Article

The Third (included) in the interdependence between the human and the social

Pierpaolo Donati
University of Bologna

Abstract

The article argues that most of today's social theories tend to look at social phenomena in ways that lead to a conflation of what is human and what is social, or to disconnect one from the other. They remove the Third as an emerging effect (therefore included) of social relationality which is generated not only by the contributions of the terms of the relations but by a plus which is the reciprocity effect of the relation itself. In this way, the ontologically constitutive relationality of the social in which the Third resides is obliterated. This outcome is both a reflection and a regenerator of most of the human crises that we experience today in social life. To get out of these crises, relational sociology proposes to go beyond the monistic and dualistic semantics of the Third by adopting a relational cultural matrix capable of connecting the human and the social, while maintaining their distinctions. The basic thesis is that a social form is human if and to the extent that the social relations that compose it are produced by subjects who mutually orient themselves on the basis of the superfunctional sense that exists in the Third generated by their relationship.

Keywords

relational sociology; Third included; epistemology; semantics; humanization

El Tercero (incluido) en la interdependencia entre lo humano y lo social

Resumen

El artículo argumenta que la mayoría de las teorías sociales actuales tienden a observar los fenómenos sociales de distintas maneras que llevan a una unión de lo humano y lo social, o a desconectar el uno del otro. Eliminan al Tercero como efecto emergente (incluido, por lo tanto) de la relación social que se genera no solo por las contribuciones de los términos que se establecen en las relaciones, sino también por un añadido como es el efecto de reciprocidad de la propia relación. De esta manera, se elimina la relación ontológicamente constitutiva de la sociedad en la que se encuentra el Tercero. Este resultado es tanto un reflejo como una causa de la mayoría de las crisis humanas que experimentamos hoy en día en la vida social. Para salir de estas crisis, la sociología relacional propone ir más allá de la semántica monista y dualista del Tercero adoptando una matriz cultural relacional capaz de conectar lo humano y lo social, de modo que se mantengan sus diferencias. La tesis básica es que una forma social es humana si y en la medida en que las relaciones sociales que la componen son producidas por sujetos que se orientan mutuamente de acuerdo con un sentido muy práctico que se da en el Tercero a partir de esta relación.

Palabras clave

Sociología relacional; Tercero incluido; epistemología; semántica; humanización

1. The removal of the Third (included) is at the origin of today's existential crises

I start by observing that, in today's societies projected towards the future, it is increasingly difficult to lend a human quality to social relations and to society as a whole. The human has become an immense battle-field with a stake in the way in which the social relationship is conceived and practised as a generative bond of humans. Society is not perceived as a place where humans can live and flourish, but rather as a hostile environment. Think of the spread of poverty, the proliferation of wars, the growing migrations of persecuted populations, the destruction of the natural environment, growing social inequalities, and the dangers of the misuse of new technologies, not to mention the so-called discomforts of modernity. It is on this last issue that I would like to focus my analysis, in order to understand how people's identities are changing in everyday life and what possibilities exist for a new humanism.

The human is confined to the private and subjective sphere of the individual, while society becomes a "behavioural system" with a dynamism that operates without will or intentionality, and therefore without human qualities. The human subject fluctuates in the environment of the social system and his relationship with the system is one of mutual irritation. The subject and society are for each other mere "noise", perceived in the blind spots of their communication.

The human condition in highly modernized societies is increasingly characterized by the divergence between the human and the social, meaning humans and society: that is, between what is felt in social relations as properly human and what is not. I would like this thesis to argue that this divergence is the product of the removal of the ontologically constitutive relationality of the social in which the Third lies (of which I will speak). The lack of vision of what I call the "Third included" of/in social relations is at once the result and the regenerator of the social and existential crises that we experience today in social life.

At the heart of this dramatic human condition is the radical crisis of the social bond. Hyper-modernizing societies produce a growing distancing between what, in the social bond, is considered "human", increasingly identified in the experiences and inner states of individuals, and what is seen as "society", considered a requirement imposed by society, not attributable to the freedom or spontaneity of the ego. To give an example, the couple bond is considered authentic if it is configured as a purely emotional relationship between individuals who gratify each other moment by moment, while it is viewed as inauthentic if it responds to the expectations of society and community institutions, be they civil or religious.

It is not until today that the separation between humans and society has been theorized. The dualism to which I refer has been exalted since, with Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the social bond was considered a mere constraint imposed by a repressive society. Later, dualism was theorized in a dialectical sense by idealism, which was followed by the reversal in a materialistic sense from Marx onwards. Today, it assumes an unprecedented radicality because, with the advent of the digital age, that residue of cultural mediation between social and human that survived until the end of the last century in the values (with a religious background) of popular lifeworlds (*Lebenswelt*) is beginning to disappear.

