

A RELATIONAL REALIST VISION FOR EDUCATION POLICY AND PRACTICE

BASEM ADI





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2. Relational Realism as an Alternative General Sociological Approach

This chapter examines the foundational assumptions of a relational realist approach. The aim is to provide an alternative general approach to functionalism and its system-based framework. In direct contrast with the system-based regulation of relations, the relational approach starts from the contingency of social reality to explore the determinants that are emergent from its interactive dynamics. Three points are covered in this chapter, which justifies the necessity of a general framework that guides the logic of social policies and interventions:

1. The necessity of referential detachment as the basis of *judgemental rationality*: Without referential detachment, it is impossible to progressively explain and interpret pre-existing determinants of social reality, that is, its *generative mechanisms*.
2. The articulation of referential detachment in a relational realist general approach: In a relational realist general approach, the object of analysis is explained in and through social relations, that is, reciprocal exchanges of knowing.
3. The reciprocal relationship between observer and observed is embedded in a structure of wider networks: A structure of wider networks organises human-referenced patterns of sociability that seek to develop the human element's latent potentiality. The aim is to generate networked interventions — grounded in epistemic relations between the observer and observed — that exceed the already given towards the potentially transformational.

The Necessity of Referential Detachment

The relationship between the referential act and the referent is articulated in the next section through the epistemic quadrangle model (Donati 2011). Before expanding on this epistemic approach, it is necessary first to justify a realist *philosophical ontology* based on referential detachment that starts from the relationality of social reality. In providing this justification, two general approaches — both denying the necessity of a *philosophical ontology* — are evaluated:

- Mid-range realism views any claim to a *philosophical ontology* as internally incoherent due to its epistemically transitive starting point.
- The understanding that any distinction between the act of reference and referent is a form of philosophising sociology. Instead, the centrality of practice is posited in which all theories are viewed as tools for action.

Mid-Range Realism

Mid-range realist theories agree in their rejection of transcendental realism as a *philosophical ontology*. The distinction between the act of reference and referent is acknowledged, but the act itself is considered a fallible conceptual model constituted in the transitive domain (Cruickshank 2004; 2010). As ontological claims are socially embedded, they are presupposed by a fallible interpretation that cannot act as an underlabourer operating outside the conditions of its emergence. Due to this fallibility, there can be no master definition of what constitutes social reality. The realist *philosophical ontology* sets itself the task of transposing questions of being into questions of knowledge despite the latter providing the content on how reality is epistemically mediated:

The problem though is that in defining the epistemic fallacy as the transposing of questions about being into questions about knowing, Bhaskar has defined the said fallacy so broadly that any reference to what we know of reality (which may well be knowledge claims with a high degree veracity) must commit this putative fallacy (Cruickshank 2004: 572).

Therefore, to start from a *philosophical ontology* is to start from a vantage point independent of scientific knowledge. Such a position first posits what must be the case for science to be possible (Cruickshank 2004: 573). In this scenario, we have an irresolvable antinomy in which a metaphysical claim denies the grounds of its emergence. As a result, it is not plausible to distinguish a *philosophical ontology* from the substantive one due to the impossibility of a God's eye view to extrapolate the essential features of reality (Cruickshank 2004: 568).

In the case of mid-range realism¹, Cruickshank argues, it is possible to commit to ontological claims that are not transcendental. Instead of metaphysical claims, ontological presuppositions are recognised as being situated within the transitive domain — they are developed and revised in critical dialogue with other theories, whose adequacy is derived from their efficacy:

Rather, ontological presuppositions may be recognised as being situated within the transitive domain, and that the task of social scientists is to draw upon the most useful ontological definitions that currently prevail in the transitive domain (Cruickshank 2004: 582).

Thus, in the transitive domain, any theory is intrinsic to practice and mediates our interaction (acts of reference) in the natural and discursive worlds.

