Mann and Relational Sociology

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1 Introduction

Although Mann has never considered himself a relational sociologist, other scholars have recognized seeds of relationalism in his works. Thus, Emirbayer (1997, p. 295) sees it in Mann’s view of societies as overlapping and intersecting sociospatial networks of power. Hecskala (2016, p. 31) indicates that Mann’s framework can be located between resource theoretical and relational approaches to power, and considers the option of enriching Mann’s project through setting the stage for a dialogue between him and Michel Foucault, a thinker who is probably the most influential among those who have explicitly underlined the need to be attentive to “the strictly relational character of power relationships” (Foucault 1978, p. 95). Similarly, both Dépelteau (2008, p. 52) and Selg (2016b, p. 198) have included Mann among the camp of thinkers who have taken important steps towards “deep” relational thinking, or more. Nevertheless, there have not been any systematic treatments of Mann’s work from the viewpoint of relational sociology. This is exactly the gap we set out to fill in the current chapter. However, given our space limitations, we have to restrict our task to Mann’s work on power as it unfolds in his four-volume The Sources of Social Power, since this is probably the most lasting of his achievements. Two edited volumes of more than 700 pages in total have been dedicated to this work alone (Hall and Schroeder 2006; Schroeder 2016a). Comprehensive overviews of it abound. Here our intention is not to compete with these writings on Mann’s magnum opus, but to engage the reader with the storyline of this work, which is anything but abstract theorizing, but

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rather an empirical masterpiece written in accordance with the best traditions of historical sociology. We will come to Mann’s conceptual framework after a brief introduction of his major topics in the four volumes.

Volume 1 (Mann 1986) is titled “A History of Power from the Beginning to A.D 1760.” The volume starts with the story of the emergence of the human civilization, the first states and empires (in the Fertile Crescent region). Mann analyses the ascendancy of the Greek multi-actor civilization and regards the Roman Empire as the most advanced among the ancient empires in combining skillfully all sources of social power. He also examines the rise of Christianity and the transformation of the ideological power relations arising from it. Mann provides a compelling analysis of the birth of the medieval Western civilization that had a “cell-like” social structure which turned out to be one source of the European dynamism in the later centuries. In the last chapters of the volume Mann pays a lot of attention to the evolution of the modern states, while his major focus is on the developments in the medieval and early modern England and North Western Europe in general.

Volume 2 (1993) titled “The Rise of Classes and Nation-states, 1760–1914” analyses the Industrial Revolution, the French and American revolutions, and the emergence of modern nation states and social classes—all the formative processes that profoundly transformed the existing power relations. Mann treats the rise of class politics and that of nation-states as interlinked processes that produced very different outcomes for the five countries (France, Britain, Germany, Austria-Hungary and the USA) analysed in depth in the volume.

Volume 3 (Mann 2012) is titled “Global Empires and Revolution, 1890–1945”. At the turn of the nineteenth century the European colonial empires encompassed all the continents of the world and their impact was so pervasive that for capturing it Mann brings in the concept of “globalization”. Unlike in Volume 2, in Volume 3 Mann also concentrates on the non-Western powers, namely Russia and Japan whose ascendancy had a huge impact on the power relations in the twentieth century. Mann analyses the rise of two transcendent ideologies, fascism and communism, in the first half of the twentieth century and outlines a blueprint of the theory of revolutions and their causes. He also focuses on the class relations and the class politics before and after the Great Depression, both in Europe and in the USA, tracing the roots of the modern welfare state which was born out of the lib-lab (liberal-labour) consensus at that time.

