

**Zeitschrift:** Traverse : Zeitschrift für Geschichte = Revue d'histoire  
**Herausgeber:** [s.n.]  
**Band:** 4 (1997)  
**Heft:** 3

**Artikel:** The sociological concept of time  
**Autor:** Leccardi, Carmen  
**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-13964>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 30.04.2026

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

---

# THE SOCIOLOGICAL CONCEPT OF TIME

CARMEN LECCARDI

The temporal dimension has traditionally been at the center of studies in two disciplines especially: philosophy and physics. But psychology, economics and biology have shown much more than episodic interest in the subject of time as well. And yet, despite the attention given to time in the period running from the second half of the 19th century to the start of the 20th century by scholars of the caliber of Durkheim, Marx and Simmel,<sup>1</sup> sociological thought concerning temporality has had a limited resonance not only externally but also within its disciplinary confines.

In the past two decades, concurrent with the crisis in the all-inclusive and totalizing paradigms of social-phenomena analysis, sociology has once again turned its attention to time. The temporality key in fact offers fecund approaches to exploring the social world<sup>2</sup> and also makes substantial contributions to overcoming the individual/society dichotomy. Furthermore, through the temporal analysis of action another great contraposition that sociological theory has long dealt with, that of action opposed to structure,<sup>3</sup> tends to crumble. Consequently, numerous studies in recent years have given renewed impulse to the sociological study of time both in Europe and in the United States.<sup>4</sup>

Generally, however, it should be borne in mind that to cast full light on the sociological dimension of temporal categories, a preliminary operation of what could be called unveiling is necessary. Due to their taken-for-granted nature, in fact, these categories are not automatically perceptible. To make them "visible" attention must be drawn to the little dealt-with nexus that ties society's organization to time as a mechanism directing and regulating social life. Analyzing this tie also reveals the historically determined character of temporal categories, their tendency to become more and more abstract as one gradually moves towards more and more complex processes of social inter-connection.<sup>5</sup>

These notes intend to dwell on this nexus – whose implications are quite broad – with a declaredly limited goal, that of indicating the outlines, the foundations, of the complex conceptual edifice built by the sociological study of time. Three authors have been chosen as guides in this exploratory journey: a classic author, ■ 11

Durkheim, and two contemporary ones, Elias and Luckmann. The first laid the bases, in a 1912 work, *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, for sociological analysis of the temporal dimension. The second has in the past decade made a considerable contribution to the same subject, putting the civilizing process and the formation of temporal concepts into relation. The third, working in the same period on the relation between time and identity, has proposed an *ad hoc* analytical system to grasp the interconnections between the interior, intersubjective and social dimensions of time.

The approaches to temporality offered by the first two authors, Émile Durkheim and Norbert Elias, are antithetical in certain aspects. While the thinking of the former was sired by an historical period still dominated by the Newtonian temporal paradigm<sup>6</sup> and its emphasis on time's objectivity, the reasoning of the latter is fully within the Einsteinian perspective in which time depends on the viewpoint from which it is analyzed, thus losing its character of absoluteness to take on a relational significance.<sup>7</sup> Correlatively, while for Durkheim the subjective aspect of time is outside sociological involvement – social time stands above interior time as well as being rigidly separate from it in conceptual terms – for Elias the subjective experience of time is a constituent part of the sociological analysis of temporality.

In practice, these are two authentic schools of thought concerned with the very same subject.<sup>8</sup> While in the French tradition headed by Durkheim attention is concentrated on the social origin of time and its role as a regulator of collective life, the German school, of which Elias is an outstanding spokesman, primarily accentuates the historicist aspect of temporal concepts, the different representations of time shown in different historical phases. The exclusively normative aspect of time emphasized in the first school is countered in the second by time's dual valence as an integrating element and, at the same time, as a resource of which individuals and groups make active use to build social reality. The third author dealt with, Thomas Luckmann, an exponent of social phenomenology, takes a stance independent from the aforementioned traditions. His analytical slant, particularly attuned to the subjective character of temporal experience, above all sheds light on the close relation that exists between subjective duration, the social interaction process and the objectivization of temporal categories.