Cruickshank proposes that situated ontological presuppositions can be realised in Popper's justification of knowledge growth in problems located in theory. Cruickshank's approach is iterative insofar as previously solved problems in an antecedent theory become subject to criticism and replaced by an alternative view (Cruickshank 2010: 600). Adopting this alternative approach re-formulates the *epistemic fallacy* so that it is substantively constituted as a fallibilist epistemology. Accordingly, ontological claims are open to revision and never settled:

1 Realism can be described as mid-level when it repudiates intransitive ontological presuppositions and the feasibility of research pragmatics with little theoretical insight or rigour (the idea of theory as emergent *a posteriori* from data collected). However, while repudiating the monological immanent critique of a *philosophical ontology*, the idea of 'internal coherence' is acknowledged, that is, that some models are progressively efficacious in producing useful ontological definitions. This commitment situates Cruickshank's approach as a midpoint between philosophical starting points and the primacy of research outcomes detached from theoretical considerations.

This is a problem because if knowledge is held to be fallible then, rather than simply using this to say that one's claims are not infallible, one needs to put this recognition to work, so to speak. Doing this, one would argue that as knowledge claims are fallible, they need to be revised and replaced through criticism. This would be antithetical to the search for an answer to a transcendental question because one would not be seeking some fixed answer but rather holding that all forms of knowledge claim were open to revision and replacement (Cruikshank 2010: 598).

Kaidesoja argues similarly that transcendental arguments aim to postulate the 'general categorical structure of the world' (2013: 18). Specifically, conceptually, it is internally incompatible to appropriate Kantian transcendental arguments in a realist sense. Kant's view does not start from metaphysical speculations about the world's general categorical structure; instead, the starting point is the general categories of understanding of the epistemic subject (Kaidesoja 2013: 84). The Kantian synthetic *a priori* is a transcendental idealism that brings together, simultaneously, the structures of our understanding with the object of our experience (Kaidesoja 2013: 85). It is a view that does not justify *a priori* transcendental arguments from what is knowable *a posteriori*. In contrast to a Kantian synthetic *a priori*, transcendental realism aims to demonstrate the necessary conditions for the possibility of intelligible scientific practices (Kaidesoja 2013: 87).

Therefore, transcendental realism reverses the Kantian synthetic *a priori* when starting from what is posited as the world's general categorical structure. Due to this object-sided starting point (the question of being), it cannot convey a synthetic *a priori* that articulates the subjective conditions of knowing. The truth-value of scientific practice descriptions become presuppositions that dictate real people's activities in the real world (Kaidesoja 2013: 88 - 89). Without recourse to these activities, it is impossible to justify understandings pre-defined in the name of a *philosophical ontology*. Hence, it is irreconcilable to develop arguments *a posteriori* that, after that become transcendental necessities:

It is not possible to justify *a posteriori* any propositions about transcendental necessities in the Kantian sense, because knowledge *a posteriori* is always merely hypothetical and hence fallible (Kaidesoja 2013: 90).

The fallible nature of realist transcendental arguments means they cannot dictate models and practices *a priori*. As 'naturalised transcendental arguments' start from reasoning that sets itself apart from the practices it seeks to systemise, there is no recourse to the situated activities of people in the real world to adjudicate between competing theories:

Practices that are referred to in the premises of these supposedly 'naturalised transcendental arguments' can (in principle) always be interpreted from the point of view of two or more incompatible ontological theories and there is no *a priori* way to decide which interpretation is true (Kaidesoja 2013: 98).

What is the basis of *judgemental rationality* and progressive practice? Again, it relates to practices that develop from the transitive domain (a *substantive ontology*):

I would thus say that the intelligibility and rationality of the practice X relate to our conceptions and judgements concerning this practice rather than the features of the world that make it possible in the first place (Kaidesoja 2013: 87).

The intrinsic features of good basic science are identified in the explanatory power of models and theories (Kaidesoja 2013: 100). Standards are not pre-justified but emerge according to different disciplines in which new theoretical ideas and methodologies are developed (Kaidesoja 2013: 101). Based on this inter-disciplinary view of epistemically successful scientific practices, particular understandings of social reality can be discounted as incompatible with the best theories of other sciences:

This requirement is needed, because the most epistemically successful scientific practices presuppose that different sciences study the same world and that the results produced in different disciplines should be complementary, not contradictory. I find this requirement especially important in the context of social ontology, since, for example, physically reductionist, idealist and individualist views of the nature of social reality are not compatible with the best theories about human cognition proposed in cognitive sciences [...]. This means that arguments in naturalised social ontology are not solely based on the successful social scientific practices since their conclusions should also be compatible with the ontological assumptions of the empirically confirmed theories of other sciences (Kaidesoja 2013: 101).