Volume 4 (Mann 2013) has the shortest subtitle, “Globalization, 1945–2011”, and it is the volume in which Mann’s socio-democratic and liberal political views find the clearest expression, as he analyses very contemporary issues such as environmentalism and climate change, the rise and demise of neoliberalism, the causes of the Great Neoliberal Recession, and so on. Nevertheless, the volume is predominately focused on the power relations in the post-war globalized world, in which the leading power has been the USA. Mann analyses the ways in which all sources of power have helped to maintain American hegemony. Far from predicting the rapid demise of the
American power, he just points out how incoherent the American Empire has been in its nature. However, Mann does not predict China’s rise to replace the USA in the near future and points to many internal contradictions in modern Chinese society as well. Concerning Mann’s study on the USA he analyses all the formative events in American history since 1945: the rise of the civil rights movement, class relations and the welfare state, Reagan’s reforms, the recent Great Recession and so on. He demonstrates how various actors and social groups combined different power recourses and gained some advantage over their political opponents in these complicated political processes. Mann finishes his “magnum opus” with a smart but grim prediction that one of the greatest challenges in the twenty-first century will be environmental problems and when confronting them we will have to undo all the greatest achievements in the twentieth century such as capitalism, nation states and individual liberties.

This is, very briefly, the storyline of Mann’s work on the history of power over the last 5000 years. Although organically embedded in this vast empirical material, Mann’s conceptual framework can still be analysed separately and compared to the major streams of relational sociology.

Since Emirbayer’s (1997) “Manifesto for a relational sociology” the latter term is reserved for conceptual logic that has later also been termed “deep” relational thinking (Dépelteau 2013), “radical relationalism” (Powell 2013) and “Continental relationalism” (Selg 2016a). According to the proponents of this position (see also Powell and Dépelteau 2013; Dépelteau and Powell 2013; Dépelteau 2008) sociological analysis should treat social actors and individuals not as isolated from each other, but as interdependent, and presume that through dynamic relations the identities, practices, values, beliefs and so on of the social actors are constantly redefined. To put it briefly, neither individuals nor social phenomena can be understood apart from the dynamic relations they are embedded in, and through which, in turn, they are constantly transformed and reconstituted. The relational sociologists also argue that individuals are not “driven only or even mostly by internal properties, or that social phenomena are ‘social things,’ meaning external and constraining or enabling forces that impose themselves on individual and collective actors” (Dépelteau and Powell 2013, p. xv). Therefore, relational sociologists attempt to overcome structure-agency dualism, because they see both individuals and larger social formations (institutions, collectives, systems, etc.) as embedded in the same relational order in which they constantly reconstitute each other (Powell and Dépelteau 2013). As Powell and Dépelteau (ibid., p. 3) put it: “Social formations (structures, systems, discourses, etc.) are nothing other than the relations among interdependent human beings.”

When considering Mann’s approach to power, some elements catch one’s eye that might strike one as “relational” in the above sense. His concept of diffuse power, that spreads in spontaneous, unconscious and decentered manner (Mann 2012, pp. 5–6; see also Mann 1986, p. 8, 1993, p. 6) seems to be close to the relational approach to power (see Selg 2016b; Chap. 27 in this volume), because given its characterization in Mann, it probably assumes
relations and communication between different power actors through which the identities of actors may be transformed. The concept of collective power that is “secured jointly through cooperation with others” (Mann 2012, pp. 5–6) also indicates that there must be some relations between different actors that may change their own nature and identities or the nature of power they exercise. His insistence that there “is no one master concept or basic unit of ‘society’” or his entertaining of adopting “an odd position for a sociologist” to “abolish the concept of ‘society’ altogether” (Mann 1986, p. 2). And finally, because Mann is focused on the historical processes and long-term social transformation, it certainly corresponds to the canons of relational sociology that stress the need to study social processes, rather than just take snapshots of social reality (Dépelteau 2008, 2013; Powell 2013).

True, Mann never explicitly suggests that relations are the most essential elements that constitute power and power networks in societies. Yet, on the other hand, he talks about “power relations” quite a lot and at the more fundamental level he seems to accept that the dynamic relations between individuals themselves, and particularly between individuals and social structures/institutions, transform the power relations in society. This, in turn, could also transform the identities and perceptions of the social actors involved in the power relations. Hence, there are some seeds of relational approach in his framework of power. But in what sense more specifically? The tradition of distinguishing between self-actional, inter-actional or trans-actional approaches to power helps us to locate his position at least as far as two large traditions of “relationalism” are considered. We will untangle these notions below. However, before that we will engage ourselves with Mann’s conceptual toolbox as it is presented in his own terms.