At the start of the century, Émile Durkheim formed a key idea in the sociological study of time, the idea of the social origin of categories of knowledge. Durkheim maintained that, as every social manifestation has a religious nature, so every religious expression – taken as a symbolic form of collective interests – is actually a celebration of the social. Since they are produced by religious

the final instance, also social dimensions. Time is therefore an expression of the religion-society coupling and as such is a primary integrating force.

Durkheim therefore rejects the Kantian reference to time as an a priori synthesis, an innate idea or category of the intellect. At the same time, arguing against psychological reductionism, he stresses its social character, its being produced by and an expression of societal organization. Fascinated by its macro-sociological features, Durkheim carefully points out time's ability to contain and define social existence. In this framework, reference to the individual dimension of time is, in practice, banned. In its place we find the life of the group and the community's time as references for temporal analysis. According to Durkheim the indispensable coordinates for organizing time are of clearly social derivation. In his eyes, time's division into days, weeks, months and so on corresponds, for example, to the periodicity of public festivals, of rites. In turn, the calendar sets the pace of collective activities while ensuring their regularity.

A social product in the fullest sense, in Durkheim's analysis time is also a crucial regulating element of collective activity. Temporal schemes constitute an essential aspect of social life as a whole, its filiations on the one hand and the concrete elements of its structuring on the other. Endowed with a coercive nature – “social fact” in its proper meaning – these schemes impose themselves on the group that recognizes itself in them. Although it is a collective *product* – it is the group that expresses it – social time is also a *norm*, lack of respect of which entails applying sanctions (in ways, forms and different degrees depending on the existential contexts).

Durkheim for the first time upsets the viewpoint from which philosophy had always considered time: the subjective dimension, the perception of time on the level of consciousness becomes secondary, is no longer the center of attention. Interest is instead drawn to time viewed as a *medium* for social reproduction along with the prescriptions that the community sets on the basis of its own periodic needs. In essence, it is the “objective” dimension of time, the impersonal power it has over the individual and the group, its ability to scan, to cadence collective life that attracts Durkheim's attention.

Several decades had to pass before Durkheim's analytic viewpoint was integrated with the acquisition of the subjective experience of time as an equally important phenomenon. At the time the subjective aspect was expunged from the sociological study of time in accordance with the supremacy of the social over the individual that constitutes the cipher of Durkheim's vision of the world. The copenetration of individual time and social time, their common substance and the impossibility of focusing on one without considering the other, were not contemplated.

Despite the obvious limitations of this approach – limitations that the decades separating us from *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* make particularly clear – the perspective begun by Durkheim continues to prove quite fecund in its basic lines. In fact, it imposes looking at the tie that unites specific conceptions of time with the features of the social organization of each historical epoch.<sup>9</sup> At the same time it suggests analyzing the ways in which conceptions of time, while guaranteeing order and regularity, contribute to reproducing and developing collective life.

In his book *Über die Zeit* (1982), published in English in 1992 as *Time: An Essay*, Norbert Elias – an eminent sociologist and historian just recently deceased – makes one of the most meaningful contributions to understanding the sociological significance of time. 70 years after Durkheim he enriches in a determinant way the conceptual network needed to grasp this significance. Even though during this long period of time authors like Sorokin and Merton or Moore in the United States and Gurvitch or Halbwachs in France<sup>10</sup> continued to sociologically analyze time, it is mainly thanks to Elias that substantial strides have been made in this direction.

Elias clarifies how the notion of time we hold today should be considered the result of a long process of collective learning, evolved over the centuries, rather than as an entity having an autonomous existence. This notion in fact expresses a conceptual synthesis whose traits tend to become more and more complex the further the civilizing process proceeds.