Pragmatist Methodological Relationism

Kivinen & Piironen's (2006) pragmatist methodological relationism takes an altogether different position against referentialist ontological reasoning. This approach rejects any commitment to a 'metaphysical language game of ontology and what might be called a "referentialist" conception of knowledge' (Kivinen & Piironen 2006: 310). Here, any form of ontological reasoning is rejected, including the philosophical dualism of subject-object. What follows is the relationality of the object in which the object is never distinct from the knowing subject:

Like Dewey ([1925] 1981, 173–225), we give up the whole philosophical subject-object dualism, which first presupposes the knowing subject as an entity distinct from the objects of its knowledge, and then engages in figuring out how the subject could form correct representations of the world (Kivinen & Piironen 2006: 309).

Fruitful methodological debates (sociologising philosophy) — in contrast to what are termed metaphysical theories — are concerned with people's concrete problems in their everyday social lives (Kivinen & Piironen 2006: 319). The knowing entity is already practically engaged and formed by shared practices. As engagement with the world is not independent of the referent — an object already named — it is the practical relations of their naming that becomes the object of inquiry:

It is precisely because of the centrality of practice — because of the fact that everything is practical and can only be weighed in action — that all theories should be conceived of as nothing but tools for action (Kivinen & Piironen 2006: 319).

Following the Deweyan operationalist approach, a practical and problem-driven way of understanding the social sciences is reached. In this approach, all human knowledge is related to the inquirer's purposes, and all beliefs are to be weighed in intentional action and its consequences. The inquirer's social scientific conceptualisations are tools that must be rendered operational in things to be done. A sense of the rules of the game in the form of problems people face in their everyday lives is not something to be theorised to capture the complexity and contingency of the real world. Instead, what is

advocated is a theory with a small ‘t’ that is oriented towards solving research problems:

From a pragmatist standpoint, we need to embrace the strict demand of operationalizability — understanding theories in terms of acts to be done — and this means, among other things, dropping the idea that the growing complexity of a theory and the use of peculiar doctrinal lexicon can be justified by the claim that they are needed in capturing the complexity and indefiniteness of the real world (cf. Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 22–23, and n. 40 and 41). Rather, we need an unambiguously operationalisable frame of references (i.e., a simple theory with a small t) that serves us as a practicable toolset for solving specific research problems (Kivinen & Piironen 2006: 319–320).

The Inconsistencies of Theories that Oppose Transcendental Reasoning

Both theories, mid-range realism and pragmatist methodological relationism, represent two different critiques of transcendental reasoning. The objections of both these views will next be reviewed, and two responses will be presented to justify the necessity of a *philosophical ontology*. The necessity of a *philosophical ontology* follows from the internal inconsistencies of mid-range realism and pragmatist methodological relationism:

1. The idea of a distinction between the act of reference and object of reference — an idea acknowledged by mid-range realism — requires a general analytical approach to examine the relationship between both.
2. The pragmatist methodological relationism described above denies the need for any general approach despite relying on a *philosophical ontology*.

In response to mid-range realism, the possibility of *judgemental rationality* is presupposed by the distinction between the observer and the observed, whose terms of reference are meaningful in the mediation within the relation of reference. As Tyfield (2007) argues, it is the ontological properties of the relatum (‘our ontology’) that determines the relation of reference:

As with all relations, the nature of the relatum of the permissible objects of reference, i.e., our ontology, necessarily determines the nature of the relation of reference (Tyfield 2007: 151).

We are dealing with a reciprocal exchange — a dialogue — between the act of reference and the referent. The *a priori* framework of transcendental realism does not impose a fixed answer on the parameters of knowing. Instead, it affirms knowing to be emergent from the contingency of social reality, whose first ontological premise is the relation itself (Donati 2011). Social reality is understood and interpreted from the perspective of the relation that provides context and makes the observed an intelligible object of investigation (the object being both pre-existing but also contingently emergent from its relations of reference). Thus, the relationality of social reality requires an analytical paradigm that can investigate the interconnections between the relation's elements that generate its differentiated features, i.e., its properties and powers.