2 Mann’s Approach to Social Power

Mann distinguishes between four different types of power: (1) ideological, (2) economic, (3) military and (4) political power. The approach is often referred to as the “IEMP model” of power.

Ideological power “derives from the human need to find ultimate meaning of life, to share norms and values, and to participate in aesthetic and ritual practices with others” (Mann 2012, p. 6; cf. Mann 1986, pp. 22–23, 1993, p. 7). According to Mann both religion and secular ideologies (liberalism, nationalism, etc.) are major manifestations of ideological power. Mann distinguishes between transcendent and immanent ideologies. Transcendent ideologies are the most ambitious and permeate through the existing institutions, attracting converts from different power networks and creating their own networks. New religious cults, world religions, but also fascism, communism and radical environmental ideologies belong to this class of ideologies. Immanent ideologies strengthen the solidarity in the existing power networks. In his later volumes Mann also talks about “institutionalized ideologies,” which are hidden inside the institutions and underpin many norms and values that are taken
for granted in particular societies (e.g. patriarchy in modern societies). Mann
prefers the term “ideological power” to “cultural power” but considers culture
(and science) to be a part of the ideological power networks.

Economic power “derives from the human need to extract, transform, dis-

dribute, and consume the produce of nature” (Mann 2012, p. 9; cf. Mann
1986, p. 25, 1993, p. 7). Economic relations encompass mobilization of
labour, circuits of capital, trade and production chains—thus, economic power
is related to both markets and production. However, Mann approaches eco-


involves commands by individual or collective actors and assumes the conscious obedience by subordinates, and (2) diffuse power that is a subtler form of power and rather spreads in a relatively spontaneous, unconscious and decentralised manner. Political and military power can be more associated with the authoritative modality of power, while economic and especially ideological power tend to be more diffuse. Third, power can be extensive or intensive. Extensive power encompasses a large number of people or territories, whereas intensive power mobilizes high level of commitment from participants. Again, one rarely encounters the pure modalities of power in real life. Often authoritative power is combined with diffuse power, extensive power with intensive power, in order to enhance the power resources of specific institutions, social actors or individuals.

The framework proposed by Mann should never be treated as an abstract grand theory, but it is rather a middle-range theory (Heiskala 2016). Mann suggests, that the four types of power form not a social system in its own right, but they are rather “an analytical point of entry for dealing with messy real societies” (Mann 2012, p. 16). All of these four types of power in the IEMP model could be viewed as ideal types; they are never represented in their pure forms, they occur in impure mixtures (ibid., p. 15). According to Mann the four power sources have a degree of autonomy from each other, while they generate “overlapping, intersecting networks of relations with different socio-spatial boundaries and temporal dynamics” and “their interrelations produce unanticipated, emergent consequences for power actors” (Mann 2012, p. 15; cf. Mann 1986, pp. 28–30, 1993, pp. 9–10). Mann’s major goal in his four volumes is to analyse how these four power sources have been in constant interplay with each other throughout the human history while creating new and unanticipated combinations. He analyses how the manifestations of the four power sources themselves have transformed during the course of history and how these different forms of power and their combinations have influenced various social actors and institutions/organizations, and vice versa.

3 Mann’s Conceptual Framework: Some Criticisms

Before exploring the issue of how Mann’s conceptual framework relates to relational sociology, it is perhaps fruitful to consider some criticisms of Mann’s work. We will not go through all the critical reviews put forward by various authors gathered in the volumes dedicated to Mann’s approach (see Hall and Schroeder 2006; Schroeder 2016a), but present some essential critical remarks that will enable us to discuss Mann’s theory from the perspective of relational sociology.