A tool for orientation and social communication created by mankind, time – stresses Elias – is nothing but a symbol: the symbol of a relationship that a human group creates between two or more series of events, one of which is standardized as a frame of reference or a measuring-stick for the other. The traits of this symbol, as Elias shows through numerous historical examples, are not genetically fixed but vary according to the state of social development reached, to the prevalent social *habitus*; in other words, according to the position held inside the civilizing process by the social organization that expresses them. They are learned by the individual in the course of socialization and are used inside the social circuit for orientation and regulation purposes and to communicate with other individuals or groups.<sup>11</sup>

As collectively created symbols and not “realities” of the spirit or of nature, conceptions of time are, as has been said, an indicator of the greater or lesser social complexity reached. And so, for example, archaic societies utilize temporal concepts that have a low level of conceptual synthesis. In this social framework the level of abstraction is rather limited. Even the need to synchronize group undertakings with other changes is small. On the other hand, a great deal

14 ■ of room is left to impulse in defining the temporal framework of activities. In

fact it's the physiological clock, with its changing rhythms, its pauses and accelerations, that serves as the main temporal reference for collective life.

With the passage to agricultural societies, the ways and forms of temporalization change. Although there is a greater need to synchronize activities with new productive demands, temporal concepts remain anchored to concrete dimensions of experience: the cycle of the seasons, daily work rhythms, the alternation of religious rites. Despite the increased wealth of concepts and an equally increased ability to synthesize symbolically, time in these societies is still not an autonomous principle able to give meaning to social life.<sup>12</sup>

Only in fully developed societies, Elias emphasizes, does the symbol denominated "time" take on more and more abstract characteristics in relation to growing social needs to coordinate and synchronize human activities with sequences of non-human natural phenomena. In the new urban context the chain of interdependence lengthens and specialization and social differentiation grow at the same time. Concurrent with an increase in trade there is a need to determine time with greater precision, transforming temporal experience.<sup>13</sup>

The two revolutions, scientific and industrial, will bring this conception of time to completion. Precision and regularity in computing time begin, for example, to play a leading role as human labor is applied more and more to machinery. The "exact time" on the one hand, with its corollary of increasingly precise instruments for measuring it, and long-term temporal scales on the other, become indispensable references for new social organization. Along with the formation of the planning-the-future concept there is also a change in the way the course of human life and the structure of identity itself are conceived. According to Elias, to whomever grew up in modern society it seems obvious that a person has an image of his or her own identity as a living being that was once a child, grew up, grows old and sooner or later will die. Instead, this image of one's own identity as a continuum of transformations presupposes a huge store of knowledge. And this knowledge, as the author stresses, is only a recent development when likened to mankind's entire progress.

According to Elias' thesis, there is no "time" which human beings, whatever historical era they live in, experience homogeneously. Instead, over the centuries they have had numerous temporal experiences, quite different from one another, progressing from illiterate societies' limited ability to temporalize to the sophisticated temporal structuring of the modern world.

Therefore, in Elias' opinion, all conceptual separation between time's subjective and social dimensions is completely arbitrary. Individual and society are not two separate entities, nor do social time and individual time refer to two different universes of meaning. But interdependence does not only involve the social and the individual dimensions and their respective times. According to ■ 15

Elias it also embraces nature and its time. Time seems to him to be a highly conceptual symbolic synthesis thanks to which natural, biographical and social rhythms can be put into relation.<sup>14</sup> Clocks and calendars are excellent examples of this synthesis: within them, the physical, social and individual dimensions are so closely entwined that they appear indistinguishable at first glance.

Elias thus believes it is incorrect to divide “individual time” from “physical time” and “social time”. In fact, the social construct that is time is as inseparable from the “natural” dimension as it is from the “experienced”. Inseparable from the first because it is impossible to separate the rhythms of human beings from those of nature.<sup>15</sup> From the second because, although created by human collectivity, it is also the historically determined setting within which human experience takes shape.

The idea of an autonomously existent time scanned by clockwork and independent of either social or experienced time was the result of the socially-enjoyed supremacy (starting in the 1600s) of the rationalist model borrowed from the natural sciences. Behind this assumption lies the axiom of the separation of, and antagonism between, nature and society – a separation and an antagonism that Elias believes instead regard their respective sciences. According to this view, empty clock time runs on implacably without communication with human society, a sort of “outside authority” that the latter must perforce bow to.

