluntary "union of goals", an accusation upon the basis of purely objective circumstances (...); 2) in contraposition with the communities by consent (...) the existence of such rational orderings (...) and of a coactive apparatus (...). (20)

The writer highlights the presence of a "rational statute" and the role of "imposition" as the foundation for the founding of institutions. This gives rise to specific characteristics of the institutional character which may restrain the ability to grasp the concept, but which could be clearly applied to the State.

C. Castoriadis, who has inspired Louraus's notions of the instituted and instituting, also sides with the self-transforming revolution and values the instituting as a modifying activity of the instituted. However, the social process is always seen through the institution. And he claims that "society, therefore, is always self-institution of the historical-social" and adds "it is true that, as such, the institution at each time can only take place as identity norm in itself, inertia and self-perpetrating mechanism"(21). He also states that overcoming the instituted implies radical destruction, the creation of new institutions, even the creation of "a *new way* of instituting oneself and a new relationship between society and man with the institution" (22).

There is no doubt that, in spite of the revalorization of the changing processes and of the role of the "institution" as transformation mechanism of the "instituted", Castoriadis

has not managed to leave the tight institution circle. The concept of "institution" is still starting point and imperative framework from which all the group of society's activities and observed and questioned, be these reproductionist or revolutionary. The institution - imaginary or real - is still the "social form" which contains the actions of society, both in its static estates and in its most dynamic movements.

All in all, we can point out that the institutions are configurations of set behaviors and that they work as legitimizing agents of those behaviors aided by social ideologies and imageries. Thus, the institutions consolidate organizing and recurrent structures and procedures. The static frame predominates over movement, form predominates over construction, synchrony over diachrony. The idea is not to deny the value of recurrence patterns, of Wittgensten's "forms of life", of Parsons's "integrating norms", of the functionalist "stable systems" and so on. The idea is, instead, to give back to the socio-historical processes the validity of their transforming - and even reproducing - capacity, not only of the institutional but also of other social configurations.

Besides, all institutions are also power constructions. Power is part of their structures and processes. With little or none of it, the institution has birth and construction problems, and it eventually declines and dies.

2. Strategy

All theories establish a place of systematic and explanatory reflection about some area of reality. The strategy theory attempts to explain one "kind" of social event and process characterized by its special attention to power problems, objectives and applied plan – execution. This kind of occurrence is characterized by being deliberate and by their search for a goal.

The strategy theory centers the approach on power events aimed at an arrival point at a certain time; that is to say, that these are executed action plans which try to get a result. They are powers programmed to achieve a goal. Then, this is not just any kind of social event or social action. From an infinite range of social events and actions, one kind of social processes and events is highlighted, those which bear some characteristics that make them "strategic". These characteristics may be summarized and synthesized in four segments which we will see later on. And, even though these could also be removed so that we could show a larger number of sides, we have preferred to make a "strategic" selection of elements so as to center things on the main places of strategic behavior.

A great number of social events, happenings and processes which are important and significant due to the effect they produce on the complex social entanglement correspond to the strategic level. This level indicates a social intervention modality

characterized by its forcefulness, its effectiveness and its execution capacity, since the strategies are always orientations and actions directed to achieve something, to reach goals, to change or reproduce real situations. This does not mean that the strategies actually do what they set out to achieve. Nor does this mean that they actually achieve what they are after. They only make and have results. They are, after all, deliberate actions which generate things, whatever these may be; since within this interplay-fight of cooperative, rival and antagonist strategies, a large section of social, political, economic and cultural life is built. A large part of history is created in this complicated and strong game. But all this is created and moves inside a field of uncertainty, where one ignores more than one knows and where the results are always – or almost always – vague and unpredictable.

Sometimes, when a strategy – or a group of strategies – stands out because of its precision, its effectiveness, its amount of power and its adequate direction towards the estate of things, it may rule over the other rival strategies and achieve a result close to the desired one – or at least the closest possible one. Sometimes, then, some strategies impose themselves over the group and direct the course of events or social processes. But many times the plot thickens, the results get inverted, the uncertainty grows (usually, exponentially) and the social situations wander towards unknown or unexpected endings. This is why social history can show us an immense number of strategic purposes which have been lost, deviated, aborted and buried by the enormous weight of chains of events intertwined and knotted unexpectedly. The strategies are carried out, made and installed on reality, but nobody knows for sure what will happen, even if each social actor wants otherwise. In the end, each strategy is partly a bet to the future, a gamble; and though some variables can be controlled, not all can.