When investigating the interconnections of the relation — between observer and observed — we are called to detach the referential act from that which it refers. As Bhaskar argues, it is this necessary procedure of detachment that establishes distinctiveness in the relation that is articulated from the viewpoint of the referent (the intransitive dimension):

The procedure which I have called 'referential detachment', that is, the detachment of the act of reference from that to which it refers, establishes at once the existential separation, distinctiveness or 'intransitivity' of both referential act and referent and the possibility of another reference to either, a condition of any intelligible discourse at all (Bhaskar 2000: 24).

The existential separation means that while the observer and observed are embedded in their context, the pre-existence of the observed implicates an 'intransitivity' between the referential act and referent. Simultaneously, the contingent mediation — a relation of knowing — between the referential act and referent is the access point and necessary condition of intelligible discourse. Thus, the process of referential detachment means a separation at the moment of reference — it is not an attitude that 'epistemologizes or normalises ontology' (Bhaskar 2007: 194). Instead, it opens the door to epistemic relativity and the practice of *judgmental rationality* towards the referent's 'intransitivity'. We have a *philosophical ontology* that is intrinsically deduced from epistemic

relations between the observer and observed, making judgment possible. The transcendental reasoning of relational realism is not a starting point that takes, for example, a functionalist system perspective that externally pre-establishes the parameters of knowing.

As the epistemic relation between the referential act and referent is internal to the relation and contingent, we are led to an *a posteriori* explanation derived from the dynamics of environmental interaction. Sociological knowledge derived from social reality — a reality that possesses relational properties and powers from its interactive dynamics — translates into relational concepts and observations. Therefore, there is a simultaneity between sociological knowledge and social reality — just as social reality possesses relational properties and powers, the same applies to sociological knowledge (Donati 2011: 103).

As sociological knowledge, like social reality, is a relational product of social agency, the observer's agency is interwoven with the agency of the observed. Between both is the mediation of pre-existing structural and cultural forms that generate the properties and powers of both social reality and sociological knowledge. The relation between social reality and sociological knowledge implicates an analytical perspective that derives its legitimacy from within the space-time of the social relation. The result of the process of mediated interaction is the development of new structural, cultural, and agential forms (Donati 2011: 99).

Sociological knowledge, therefore, derived from social reality, is inseparable from referential detachment that starts from the dynamics of the epistemic relationship. The question is whether or not the starting point acknowledges the referent's perspective and the range of relations that underlie its formation. Again, as the internal dynamics of the relation is the first ontological starting point, there are no fixed answers that normalise ontology through a pre-given referential perspective (as is the case in system-based governance discussed in the previous chapter).

On the other hand, pragmatist methodological relationism replaces referential detachment with unceasing cycles of practice-based problem-solving within self-referential networks. Two central problems can be identified with this general approach:

1. Despite its claim that it rejects 'philosophical sociology', albeit, through negation, it adopts a general approach, that is, theory with a capital 'T'.
2. Denying the necessity of referential detachment leaves us with no way to evaluate the efficacy of practices.

Regarding the first point, self-referential relations of knowing — with no distinction accepted between the referential act and referent — is an *a priori* framework whose defining factor is an already named world weighed in action. Consequently, there is a closed transcendental *philosophical ontology* that denies its starting point through negation. The present tense focus on action-centred relations means the immanence of communicative networks encapsulates all differences, including the distinction between the knower and the world. From to this starting point, all theory is merely a language game within networks of self-referential practice.

The negation of the difference between the referential act and referent means there is a pre-given conceptual evaluation with no distinction between a linguistic knowing-that and embodied knowing-how. As a result, as analytical ties disappear between the propositional and embodied experience, we are left with empiricism at the level of events. Answering research questions and solving problems, in this general approach, leads to an empiricist mode of observation that focuses on immediate interactive communication on who is doing what and when, i.e., on how individuals manage social mechanisms at the level of events. Implicated from this *a priori* framework, due to its presentism and analytical conflation, is both the genetic and *epistemic fallacy*.