What results from the acceleration of the separation between the human and the social? The result is a schizophrenia of social life which involves a widespread existential crisis of people. This schizophrenia consists of the fact that the human being is perceived as increasingly weak and fragile, while technological society promises that she may go beyond herself on the condition that she accept the systemic logic of relief (*Entlastung*: Gehlen, 2003) from the hardships and responsibilities inherent in the responsible assumption of social relations, that is, taking into account the effects of the social relations themselves (i.e. the Third as an effect included in social relations). System logics are increasingly represented by digital connections (a sort of virtual Third) which replace concrete and vital relationships (in which the Third included lies).

On the one hand, in daily life, individuals experience the separation between humans and society as a lack of meaning and absence of purposefulness in social life, which is given the label of "discomforts of modernity". For example, it is said: no human instance can prevent mass media and new digital technologies from emptying interpersonal communication, the economic system from pushing towards superfluous consumption, the natural environment from being devastated, politics from always creating new conflict, or religion from being subjectivized and becoming only a vague feeling of that which is perceived as a mystery. In all this, we can see the chasm between the subjective experience of individuals and social dynamics. On the other hand, scientific and technological innovations (artificial intelligence, robotics, genetic engineering, and so on) promise an indefinite extension of the freedoms of individuals. Society takes on the form of an autonomous system: a real social machine which allows you to dream of a subjectivity evolved beyond human limits, that is, a post- or trans-human society, well represented by the Metaverse that creates a virtual life parallel to the real one. For example, it feeds the illusion of an increasingly artificial procreation, of an increasingly less burdensome job, of a gender identity available to any subjective desire and, more generally, it feeds the dream of an "augmented" human freed from his or her natural limits as well as from all constricting social ties.

How did we reach this point? My thesis, which I will argue in great depth, is that both the aspects of crisis (a widespread sense of depersonalization, even dehumanization, of relationships, lifestyles, and the social fabric in general), as well as the illusory dreams of the liberation of the human (in the direction of a supposed trans- or post-human) arise from having distorted and annihilated the element that connects the human and the society: that is, the Third included. To escape today's crisis and free the human in its qualities and properties, even potential ones, it is necessary to recognize that the great mistake of modernity has been to distort the meaning of the Third included to the point of its negation, and that the fate of the human depends on putting back into play this "Third" which has been rendered impersonal and expelled from the dialectic between the I and the You.

It is worth recalling here the role of the Third which is present in the radically heteronomous ethics of E. Lévinas, according to which the Third is someone who enters the Ego-Alter relationship and obstructs interpersonal ethics in order to respond to the needs of "politics". In this sense, for Levinas too, the Third is a disturbance: necessary for the political sphere, but a danger to the ethics of the Ego-Alter relationship which must be "anarchic" (i.e. devoid

of an *archè*, of an original principle of all things),[1] which political justice must implement, thus causing a perennial oscillation between ethics and politics (cf. Simmons, 1999). It is equally important to remember that the same meaning of the Third, understood as "the impersonal", is used by Esposito (2012).

But what is this "Third" to which I refer? How can we understand and observe it? How does it affect personal and social life? How can we treat it in order to carry out social practices of authentic humanization?

In mainstream sociology, the figure of the Third is treated in a very general way, if not generically, as a third entity that is added to a couple (of people or otherwise), generally external to it, which, as such, can be anything. It can be a human entity (another person), non-human (plants, animals), or more-than-human (divine or transhuman). It can be a mediator, a *tertius gaudens*, an observer, messenger, translator, rival, judge, matchmaker, trickster, hybrid, stranger, common enemy, scapegoat; it can be an intruder; it can be a parasite or an angel who came down from heaven (Pyyhtinen, 2010).

It is not in this general sense that I will deal with the theme of the Third. The Third of which I will speak is that which lies between two agents (individual or collective persons) as an effect of their mutual action, and therefore as a product of their actions under the aspect of sociability, or sociality. I will call it the Third included, as an expression of the relationship between the related subjects of the same relationship.[2] Understood in this way, the Third is the entity that exists "between" the subjects in a relationship, which is seen by a relational sociology capable of operating with the relational gaze.

2. Three semantic matrices of the Third, depending on whether it is included or excluded

Today everyone perceives the fact that society relationships have become fluid and lacking consistency. Our society produces, more than ever, social forms which, although are acted upon by human persons, are perceived, experienced, represented as lacking, if not quite devoid of the human.