The theory of strategy investigates, reflects upon and explains one kind of social events and processes which generally occur in uncertainty and operate on social fields of uncertainty and chance. This is one of the strategies' paradoxes, since, on the one hand, the strategic movement is the most rational – in articulately relating means and ends-, structured, conducted and directed to the achievement of set goals attempt, with the necessary amounts of power. That is, it is a deliberate attempt to overcome uncertainty, to envision what is to come, to master the forces which operate and scatter efforts, to find the most appropriate paths to arrive on time, to make the chased destiny real. And, on the other hand, it implies opening possibilities, rivalries, resistance, opposition to the others. That is, it originates – or reproduces – a new and, therefore, unknown social space; it opens a new game with uncertain end; it is, partly, a game and, consequently, it remains in the hands of chance; it sets in motion the fight

between active forces and dormant forces which wake up and expand with unexpected vigor. It enriches the - prior or current - social situation with new configurations, through the interweaving of rival essays, adversaries, enemies and allies.

If there is strategy, there is fight – even if it is a peace and consensus strategy, since all strategies generate various points of resistance, of hostility, of antagonism, of confrontation. Only rarely is consensus reached between freely choosing parts with equal forces, power and conviction. Most of the time, however, consensus belongs intrinsically to the utopias of each viewpoint, and in these cases, final consensus is reached after having managed to articulate all specific consensus held by the parties. Actually, in most cases, there is the attempt to make one's own strategy prevalent and then reach consensus, i.e. the winner's consensus. Some other times, conversely, consensus is considered ineffective and, often, dangerous.

Strategies are social interventions made up of, at least four elements. These are: 1. *Management / Leadership* – which analyzes the situation, directs the development of a line of activities, details the intertwining of adverse conditions, obstacles, opposing, alternative and favorable forces, and organizes the group of elements to operate; 2. *Project* – which sets the goal, the future scenario and path to be taken; 3. *Time* – all strategies stagger their paths, their development,(23) according to time – there is always a before and after; 4. *Power* – which are the necessary capacities to materialize the projects.

Strategic thought sets out from a key presupposition: in society, as opposed to in nature, nothing is granted for sure beforehand, nothing inexorably or necessarily happens. Nothing is determined in such a way that it must occur without doing anything about it. Then, with or without determinism, things happen if they are launched, if they are done. And, within this vast field of possible actions, strategies constitute the most appropriate construction to make this happen. Strategies intend to introduce some order in the alleged "chaos", which implies groups of possibilities which occur at random, or to change one order for another, or to transform it. Strategies leave their mark. They imprint a line. They inaugurate or steer a course. They always are or imply some interventionist will over an uncertain time – space.

Not applying a strategy, then, only indicates that the field of operations will be crammed by other strategies but the omitted one. That is, any one can "win", triumph, set the course, except the missing one, the strategic no-actor. And, as corollary, whoever fails to build a strategy to achieve the goals or purposes aspired is left to the mercy of the result from rival strategies. Thus, whoever fails to make a strategy does not just remain on the margin of the game but rather in the hands of his rivals. Then, there are attack strategies as well as defense strategies, which are used to resist and survive. People

and groups short of strategies are also short of answers and power, be this in defense or attack. It is not by chance that the weakest, the poorest, the defenseless are those with the fewest strategies appropriate to change the situation.

3. Action

Max Weber is one of the theorists who best understood and reformulated the concept of social action. Action is social precisely because it takes into account the existence and/or presence of the other. Weber establishes a typology of actions:

1. Rational action with arrangement to goals, 2. Rational action with arrangement to values, 3. Affective action and 4. Traditional action. This typology proves the importance given by this author to rational action and, at the same time, the width of behavior included, since he adds emotional states and the force of customs.

The categories *action, social action, interaction and social relation* are units and combinations scattered around the whole territory of social disciplines. This is understandable, since, on the one hand, they show characteristics belonging to the eternal search for basic bricks, for the basic particle which supports the social building, for the fundamental unit which presides all social relations, but, on the other, they also show characteristics which remain from the social sciences when organization and institutional processes are run out of. Then, there are several action theories and each one assigns it a key position, even if its significations vary.