Second, the interpretive paradigm that follows from pragmatist methodological relationism is conceptually incapable of evaluating the efficacy of methods it uses when seeking answers to research questions. The pragmatic relational general approach, committing the *epistemic fallacy*, disconnects the linguistic knowing-that — the referential act — from the embodied knowing-how. Absent from this account are the contingent, relational dynamics that generate observed determinants. As we are conceptually operating at the level of meanings,

we are disconnected from the underlying reality that produces new relationships that explain the origins of properties and powers of referents investigated. In self-referential operative practices, we only have self-referential networks of meanings. Consequently, research cannot be anchored in anything distinguished from de-centred practices weighed in action.

An Epistemic Framework in which a Compass is the Referent's Relations of Emergence

As the epistemic relation — the necessary condition of intelligible discourse — is the first ontological premise of social reality, a general framework is needed to articulate the interchange between the referential act and referent. We are not merely focused on what individuals do to manage social mechanisms in their immediate activities. Instead, the focus is on relational networks that are operationalised through a process of *double contingency*. Based on the *double contingency* between *Ego* and *Alter*, existential separation and 'intransitivity' operate at all levels of society that make up the environment of emergence. A relational realist general approach aims to analytically explore the contingency in this environment that impacts the referent's *latent ontological reality* as a *generative mechanism*.

Generative mechanisms are more than exercised powers immediately perceived in events (Prandini 2011: 41). As a transcendent reality irreducible to its context, the object's latent model points to its mode of operation — the potential properties it could develop in alternative relational settings. The distinction and interrelation between the latent mode of operation — the transcendent mode of existence — and the environment that mediates its development is the basis of referential detachment. Based on this distinction, the epistemic model consists of two triangles that, when placed one above the other, form a quadrangle (Donati 2011, see Figure 1):

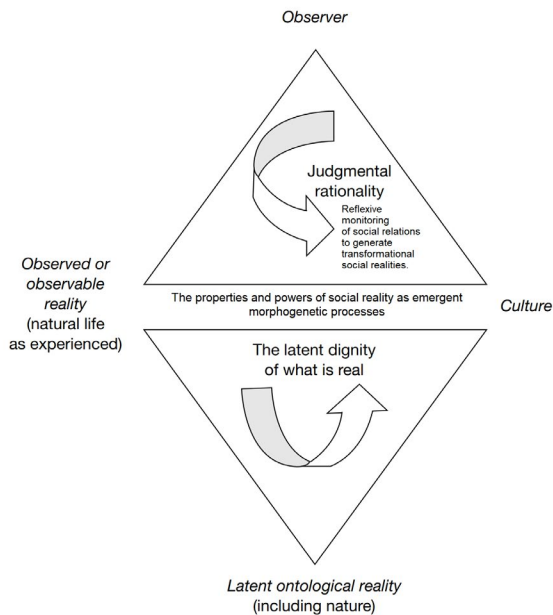


Fig. 1 For relational sociology, critical realism is an approach that extends the epistemic triangle (commonly used in sociology: observer — culture — observed reality — latent ontological reality) (Donati 2011: 100). The diagram is adapted to show the epistemic quadrangle in the context of social interventions generating transformational social realities.

1. The first (upper) triangle refers to the observer whose immediate scope of perception is the object's observable reality (the level of the event).
2. The second (lower) triangle of the quadrangle refers to the *latent ontological reality* of the perceived object.

The distance between the upper and lower triangle denotes existing relational mediations (referential acts). In the relation between both triangles, the act of reference conveys *judgmental rationality* towards the second triangle, that is, the underlying reality that generates exercised powers. In the interrelation between observer and observed, *judgmental rationality* (as a reflexive mediation) expresses the potentially transformational in the context of patterns of sociability intended to enable the development of the referent as a *Relational Subject*. Hence the dialogical relation between the upper and lower triangles implicates the

reflexive monitoring of existing relations in their efficacy in generating transformational social realities.

The epistemic quadrangle proposes a general approach to understanding social reality as complex networks managed in reciprocal and contingent relations (the epistemic process of *double contingency*). It is an epistemic framework that establishes a general understanding from which we evaluate (using *judgemental rationality*) the properties and powers of social reality as mediations emergent from the interplay of its constituent elements, that is, the dynamic between actors and broader socio-cultural properties and powers. The *morphogenetic paradigm* is derived from this relational realist understanding as an analytical logic and language to investigate the internal dynamics of relations and outcomes produced through these dynamics.² In turn, the methodological tools devised when answering a research question aim to empirically validate the interactions of pre-existing determinants to ascertain the outcomes they produce.