First, while Mann claims that he sees four power sources as being entangled in overlapping and intersecting networks, one could assume a very network-based analysis of power, which, in turn, could also be relational. As Emirbayer (1997) notes, one way to implement the empirical potential of relational sociology is to concentrate on the analysis of social networks and power networks.
However, this is somewhat deceptive, because for Mann power networks rather serve as a general concept or even a metaphor for illustrating the idea that power relations are not just isolated streams or entities, and that there is a high interconnectedness and constant interplay between different power actors and the types of power. He has never engaged in the analysis of networks of the kind the theorists of social network analysis (SNA) conduct. Neither does Mann distinguish between nodes, ties and flows within power networks or other important concepts essential for the network analysts. Interestingly, few scholars have pointed out how inadequately Mann conceptualizes networks both in his theoretical and empirical studies. Briefly, the mere fact that Mann brings up the notion of “network”, does not make him a relational sociologist per se.

Second, while reading Mann’s *The Sources of Social Power* one could be struck by how empirical Mann’s analysis really is. Mann is indeed a great storyteller—analytical and engaging in the sense of classical historical sociology. With a grand sweep he covers an astonishing variety of topics, tells about very different societies and eras, makes novel and compelling generalizations about the course of human history, especially about the rise and nature of the Western civilization. While one seeks for an analytical and accessible account on global history, or likes to explore the major formative processes that have shaped the human societies up to present, we really recommend reading Mann. Almost no other historical sociologist at the present can match Mann’s sweep and encyclopaedic knowledge. However, for those who hope to find elaborated theoretical passages and grand philosophical ideas, Mann’s volumes would be a disappointment. Except for the introductory chapter of Volume 1 where there is an almost 40-page treatment of the conceptual framework (and the introductory chapters for the subsequent volumes where there are a few pages dedicated to the recollection of this framework) there are almost no theoretical reflections, although, according to Schroeder (2016b, p. 1), Mann “is now working on a fifth volume where he will reflect on his project”. Furthermore, while carefully reading his volumes one can find that Mann is surprisingly unsystematic in applying his theoretical models to the historical empirical material. He only occasionally refers to his theoretical concepts when analysing particular socio-historical processes, cases and eras. Rather, he simply puts forward an analytical historical narrative on a given subject, not a systematic theoretically informed sociological analysis. Nevertheless, the theory and the empirical material are slightly more tightly knit in Volume 1 than in the subsequent volumes (particularly in Volume 4 where the connections between the theoretical accounts and the empirical analyses are very loose).

Mann’s unwillingness to focus on theorizing has not remained unnoticed by other scholars. As Heiskala (2016, p. 29) puts it: “Even if Mann has done almost all that can be done to downplay the status of theoretical vocabulary, he actually has quite an extensive toolbox of theoretical concepts.” Smith (2016, pp. 43–45) outspokenly calls him “a dedicated empiricist”.

On the one hand, it makes it easier to approach Mann’s framework of power in view of relational sociology, because there are many good empirical examples in his writings that allow us to illustrate the major points we intend to make in the following analysis. Yet, on the other hand, it will make our task even more complicated, because the level of abstraction in his theory and its elaborateness is not sufficient for providing a very detailed and convincing analysis. Rather we will propose just one possible interpretation of Mann as a relational sociologist, while not denying that there could be alternative interpretations. For analysing Mann’s oeuvre from this perspective, we use the vocabulary of self-action, inter-action and trans-action—originating from the classical work of Dewey and Bently (1949)—that has been applied in the metatheoretical reflections for distinguishing the specificity of “substantialist” and “relational” approaches in the social sciences (see Emirbayer 1997, pp. 282–291; Dépelteau 2008, pp. 59–64, 2013, pp. 166–171, 177–183; Selg 2016a, b). Here we only extract very briefly the gist of these works.