In our case, social action is not only defined in itself but also in its relationship with the other two categories: "institutions" and "strategies". In this dialectical, triangular, and at the same time circular, game, action is granted with a set of attributes which are impossible to be thought of in isolation. Philosopher J. Habernas makes interesting comments and differentiations about the concept of social action. He makes the distinction between four main actions. The fist kind is *theological action*, in which action is defined by the goal (*télos*) it pretends to obtain. The actors are guided by the final objective, the state of distant and searched for things, using the appropriate means rationally in order to achieve a goal. This author also includes them with the one called *strategic action*, which actors also work for a goal, though taking into account the presence of "the other". This, with his expectations, re-socializes the action as the actor carries it out taking into account the existence of someone other than himself.

The second case is the *action governed by norms*, in which the action is performed within a frame of a social group, and its members orient his actions according to social values in common. The third type is called *dramatic action*, in which the social agents, like in the theater, play a role and introduce themselves to a public (Erving Goffman[24] has developed a sociology of everyday life in which he considers the premises of this

concept). And, finally, Habernas's strongest proposal is offered by the *communicative action*. In this case, interpersonal relations are established, in which subjects can reach consensual, balanced, rational, dominance-free communication. The writer opposes it to theological action and, essentially, to strategic action, since they differ in the way they understand rationality. In the strategic action, rationality is supported by the coordination effects of influence exercises, and it happens mainly through non-linguistic activities. These kinds of actions are not aimed at understanding. They are, conversely, interested in and supported by effectiveness. In communicative action, language plays the role of mediator in the achievement of agreements and understanding. Agreement is valid inter-subjectively since it has not been imposed by any one party. As a result, it is also inter-subjectively rational and, therefore, communicative (25).

We agree with Giddens's criticism to Habermas's concept of action in that his defended communicative proposal seems to ignore real situations, inequalities, power and interest struggles, and, on the other hand, it highlights the normative and systemic dimension(26). In our case, actions – which are always social, since no one lives outside the social world and stops carrying their specific and group socialization, not even in isolation or solitude situations – must be divided in types according to the characteristics that differentiate them. They are both different and complementary at the same time. Then, depending on the cases and approaches used in the analyses, communicative actions may be a variable of strategic actions, as they are characterized by having a goal: communicative agreement; and by using axiomatically valid procedures within a reciprocity context. Conversely, strategic actions can represent one moment in the development of the communicative and understanding processes.

We claim, at least temporarily, that actions can have types which depend on the observer's viewpoint and on the object of established knowledge. This is how categories, distinguished according to the characteristics to be chosen, are formed, which bears significance when the theoretical framework and the empirical correlate allow for the discovery of those elements of the action which are more decisive in social processes.

However, leaving action on its own, as the main category in social life, and placing the fundamental importance of social relationships, strategies and institutions on the background, weaken the explanatory and meaningful group offered by the triad. Moreover, and above all, actions borrow energy from power. Power is, actually, "its" energy. When power fades, action stops. In the end, there is no activity for the action without an allotment of power.

4. The institution – strategy – action relationship

Strategies, institutions and actions differ from, oppose and relate to each other dialectically. Pointing out some distinctive and opposite characteristics does not imply the negation of their reciprocal interventions. While institutions move towards stable rigidity, strategies and actions are more malleable and active. While the former intends to perpetrate and rule over movement, the latter adapt to the unevenness of the terrain, operate on the obstacles and respond to threats and surprises.

It is true that institutions usually live and last longer than the other forms, and that they stabilize social orderings. But it has not been noticed that those repetitions and frameworks work by movements with different characteristics, especially strategic and actional. This is why institutions are sometimes seen as frail, ungettable and contradictory, and when they are stabilized for long periods, they have to reproduce, through constant games and struggles, under special conditions, i.e. in the predominance of certain stabilizing powers where multiple elements are abundant and articulated, and where the symbolic world offers some framework of appreciative and normative coherence and is located at a predominant positions in the forming of that power.

Everything takes place through struggles and agreements, consensus and dissension, intentions and, partly unexpected, results. When the predominance in the symbolic world changes and, because of this and other reasons, the power relations which had stabilized that order are altered (from laws and regulations to the use of force), history takes a brand new path.

Nobody ignores the ordering force of institutionalized and sanctioned norms. However, the repertoire of behaviors and strategies which are necessary to make that norm "live" should not be overlooked either. The norm, traditions and the situation at present actually co-determine the "action". But, even if we focus on the normative aspect of behavior, we should still take into account how social actions are established and through which mechanisms they are repeated, as well as how acting patterns are perpetuated. And here we will encounter variations, changes, deterioration, and novelties unacceptable to the norm, but acceptable to reality. These norms are sometimes just empty charts, wrappings, marks and fetishes with a short life, which social praxis has left behind while taking a different course, a different line of action, which has little to do with the old pattern.