The process described above are components of sociology as a knowledge system and apply to any general theory that seeks to understand and solve problems relating to research questions (Donati 2011: 105). Whether implicit or explicit, affirming or denying, any attempt to answer questions, as argued before, starts from a general approach that impacts the explanatory paradigm and methodological tools adopted. If social reality is understood as the reality of 'social facts' that are emergent relational products, then the paradigm, tools, and theories developed should express this understanding. Thus, utilising the AGIL scheme as a compass, Donati (2011) posits four cardinal points of sociology as a knowledge system (see Figure 2):

1. A general approach or metatheory (L) that affirms an understanding of social reality. This general approach can be stated as a *philosophical ontology*.
2. Derived from a general approach is a compatible paradigm (I) whose premises express and apply the metatheory. As the relational realist framework starts from the relations that generate observed reality, we need an analytical paradigm to explore the complexity

2 In the case of a relational realist approach, the *morphogenetic paradigm* is a complementary paradigm that can analyse the interchanges within relations over time. The paradigm will be covered in more detail in Chapter Three.

of analytical exchanges that constitute this reality. In relational realism, the *morphogenetic paradigm* explains outcomes as dynamic relations between agency and evolving structures.

1. Methodological research tools (A) operationalise morphogenetic processes. Specifically, they identify appropriate tools that answer questions based on an analytical understanding of social reality as networks of reciprocal interchanges.
2. Single theories (G) are derived from research outcomes that reflect a relational realist understanding of social reality.

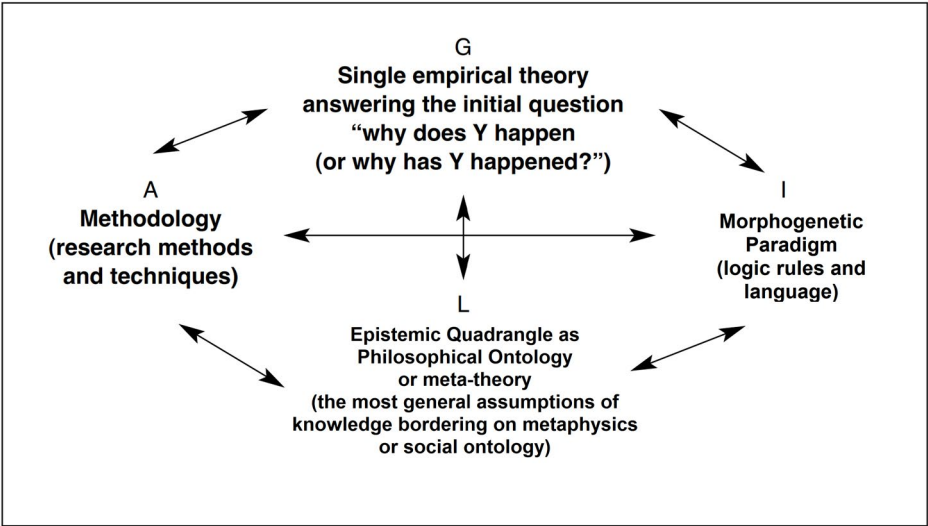


Fig. 2 The components of sociology as a knowledge system (aimed at formulating a theory) built upon two axes, L-G and A-I (Donati 2011: 105). The diagram is adapted to relational realism and the *morphogenetic paradigm*.

Based on the four sociological knowledge points, we start from the reasoned necessity of an *a priori* starting point. Based on this starting point, an analytical language is derived that applies *judgemental rationality* to the referent’s conditions of emergence. In turn, to study the conditions of emergence, equally relational tools are needed to answer research questions and develop theories.

Networked Interventions that Surpass the already Given towards the Potentially Transformational

Adoption of the general approach, based on how social relations are understood, produces implications for the direction of social interventions. In the epistemic quadrangle, observation involves explaining the object in reference to its underlying *latent ontological reality*. Based on the interaction of agent-subjects, the relational mediations between both triangles provide the context for the emergence of the lower triangle. Referential detachment is applied in the mediations of agents-subjects through *judgemental rationality*, which normalises ontology. The relational *symbolic code* is operationalised in these morphogenetic interactions to arrive at *judgemental rationality* in networked interconnections between personal and social outcomes.