4 FROM SUBSTANTIALISM TO RELATIONAL THINKING:

S E L F - , I N T E R - A N D T R A N S - A C T I O N

Conceptualizing social relations as self-actions means that the social entities (structures or actors) are acting under their own powers. They generate their own power resources and the exercise of power by actor A is not dependent on reactions or resistance by actor B, upon which the power is exercised. Self-action is expressed not only through individuals but also through social structures and institutions. The structuralist theories often see various self-substituent “social structures”, “social systems” or collective actors (like cultures, nations and social groups) as the exclusive source of action in human societies. While analysing power from the self-actionalist perspective, one has to concentrate on A’s not on B’s, because B’s are not free to make choices on their own and are rather manipulated or deceived by A’s.

Inter-action refers to relationships in which “entities no longer generate their own action, but the relevant action takes place among the entities themselves” (Emirbayer 1997, pp. 285). However, similarly to self-actionalism, the nature and essence of the entities are presumed to ‘remain fixed and unchanging throughout such interaction, each independent of the existence of the others’ (Emirbayer 1997, pp. 285–286). Furthermore, not the entities, but their attributes do the inter-action and thus “create outcomes, themselves measurable as attributes of the fixed entities” (Abbott 1988, p. 170). Methodologically this approach often takes the form of the “variable-centered approach”, which is still prevalent in contemporary sociology (Emirbayer 1997, p. 286; Selg 2016a, b).

The trans-actional or “deep” relational perspective (Dépelteau 2013) assumes that there are no entities or actors with fixed attributes or identities which are separate from each other, but “units involved in a transaction derive their
meaning, significance, and identity from the (changing) functional roles they play within that transaction” (Emirbayer 1997, p. 287). There are no discrete A’s or B’s (individuals, structures, etc.) or even actions, since “the action A is the action A only because it is interconnected to the action B, and vice versa” (Dépelteau 2008, p. 60; Selg 2016b, p. 188). Trans-actional approach “sees relations between terms or units as pre-eminently dynamic in nature, as unfolding, on-going processes rather than as static ties among inert substances” (Emirbayer 1997, p. 289). Briefly, entities or actors assume their distinct attributes/identities only due to the mutually constituting dynamic relationship they have with each other. They have no identity outside these relationships, and the attributes and identities they have are never fixed but constantly in flux due to this ever-changing character of the relationship. Or as Dépelteau (2008, p. 65) puts it: “The notion of trans-action implies that the production of the world is not based on free will and self-action. The principle of trans-action is founded on the idea that the production of the social world happens through social relations and in a physical environment.” Transactional perspective sees social relations as a process or a flow in which it makes no sense to make an ontological separation between A’s and B’s. The social relations between A and B are actually always presumed to be parts of wider networks in which the “third parties” (the C’s, D’s, E’s, etc.) have a constitutive role as well (Selg 2016b, p. 195). Social relations are dynamic, constantly unfolding processes, which constitute the very attributes and identities of the actors/entities involved and these entities and identities emerge only in the context of these relations, they are never pre-given.

5 MANN AND RELATIONAL SOCIOLOGY

In order to examine the question of whether Mann considers human relations and power relations in mostly self-actional, inter-actional or trans-actional terms, we present our version of the general theoretical model of how power might operate in human societies according to his The Sources of Social Power (see Fig. 16.1).

Let us start with the bottom section of the figure. One can see different social actors and various types of relations between them. All the social actors depicted are collective (rather than individual) human actors and institutions/structures (they could be the working class, capitalists, feudal lords, liberal political parties, administrations of presidents, labour unions, monarchs, military elites, etc.). Mann rarely talks about single individuals or analyses power relations at the micro level. It is the major reason why the title of his book refers to “social power” not just to “power” or to “individual power”.

The relations between different actors, according to Mann, could be primarily either what we delineated above as self-actions or inter-actions. We will further explore that point in the closing paragraphs of the sub-section.