The group of unexpected and unforeseen results with a tendency to usually exponential progress has to be paid attention too. That varied game of social interventions enables, then, *sui generis* reproductions – which copy a little and modify a

lot -, alternative paths and, many times, opposite directions to institutional determinations.

There is no doubt that institutions have a key role, but this should not be overrated. These institutions often become part of strategic movements or series of actions. We can observe in everyday life episodes that a large number of strategies and actions are produced to build stability and change-and-rupture processes. Social construction of the reality of everyday life takes place both because of strategies and actions and of institutions as recurrent forms.

For instance, considering the State as a political (even with its contradictions and commitments), normalized, rigid and bureaucratic institution is a problem. Another problem is to tackle it as a complicated strategic-institutional-actional web where all movements lead to different vertices and where the State sails in a sea of internal and external actions and strategies which continuously invade it, make it, hit it and test it, and where the State sometimes survives by using actions and powerful strategies construction, which stabilize an order dependant upon them and not weakened institutions. State reality is a complex web of actions, strategies and institutional forms that expresses the history of its formation and development. In spite of the constitutional definitions and the directives of the Law, the situation of the State has moments and historical stages where institutional orders, strategic interventions and actions of different degrees of importance are set.

Institutions are "formal", strategies are "informal-formal" and actions are "informal". Institutions tend to create structures, regulations, work divisions and ideological codifications. Strategies construct instrumentally. Actions live all possible alternatives within their restricted historical time-space. Institutions tend to repeat, strategies to intervene and actions to interrupt. Institutions replicate, copy, revolve around themselves; strategies change and reproduce while moving; actions are atomistic except when they move up to other formats. Nothing is the same for actions and strategies, even if they want to repeat institutional orders. When they get ready to continue the institutional tradition, they must respect the real, always changing, conditions in order to move along.

Institutions are "hard", strategies are "semi-soft" and actions are "soft". Institutions follow the orders of their continuity, avoiding leakage and crises, dodging decadence and crumbling. Strategies, on the other hand, expand and shrink as convenient; they get rid of useless burden and take on what they deem necessary, even if that has been previously rejected. Actions spread continuously through the social tissue, not being able to avoid it. Thus, strategies and actions may be adaptable and, at the same time, revulsive, depending on what they have been looking for or doing. They tend not to

attach themselves to scales or orders, and they usually sneak through the gaps within the social plot.

5. Power

The reciprocal interdependence of institutions, strategies and actions supported by power should not be overlooked. The hypothesis backing this idea up claims that all social relations are also power relations. None can exist without the other, and while those are constituent parts of power relations, these are, in turn, necessary for the first. Therefore, no social relations can exist without power or outside it – of course, if and only if the concept of power bears the width and the characteristics referred to here.

Getting to know power establishes the need of a new problematic reformulation. There is no doubt that reformulating implies a "twist" and the construction of a new viewpoint, but it also needs to add whatever is considered rich within theory development, even if the theories are rival. Power is formed by all elements comprised by reality: social relations, actions, strategies, institutions, organizations, myths, beliefs, values and knowledge. Its peculiarity lies on the fact that it shapes those elements in organizing complexes empowered with creative and imposing capacity.

Our viewpoint of this subject, from a "globalizing" understanding which includes all levels and social dimensions of power, can very well be complemented by a "localizing" perspective, such as is presented by Foucault. Then, the macro and micro views inter-relate and feed one another without losing context or specificity. Foucault only dealt successfully with the problem of power from a "microphysics"(27) because he regained the praxis located in each social situation and clarified the construction of power in each place. This must be added to the determinism and inter-determinism coming from the top of the state or from the foundations of the economy, from the "production relations" and culture. We believe that power's local specificity needs to be completed with a "macrophysics of power"(28), like we mentioned in *Power. Towards a systematic Theory(*29), always retaining a metaphorical sense which takes into account the different levels of generality, contextualization and mediation.

The production of power encompasses a very large spectrum. It extends from relationships like the political, cultural, ideological and economic "dominating-dominated" kind to the creation of the many forms of management, direction, orientation and influence that social relations have when in search of their objectives and goals. This is why power may cause subjection, collapse or emancipation, as well as the complex intertwined frame of all the possibilities in social life.