In reality, as Tabboni observes,<sup>16</sup> the “so-called natural or physical time that appears to us today in the semblance of an external and immutable law, which clocks are called on to ‘measure’, is a fairly recent historical creation [...] an idea inconceivable prior to the scientific revolution”. “Objective”, homogeneous time that can be broken down into homogeneous instants of equal length is the product of *one* particular historical period, the period of scientific progress and the great technological transformations. Its quantitative character is well-adapted to the progressive rationalization that touches every sector of social life as the industrializing process gradually expands and deepens. The prevalence in the modern world of the instrumental type of action Weber shed light on – goal definition on the basis of cogent reasons and identification of the best ways to achieve them – would be unthinkable without the success of this temporal logic centered on efficiency and rationality.

In conclusion, Elias’ work offers many stimuli for considering time untied to naturalistic-philosophic approaches. He clarifies well how the degree of a society’s development influences social concepts as much as it influences the subjective experience of time. By studying the historical stages through which temporal categories have evolved, Elias manages to focus fully on the parallel influence of the social structure and of intentionality in defining modes of

If Elias greatly weakened the analytical barrier that has long separated the different levels of experiencing time, the thinking of Thomas Luckmann – expounded in his essay *Remarks on Personal Identity: Inner, Social and Historical Time*<sup>17</sup> – enriches the conceptual network that concerns the different aspects of temporality and their interrelations.

Luckmann's departure-point is the relation between time (taken as the *medium* of social interaction) and personal identity. Distancing himself both from the concept of identity as a pure and simple epiphenomenon of physical and physiological structures, and from viewing it as a "reflection" of the social and cultural system, Luckmann underlines the intersubjective nature of the process that leads to its definition. "In face-to-face encounters, – he writes – the (mediated) experience of one's self is built up in (immediate) experiences of others. In the reciprocal mirroring of a face-to-face encounter, two streams of consciousness, and two body-bound, inner times are synchronized into the intersubjective time of direct, social interaction [... The] reciprocal mirroring in the 'here and now' of a concrete situation is an elementary condition for the development of personal identity."<sup>18</sup>

Identity is therefore not conceived as self-awareness pure and simple – even though reflective consciousness remains one of its constituent parts. Rather, it is thematically dealt with as a *temporal structure*, a combination of three different dimensions of time: inner time, tied to corporality and experienced as duration; intersubjective time, tied to face-to-face social interaction and experienced as the synchronization of two currents of awareness; and, finally, biographical time, connected to social temporal categories and experienced as a meaningful horizon for building a life history.

Apropos of inner time – "the form of consciousness as continuous experience"<sup>19</sup> – Luckmann stresses for example how only rarely, when awake, is the individual tuned to its wavelengths. Only in particular circumstances of solitude, and in the absence of normal activities of purposeful work or thought (in the rare moments, that is, when the mind is not working towards specific aims), does inner time thoroughly envelop us. "The world of everyday life is a social world; it is a world in which pragmatic motives prevail [...] The time that govern daily life cannot be the inner time of the solitary individual."<sup>20</sup>

As Schutz states,<sup>21</sup> the time in which we are habitually immersed is a shared, necessarily intersubjective time, made up of continual connections between our inner time and the time of our interlocutors. Social interaction in fact presupposes the synchronization of the social actors' inner time. Both Schutz and Luckmann stress that the primary context in which the temporal perspectives of the actors are unified is the world of daily life.<sup>22</sup> In this framework inner time, intersubjective time and social time meet and blend.

Inner time – a time of which we are usually conscious only in an unthinking way – can therefore not be thematically dealt with without referring to social temporal categories. With this term the author refers to those categories which we, as members of a particular society, born and raised in a certain historical period, have internalized during the socialization process. These are “ready-to-use” categories, objective and abstract, superimposed on concrete social interaction that we are accustomed to make use of in daily life. They are an integral part of the stock of knowledge available socially; or, to be more precise, this stock can be considered the *locus* of the socially objectified temporal categories (as the body is for inner time, or face-to-face social interaction in the case of intersubjective time).