When moving upwards along the figure, one can see that social actors and relations between them can affect four types of powers (IEMP) separately or influence the unique combinations/intersections that emerge between them.
Fig. 16.1 Mann's approach to power: an interpretation from the perspective of relational sociology
Source: authors' own

The relations between the social actors and the forms of power are more difficult to specify: on the one hand, Mann often assumes (and it is logical) that different human actors and structures/institutions use different power resources (ideological, economic, military and political), and that power functions primarily between the actors. But on the other hand, Mann is not always very consistent in his empirical analyses and often one can find passages in which the possible interpretation is that different types of powers (e.g. ideological power), or their combination, affect the actors directly and vice versa (actors shape the character and content of the four types of power and have an impact on how they interact with each other). Thus, different types of power in the IEMP model could be seen as independent entities or even as actors by themselves.

The relations between the different actors and the powers described in the IEMP model could be conceptualized in both self-actional and inter-actional terms: they are self-actions in the sense that the types of power, while relying on their own unique resources, can influence the actors and vice versa; they are inter-actions in the sense that the actions by actors and the corresponding types of power affect each other and produce new (and sometimes unintended) consequences.
During all these self-actions and inter-actions the identities of the actors or the types of power (and their combinations) remain largely unchanged. But if the time passes on and the next period (T2 in Fig. 16.1) arrives, new identities for actors will emerge. Even if Mann is not very explicit in these terms, one can find multiple hints in his works, that the above-mentioned change could happen due to constant mutually constituting relations between the actors that are also mediated and influenced by the four types of power. In other words, Actor A¹ becomes Actor A² with a changed identity and nature due to constant relations with other actors. This transformation can to a large extent also be affected (or mediated) by the powers distinguished in the IEMP model, and this, in turn, can also change their combination and nature (ideological power¹ becomes ideological power,² political power¹ transforms to political power,² etc.). However, the last transformation among the types of power is not as profound as the one that takes place among the human actors. For example, the basic nature of the “ideological power”¹ (to provide a meaning and symbolic order for human life) does not change, but the content and the manifestations of it can transform to the extent that it becomes accurate to talk about “ideological power”².

Therefore, Mann does not concentrate so much on the trans-actions between the actors than on the trans-actional processes (or mechanisms). This becomes clear if one attentively examines the way he analyses the large scale historical processes and demonstrates how the nature, identity of the actors, and also the intersections within the power networks, are in an endless transformation. In other words, social action as trans-action is barely observable in Mann’s approach to power, if one takes a random chapter of his volumes or a snapshot of a historical period analysed by him. On these occasions Mann appears to be a profoundly self-actionalist or inter-actionalist thinker. However, Mann’s potential for trans-actionalism becomes more evident, if one explores a prolonged historical process in which often the same types of agent are active but transform their identities and nature in the course of constant interplay with one another. Hence, the major argument of the chapter is that if one reads Mann’s approach to power from a synchronic perspective it does not correspond very much to the canons of “deep” relational sociology and his depiction of power relations is clearly self-actionalist and inter-actionalist. But if one assumes a diachronic perspective, Mann appears to be engaged in a more trans-actionalist sociology.