Power is doing, but it is also refusing to do; it is forcing and persuading to do, as well as preventing from doing. Therefore, it sometimes dominates and some other times

frees. It is not just order and obedience, since it also creates, produces and emancipates. The concept of power entails a connotation of force and abuse which hides other liberating and opposing characteristics. Power is usually opposed to morale, freedom and equality. This, though, inhibits the possibility to understand its other capacities, therefore weakening the fair struggle against powerful dictations in the economic, political and cultural arena.

As a result, power is always a capacity: a capacity to achieve something. It can then be defined as a capacity to make and carry out decisions, to stop or hamper them, and to make more powerful alternative capacities prevail or to impose them over the whole group of social, political, economic, religious, military and personal relations.

Conclusions

Power is spread around all the social space, though in different concentrations and dispersions. It makes imposition or creation units of different extents, and an important part of that power is hidden, submerged, far from the citizens' sight. Consequently, there exists a complex frame of power structured in domination and rival poles accordingly and, many times, "encoded" within societies.

Therefore, power cannot be escaped from, since it is a constitutive part of all societies. The alternative power/no-power does not exist. However, types and forms of power which are produced and carried by social actors and which mark the different possibilities, tendencies and performances of social and political processes do exist. As a result, there are creating and subordinating powers, positive and negative powers, constructive and destructive powers.

In this way, power provides social relations whose basic structures seem to be that of institutions–strategies–actions with its capacities. Institutions "recite", strategies "speak" and actions "update". Institutions pontificate, idolize and introduce crystallized ideologies. Strategies doubt, question, ask, while weighing up the irregularities of their path and arming operative forces to attain goals. They even "use" the crystallizations and recitals as long as they are inserted as parts of social forces and interventions and as long as they contribute to reinforce their repertoire of dynamic power. Actions are everyday life itself. They explore the terrain and sets out to "make" the society in all possible behaviors, from the most random and anarchical to the most ordered and formalized. And in all of these activities, the aforementioned triad needs the strength and the presence of power.

Lastly, power is the capacity that institutions, strategies and actions have in order to build, normalize, reproduce, project, execute, transform and act along the whole social relations' chain. Power is the "updating" strength - in all its possible directions – that

creates social forms with all their historical contents, identities and differences. Thus, the *new field of social relations* has established it specific problems and reciprocal interactions, and has not forgotten its intertwining with the other social fields where power and production, political and cultural relations also inhabit.

Notes

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2. See Morin E. *Sociología.* Tecnos: Madrid, 1995: 144.

3. Bourdieu, P. *Sociología y cultura.* Grijalbo: Mexico, 1990.

4. Bourdieu, P. *L distinción.* Taurus: Madrid, 1988.

5. Sloterdijk, P. *Esferas I.* Ediciones Siruela: Madrid, 2003.

6. Searle, J. *La construcción de la realidad social.* Paidós: Buenos Aires, 1995.

7. Winch, P. *Ciencia social y filosofía.* Amorrortu: Buenos Aires, 1972: 117.

8. Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations.* Blackwell: Oxford, 1953.

9. Berger, P y Luckmann, T. *La construcción social de la realidad.* Amorrortu: Buenos Aires, 1979.

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11. Labourdette, S. *Política y Poder.* A-Z: Buenos Aires, 1993. (Among other works)

12. Berger and Luckmann, op cit. 82.

13. Op cit, 66-163.

14. Op cit, 89.

15. Searle, J. Op cit

16. Panebianco, A. *Modelos de partido, Organización y Poder en los Partidos Políticos.* Alianza Universitaria: Madrid, 1990.

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22. Op cit, 333.

23. Labourdette, S. *Política y estrategia.* Editorial UNLP: La Plata, 1999.

24. Goffman, E. *Estigma.* Amorrortu: Buenos Aires, 2001.

25. Habermas, J. Op cit, vol. 1: 368

26. Guiddens, A. *Política, Sociología y teoría Social.* Paidós: Barcelona, 1997.

27. This is connected with Foucault's stage called "genealogy of power", which includes works such as *Microphysics of power.* The Spanish translation used here was published by Ediciones de la Piqueta, in Madrid, 1979.

28. The term "macrophysics" is metaphorically used here to create a play on words with Foucault's term. No "physicalist" connotation is added.

29. Labourdette, S. *El poder. Hacia una teoría sistemática.* Ed. De Belgrano: Buenos Aires, 1984.

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