According to the author, even in face-to-face social interaction these categories play a very important role, guaranteeing its structure. The usual temporal adjustment needed to coordinate interactive exchange would, for example, be impossible without these categories.<sup>23</sup>

On the other hand – and it is one of the alchemies of time analyzed in a sociological key – the categories of social time could not exist if, upstream, there were no interactive processes generating them. Luckmann believes that they take shape and are continually remodeled in the course of concrete interaction whose temporality, once they have been molded, they compete to regulate. These “objective” categories, as Luckmann argues, “are *socially* objective. Social categories of time thus point back to original, intersubjective coordinations of interaction sequences accomplished in the pre-categorical synchronization of two streams of consciousness.”<sup>24</sup> While social temporal categories, given their linguistic articulation and symbolic representation, appear as independent from inner time as they are from intersubjective, their interweaving is deep and indestructible.

“Several Times and One Identity” is the title the author meaningfully gives to the brief conclusive paragraph of his essay on the relation between time and personal identity. Since human beings live constantly in contact with other human beings, their temporal experience, founded on inner rhythms, tends – as we have already noted – to coordinate in daily life with other “durations”, creating a “common time”. However, Luckmann reminds us, it is indispensable to keep in mind that an individual life is put into relation with a dimension that transcends both individual and intersubjective time. It is in fact immersed in history’s time, taken as the temporal space that individual experience passes through.

In Luckmann’s analysis, the tools connecting biographical and historical time are the so-called “biographical schemes” that tie individual life to lengthier

18 ■ periods of a social and cosmic nature. “Human individuals – he writes – are

born at a particular time in a particular place into a socio-historical *a priori*. Biographical schemes are central components of the *a priori*.<sup>25</sup>

Like the interactive categories, they serve to regulate sequences of action over time. But while the former refer to the short, recurrent times of daily life, the latter regulate the lengthier temporal sequences that do not recur in individual life. Thanks to them, short-term actions are integrated into longer ones without, however, losing their salience. In particular, daily routines take on great significance from the existence of biographical schemes, being put into relation with macro-temporal dimensions through them.

"Explanatory, legitimizing and normative 'models' par excellence" as Luckmann defines them,<sup>26</sup> biographical schemes constitute a sort of compass with which to orient oneself at times of crucial existential decisions, at turning-points, and in planning one's life. Although changeable historically, their contents have in common the ability to make available a whole of categories (themselves part of the stock of socially-given knowledge) thanks to which the course of individual life is put into relation with an extra-individual time through which it passes. From this standpoint biographical schemes can be read as the answer to the challenge posed by the finiteness of human existence.

In substance, if we are indebted to Durkheim for the basis of the conceptual edifice of social time, and to Elias for having brought to light the close relation that unites natural, individual and social time, through Luckmann's contribution we can better understand the role that social interaction plays in structuring temporal experience.

The many-sidedness of time viewed in a sociological key,<sup>27</sup> is probably the aspect that most strongly meets the eye, reflecting all together on Durkheim's, Elias' and Luckmann's analyses. But another factor, pointed up by these last two authors, should be emphasized: the time studied by sociology is at once a social product *and* an individual creation. Individuals and groups create time and in turn are molded by it; these two aspects are inseparable. Probably the greatest merit of the sociological study of time is its convincing illustration of the inconsistency of the individual/society dualism.

#### Notes

- 1 Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of religious Life. A Study in Religious Sociology*, London 1915; Karl Marx, *Capital*, New York 1967; Georg Simmel, "Die Transzendenz des Lebens", in *Lebensanschauung. Vier metaphysische Kapitel*, München, Leipzig 1918; *Brücke und Tür. Essays des Philosophen zur Religion, Kunst und Geselleschaft*, Stuttgart 1957; *Die Philosophie des Geldes*, Leipzig 1958; "The Problem of Historical Time", in *Essay on Interpretation in Social Sciences*, Manchester 1980. For thinking on Simmel's conception of time, cf. Michael J. Molseed, "The Problem of Temporality in the Work of

Georg Simmel”, *The Sociological Quarterly* 3 (1987). While refuting the “atemporality” thesis of the Simmelian approach, this essay in any case embraces the same presuppositions that the thesis leads to (primarily, a “rigid” interpretation of the subject-object/form-content dualism). In the early decades of this century both Mead and Schutz gave great importance to the temporal dimension in their respective theoretical constructions. Cf. George H. Mead, *The Philosophy of Present*, La Salle, Ill. 1959, and Alfred Schutz, *Collected Papers, The Problem of Social Reality*, 1962, vol. 1; *The Phenomenology of the Social World*, Evanston, Ill. 1967. Regarding Mead’s conception of temporality, see Werner Bergmann, *Die Zeitstrukturen sozialer Systeme*, Berlin 1981, 37–55, and Barbara Adam, *Time & Social Theory*, Cambridge 1990, chap. 1.