In order to illustrate the statement above and relational mechanisms depicted in Fig. 16.1 we provide a relatively simple empirical example. In Volume 1 (Chap. 6) Mann demonstrates how the adoption of the iron tools and weaponry at the end of the second millennium BC transformed the power relations and the nature of human civilization in the Western part of Eurasia. The core features of the argument are depicted in Fig. 16.2. The group of people whose complex network of trans-action with various mineral resources, technologies and people as co-producers, enemies and so on resulted in the gradual emergence of iron weapons transformed the content of the military
power (self-actional relationship R1) that became more efficient and lethal. This, in turn, affected how it was possible to exercise the state power through state institutions (R2) and this, in turn, also affected the content of political power (R3). Briefly, the early despotic empires in the Fertile Crescent lost their former monopoly to provide weapons for their subjects, because unlike bronze, iron was widely available and every community could make their own weapons and tools. This empowered the ordinary peasants who formed the bulk of the infantry which soon replaced chariots as the major military force on the battlefield. Political power, in turn, became more decentralized and dispersed than during the Bronze Age. The people who adopted iron tools also profoundly affected the economic power (R4), because with the new iron tools ploughing was more efficient, making it possible to till heavier, rainwatered, soils. This resulted in a more forceful expansion of the agricultural civilizations to Assyria, Anatolia, Greece and Italy. The productivity of agriculture increased as well and the urban civilizations spread more extensively, meaning that more regions could be incorporated into tenser trade networks in which the independent trading cities became the major actors. The changes in the economic power and the military power also affected the religious institutions (R5) and this, in turn, had an impact on the ideological power (R6). Here the intensified warfare and urbanization created the new unexpected tensions in the society and the old polytheistic, local cults-based religious systems and rudimentary philosophies were unable to provide adequate answers to new, more metaphysical questions that the people had.
The adoption of iron tools and weaponry created new relationships between the different human actors and institutions. These new and changed mutually constituting relations gradually transformed the identities of the human actors and changed the nature of institutions/structures. The change also affected the content of the four types of power and the way they were aligned with each other. These slow trans-actional processes produced completely new societies around the year 500 BC (Fig. 16.2). For example, in Greece the former small agricultural communities transformed into polis, which changed the way in which political power operated. It became more democratic and the new city dwellers started to identify themselves as the citizens of their city states, not just as peasants of small semi-urban communities. Even some elements of proto-nationalism emerged. The hoplite army consisting of free citizens became the most important military force and a military institution. New types of religious and ideological institutions emerged in which the new rational Greek philosophy and philosophers gained prominence. The efficiency of ideological power increased considerably with the spread of literacy which, in turn, was facilitated by an intensification of trade and communication. New economic institutions based on coinage affected the various ways other social institutions could interact with each other and how the economic and political power operated and so on.

It is impossible to map all the new self-actional or inter-actional relationships that emerged in these new classical societies of the iron age. What is important is the fact that both the essence of the types of power was transformed (e.g. ideological power transformed into ideological power) and that various key actors changed their very identity and nature (and some new actors emerged).

In order to further clarify the issue of whether Mann could be considered primarily a self-actionalist, inter-actionalist or trans-actionalist, some additional empirical examples and remarks could be provided. One, indeed, encounters self-actions very often, when reading his *The Sources of Social Power*. Mann assumes that the actors have their own unique self-generated powers to put large social processes in motion. Christians, for instance, had their own unique power sources which transformed ideological power in late antiquity (Volume 1), the British empire-builders had their own self-generated political and military powers to subjugate the large swaths of lands in Asia (Volume 2), the presidential administration in the USA relied largely on its own political power sources in order to launch the New Deal reforms in the 1930s (Volume 3), the neoliberal economists had their unique advantage in terms of ideological power to convince the politicians and the general public to initiate the radical laissez-faire free market reforms in the 1980s (Volume 4), and so forth. Conceptualizing social action as self-action seems to be a particularly prevalent trend in Mann’s writings when he is talking about the critical events or junctures that have fundamentally changed the course of human history, like significant technical innovations (Fig. 16.2), big revolutions (e.g. in Volume 2 and 3), far-reaching reforms (e.g. in Volume 3 and 4) and so on.
Nevertheless he also often assumes the inter-actional relations between different human actors and institutions in which the nature or the identity of these actors or entities does not change, but their attributes interact with each other and produce new outcomes (institutions, structures or transformed networks of power). For example, in early modern Europe the intricate interplay between the nobility, the cities, the religious authorities and the monarchs gave birth to the different models of early nation-states (the constitutional and the absolute monarchies) (Volume 1); the peculiar alliance between the conservative Junker nobility and the liberal bourgeoisie enabled the semi-democratic institutions in the German Empire (1871–1918) to flourish (Volume 2); the complex relations between different social classes, which already had their own self-articulated and clear identities by the first quarter of the twentieth century, helped to promote the left-wing revolutions in Europe (Volume 3); the Great Recession in the early twenty-first century was possible because the neo-liberal political elites were successfully convinced by the financial elites that there was no need for institutionalized rules for the global financial market (Volume 4) and so on.