In these interwoven relations, network analysis explores the differentiation and mutual interaction between the human and social. It acknowledges the networked reality between the non-contingency of pre-existing human needs and the social order whose patterns of sociability meet these needs. Modernity's *symbolic code* and its functionalist *modus operandi* cannot distinguish between these distinctions of relations because its starting point is the system and the needs of the social order (Donati 2011: 162).

Derived from a relational model of reference, the relationship between the immanent (*judgemental rationality*) and transcendent (the latent dignity of what is real) dimensions of social reality implicate networked interventions that can articulate the distinction between the human and social. This networked logic is the practical application of a social ontology whose starting premise is the reciprocal interchange between *Ego and Alter* — whether individual or collective actors (these interchanges exist in relations between the upper and lower triangles of the epistemic triangle). Recursively, the reality generated in the lower triangle is emergent from and embedded in complex networks that make up the mediation between the two triangles. Again, as network analysis explores the relations between these mediations, the application of *judgemental rationality* becomes key. It is the normative dimension that is identified and emergent from the mediation between the upper and lower triangles.

Policy initiatives and interventions are an outcome of network analysis between the upper and lower triangles; they develop from the relation's epistemic interchanges to determine sought outcomes. As will be expanded in the coming chapters, the *morphogenetic paradigm* is a model that explores the inner dynamics of these epistemic relations by analysing their reflexive interplay that produces structural bonds. The paradigm is equipped to explore the referential acts of its participants that normatively regulate the relation between the human and social. As a result, the aim of *morphogenetic cycles* is to ensure interventions continuously direct potentially transformative interventions in the mediations between the upper and lower triangles in the spirit of *judgemental rationality*.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter proposed an alternative approach to system-based functionalism, the ethos of which dominates policy models and initiatives. In contrast to the external regulation of relations, the relational realist approach starts from the contingency of social reality to explore how it mediates the emergence of relational elements — both actors and the social order. The idea of a general approach that underpins an alternative policy vision was justified as a reasoned necessity.

Two opposing perspectives on the concept of *philosophical ontology* were presented. In contrast to mid-range realism, relational realism is not a metaphysical ontology that transposes questions of knowing into questions of being. Rather, its first ontological premise is grounded in epistemic relations from which the relatum is emergent. Relational realism also contrasts methodological relationism, a metaphysical starting point that only acknowledges the doings of knowing subjects. With no distinction between the doings of the knowing subject and engagement with the referent, there is no way to evaluate the efficacy of practices. Hence, methodological relationism is a closed metaphysical ontology that denies its ontological presupposition despite starting from the purposes of inquiry rather than outcomes irreducible to the practical understandings of social scientific practice.

With a *philosophical ontology* being a reasoned necessity, a model to operationalise epistemic relations is needed. If efficacious referential acts

are continuously regenerated, then an epistemic model should connect the process of referential detachment to transformative mediations. The epistemic quadrangle understands these mediations to be embedded in networked connections in which reciprocal interchanges exist at both the level of the event and the broader socio-cultural context that shapes the direction of these interchanges. Progressive problem-solving, therefore, mediates between the upper and lower triangles. These mediations acknowledge the referent's developmental emergence as an irreducible and emergent *generative mechanism* (the *latent ontological reality* of the referent). In the process of referential detachment, existing mediations in the interplay between immanence and transcendence generate the properties and powers of social reality.

Social policy initiatives attuned to the referent (Alter) require the reflexive monitoring of existing mediations in their capacity to generate transformative patterns of sociability. Accordingly, based on the relational realist general approach, an analytical paradigm is needed to investigate the interplay within relations and the outcomes they produce. The *morphogenetic paradigm*, discussed in the following chapters, approaches the different elements of social reality — both the personal and the socio-cultural — as networked phenomena. It is a paradigm that views epistemic mediations from within the relation (a networking logic) to develop *meta-reflexive* subjects that actively participate in the regeneration of the social order rather than relying on a compromise between impersonal system mechanisms and individualised preferences. Therefore, the contingency of current mediations is not the point of reproductive adaptation but the basis of reflection on how things could be different. Again, relational realism opposes closed ontologies that limit the possible by regulating the parameters of sociability.