- 2 As Cavalli emphasizes, in sociology “time is not an object alongside other objects but a perspective that involves all social forms”. This implies both impossibility and a chance: the impossibility of circumscribing a “sociology of time” as a specialized subject and the chance to use the key of time to review already explored social territories, getting new suggestions from them. Cf. Alessandro Cavalli, *Presentazione* in Eviatar Zerubavel, *Ritmi nascosti*, Bologna 1985, 3.
- 3 Giddens worked in particular to overcome this contraposition, stressing spatial-temporal construction of social systems. See Anthony Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory*, London 1979; *The Constitution of Society*, Cambridge 1984.
- 4 See, for example, Barbara Adam, *Time & Social Theory; Timewatch*, Cambridge 1995; Maria Carmen Belloni and Marita Rampazi (eds.), *Tempo, spazio, attore sociale*, Milano 1989; Werner Bergmann, *Die Zeitstrukturen sozialer Systeme*; Alessandro Cavalli (ed.), *Il tempo dei giovani*, Bologna 1985; Antonio Chiesi, *Sincronismi sociali*, Bologna 1989; Giovanni Gasparini, *La dimensione sociale del tempo*, Milano 1994; Anthony Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory; The Constitution of Society*; William Grossin, *Les temps de la vie quotidienne*, Paris 1974; Carmen Leccardi, *Orizzonti del tempo*, Milano 1991; Niklas Luhmann, *Legitimation durch Verfahren*, Neuwied 1969; *Soziologische Aufklärung*, Opladen 1975, vol. 2; “The Future Cannot Begin: Temporal Structures in Modern Society”, *Social Research* 43 (1976); Gabriella Paolucci, *Tempi postmoderni*, Milano 1993; Martine Schoeps, *Zeit und Gesellschaft*, Stuttgart 1980; Roger Sue, *Temps et Ordre Social*, Paris 1994; Simonetta Tabboni, *La rappresentazione sociale del tempo*, Milano 1988, for Europe; Barry Schwartz, *Queing and Waiting*, Chicago, London 1975; Carmen Sirianni, *Work, Time and Inequality*, Oxford 1988; Michael Young, *The Metro-nomic Society*, Cambridge, MA. 1988; Eviatar Zerubavel, *Hidden Rhythms*, Chicago 1981 for the United States.
- 5 Cf. Norbert Elias, *Time: An Essay*, Oxford 1992.
- 6 See Michael A. Katovich, “Durkheim’s Macrofoundations of Time: An Assessment and Critique”, *The Sociological Quarterly* 3 (1990), 369.
- 7 David Maines, “The Significance of Temporality for the Development of Sociological Theory”, *The Sociological Quarterly* 3 (1987), 305.
- 8 The French school (which included Durkheim, Hubert, Mauss and Halbwachs) developed above all in the United States, thanks especially to the contribution made by Merton, Sorokin, Sorokin and Merton and Zerubavel. See Robert K. Merton, *Socially Expected Durations: A Case Study of Concept Formation in Sociology*, in William W. Powell and Robert Robbins (eds.), *Conflict and Consensus: A Festschrift for Lewis A. Coser*, New York 1984; Pitirim A. Sorokin, *Sociocultural Causality, Space, Time*, Durham 1943; Pitirim A. Sorokin and Robert K. Merton, “Social Time: A Methodological and Functional Analysis”, *American Journal of Sociology* 42 (1937); Eviatar Zerubavel, *Hidden Rhythms*. The German school groups authors like Elias, Koselleck and Luhmann, to cite the best known. Cf., on these different orientations, Simonetta Tabboni, *Robert K. Merton’s Contribution to Sociological Studies of Time*, in Jon Clark, Celia Modgil, Sohan Modgil (eds.), *Robert K. Merton. Consensus and Controversy*, London, New York, Philadelphia 1990.