When it comes to trans-actional relations then, as was noted earlier, Mann does not provide a very detailed analysis on how the trans-actions between different actors really work and he certainly does not analyse these processes at the micro level. Rather he takes snapshots from different eras and describes how very broad historical processes and shifts in power configurations produce the substantial identity shifts and changes in the very nature of the different collective human actors. It seems to be a hidden (not explicitly pronounced) assumption in his works that the constant relations between different actors constitute and reconstitute their identities. This becomes clear when one not only reads some random chapters of The Sources of Social Power, but systematically goes through Mann’s volumes. The trans-actional processes are more manifest in those volumes in which Mann focuses on a limited number of cases in a more in-depth manner (the UK in Volume 2; the USA in Volumes 3 and 4; Japan in Volume 3; and China in Volume 4), and examines the actions and relations between the same key actors (classes, social groups, institutions, etc.) through different eras.

Perhaps the best example concerns the case of the USA and the destiny and impact of the New Deal reforms (Volumes 3 and 4). One can see that during the period of the 1930s and the 1980s (when Reagan’s administration largely dismantled the achievements of the New Deal reforms) the key actors’ identities and self-perceptions were profoundly transformed. The republicans and the democrats in the 1930s were not the same as in the 1980s— their mutual struggle (and multiple other factors) had transformed their ideological views, perceptions of the world, various key elements in their identities and so on. African Americans adopted a very different identity and self-perception in the 1960s in comparison to that of the 1930s. It also largely
happened due to the complex relations they had with the white majority and with themselves. The white working class abandoned the more militant class identity they had in the 1930s and in the 1950s and became more docile and right-wing by the 1980s. The transformation was also largely facilitated by the complicated relationship they had with the employers, with the political elites in both parties, the rivalries within the labour unions and so on.

If one reads Mann’s profound analyses of nineteenth-century Britain (Volume 2), post-Meiji restoration imperial Japan (1868–1945) (Volume 3) or twentieth-century China (Volumes 3 and 4) attentively one can find similar transactional processes or mechanisms that come into play.

6 CONCLUSION: THE MULTIPLE FACES OF MANN AND RELATIONAL SOCIOLOGY

As a way of concluding, we can reiterate the point that has been made throughout this chapter: even if Mann is mostly self-actionalist and inter-actionalist, a trans-actional approach is also decipherable in his writings. Oftentimes it is presented in a not very explicit way, but it is still evident, when one considers the large historic processes and the identity shifts accompanied by them. In order to find the trans-actional Mann, one has to follow his work in its full detail attentively and systematically, because the seeds of trans-actionalism are often found “between the lines” of his writings, and spotting them requires an open-ended and creative reading of his work. This would also mean taking a diachronic macro perspective rather than a synchronic micro perspective. Mann is somewhat paradoxical. On the one hand, his process-oriented trans-actionalism or “deep relationalism” emerges most clearly when he looks at power from a great distance, that is, at the macro-level—here the constitution and reconstitution of (collective) actors and their power relations is apparent. On the other hand, as we also indicated above, the trans-actional processes are most manifest in those volumes in which Mann focuses on a limited number of cases in a more in-depth manner. Actually this paradoxical relation—being in depth and distanced at the same time—looks less paradoxical if one takes seriously one of the major methodological precautions of relational analysis that Elias has put forth in another context: the various perspectives on social reality (micro, meso, macro) “can be considered separately, but not as being separate” (Elias 1978, p. 85, italics added; see also Selig 2016b).

NOTE

1. For a discussion of Mann’s Fascists (Mann 2004) and The Dark Side of Democracy (Mann 2005) see Volume 4, issue 3, pp. 247–297 of Political Studies Review, where contributions from Daniele Conversi, Roger Eatwell and Jacques Semelin is accompanied by a response of Mann himself.
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