- 9 Anthropological studies and comparative historical research on conceptions of time have made ample contributions to the study of this tie.
- 10 Pitirim A. Sorokin and Robert K. Merton, "Social Time: A Methodological and Functional Analysis"; Wilbert E. Moore, *Man, Time and Society*, New York, London, 1963; Georges Gurvitch, *La multiplicité des temps sociaux*, Paris 1958; Maurice Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective*, Paris 1950; *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*, Paris 1976.
- 11 As Elias in fact reminds us, temporal devices are always also information transmitters for human beings.
- 12 At this stage there is still a close tie between social behaviour and production for pure and simple sustenance.
- 13 About the new temporal organization of medieval society, characterized by the growth of trade, cf. Jacques Le Goff, "Temps de l'église et temps du marchand", *Annales* 15 (1960).
- 14 On the relationship between natural, biographical and social time see in particular Barbara Adam, *Timewatch*.
- 15 One thinks, for example, of circadian rhythms – the rhythms of inner time our body registers – and their close tie to natural cycles (day/night, the seasons, etc.).
- 16 Simonetta Tabboni, *La rappresentazione sociale del tempo*, 147.
- 17 Thomas Luckmann, *Remarks on Personal Identity: Inner, Social and Historical Time*, in Anita Jacobson-Widding (ed.), *Identity: Personal and Socio-Cultural – A Symposium*, Uppsala 1983.
- 18 Thomas Luckmann, *Remarks on Personal Identity*, 74.
- 19 Thomas Luckmann, *Remarks on Personal Identity*, 77. According to the author, the "rhythms of inner time are the omnipresent basis upon which are erected all other structures of time in human life". They constitute the bridge connecting the body to consciousness.
- 20 Thomas Luckmann, *Remarks on Personal Identity*, 78.
- 21 Cf. Alfred Schutz, *The Problem of Social Reality, Collected Papers*, The Hague 1962, vol 1.
- 22 Cf. Alfred Schutz and Thomas Luckmann, *Structures of the Life World I*, Evanston 1973.
- 23 In referring to these categories Luckmann is thinking about calendars, clocks, but also rites of passage, the temporal structure of careers, etc. In essence, the dimensions indispensable to socio-political organization learned by individuals during the socialization process.
- 24 Thomas Luckmann, *Remarks on Personal Identity*, 80.
- 25 Thomas Luckmann, *Remarks on Personal Identity*, 89.
- 26 Thomas Luckmann, *Remarks on Personal Identity*, 86.
- 27 Cf. Carlo Mongardini, *Le dimensioni del tempo in sociologia, Prefazione*, in Simonetta Tabboni, *La rappresentazione sociale del tempo*.

## **SUMMARY**

### **THE SOCIOLOGICAL CONCEPT OF TIME**

As the founding fathers of sociology had already understood, the study of time is an especially efficacious analytical tool in exploring social forms. Through it, in fact, the connections between individual and society, structure and action, the worlds of nature and culture are clearly revealed. And the specific "fecundity" of temporal categories has led to an intense flowering of sociological studies on time over the past two decades. With the intent of offering some basic concep-

tual equipment with which to understand the sociological approach to the temporal dimension, this paper proposes three different, and complementary, directions for research. The first is offered by one of the classics of sociological thought, Émile Durkheim. As early as the start of our century, in the context of his study of the social origins of categories of knowledge, he stressed the close relationship that exists between temporal concepts and the character of social life. In his view, however, individual time has no analytical autonomy and the subjective temporal experience is expelled from the strictly sociological field of interest. The second, more recent, mode of thinking is that of the eminent German sociologist and historian, Norbert Elias. Elias takes a clear stand against making time an external dimension, "objective" in relation to human existence, emphasizing instead its symbolic character, the combined result of human experience and the civilizing process. At the same time the author offers important analytical elements with which to go beyond the viewpoint tending to counterpose individual, natural and social time. The third research direction, taken from the social phenomenology school and here described in relation to Thomas Luckmann's thinking, deals with the processes that relate the dimension of inner time to intersubjective time on the one hand and, on the other, to the broader social temporal categories. In this case, too, important analytical departure-points are offered to supersede dichotomous approaches to the study of time.