To understand the historical process that led to this situation, it is necessary to refer to the great cultural matrices that have shaped the relationship between the human and the social so far. In a nutshell, I identify two great semantic matrices that have marked centuries past and the need to overcome their limits by orienting oneself to a third matrix which, in my opinion, is emerging. These semantics are cultural matrices of theological derivation that have forged, and continue to forge, different types of social formations. These are the monistic, dualistic, and relational ways of thinking (table 1). They are presented here as somewhat ideal types. We can consider them longitudinally in historical time (and thus coincide respectively with classical, modern and postmodern semantics). Alternatively, we can consider them synchronously as three ways of characterizing today's

theories of social phenomena (respectively individualist theories of an economic type, such as rational choice, wholist-dualistic relationalist theories such as Luhmann's, and relational humanist theories such as those inspired by Simmel). In any case, from these ways we derive three different ways of conceiving the human person and, therefore, three kinds of humanism.

I) The classical semantic matrix

In the monistic conception, typical of ancient classical thought (primarily that of Aristotle), the human and the society practically identify each other. Society is regarded as human for the simple fact that it is made up of human persons. There is no need for a Third. For classical semantics, the identity of each entity is understood as a substance: as something that, in order to exist, does not need to relate to anything other than itself. Identity is based on the principle of self-reference [A = A], so the identity of A is immediate; it exists without mediation. From a historical and social point of view, the identity of the individual coincides with that of the social group to which he belongs (tribe, social stratum, local culture) and is experienced in a reproductive way through the internalization of habits and customs (*habitus*). The space of personal (inner) reflexivity is very limited, reserved for philosophers, while relational reflexivity, which also exists in practice, is not thematized.

These semantics do not deny the existence or importance of social relationships in defining the identities of individuals, but consider relationships and identities as something natural that is taken for granted. Social subjects tend to identify with the attribution given to them "naturally" by the community. This way of thinking and living identity is typical of simple societies, with segmentary differentiation (tribe), and persists in those with vertical differentiation, stratified by class (such as the medieval one). Nowadays, such semantics are typical of communitarian theories that conceive of identity as an expression of cultural traditions (for example MacIntyre, 1978).

Table 1. Three semantic matrices of the Third (excluded or included in the social relationship)

I) **Monistic** semantics	II) **Dualistic** semantics	III) **Relational** semantics
A = A	**A = not (non-A)**	**A = Relation (A, non-A)**
The identity of A is given by a simple (logical, unmediated) relationship of equality with itself (identity symbolic code)	The identity of A is given by a negation relation of what is not A (it's a double negative) (binary symbolic code)	The identity of A is given by a relationship (reciprocal action) with the Other (the non-A) that generates the identity of A as an emerging effect of the relationship (generative symbolic code)

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1. The word *archè* (in Greek ἀρχή,) means *beginning, origin*, and represents for the ancient Greeks the primordial force that dominates the world, from which everything comes and to which everything will return.
2. The theory of the "included third" is the basis of the second axiom of transdisciplinarity, as defined by the theoretical physicist Nicolescu (2010), which postulates the existence of a state T at the same time A and not-A on a level of reality different from that of closed system under consideration. In other words, it is possible to include the excluded third party if other observation perspectives, influences and interconnections that overcome the barriers of the closed system and transform it into an open system are also taken into consideration.

I) **Monistic** semantics	II) **Dualistic** semantics	III) **Relational** semantics
Human as immediate social	Human as a negation of the social	Human as a relation to the social
The Third is excluded from the logical point of view (according to the principle of non-contradiction), but can be contemplated as an additional/aggregative element	The Third is ontologically denied (since the distinction is a radical antithetical opposition: "either you are human or you are society")	The Third [R (A, non-A)] is ontologically and logically required for the very existence of the terms of the relationship (substances exist only in a relationship)
Traditional humanism The human person is a self-sufficient substance that is realized in society according to nature (the goods of relationship exist as a virtue of the people through which they pursue their perfection and the common good) (substantialist ontology)	Anti-essentialist humanism (or anti-humanism) The person does not have a given nature but is socially constructed through her ability to differentiate herself by her own opposition to the Other (relational goods are pure events) (dialectical ontology)	Relational humanism The essence of the human person is that of an original intransitive constitution that emerges from the relationship of the Self with an Other that constitutes it "relationally" (relational goods belong to the reality of the Third) (relational ontology)

Source: own creation

II) The modern semantic matrix

Modernity was born as a denial of the identity between the human and the social on the basis of a conception of reality that considers it to be constituted by a *dualistic negative dialectic*. Typically, modern identity is based on the principle of difference, so [A = not (non-A)]: that is, the identity of A is given by the negation of everything that is not A. Identity is based on differences understood and managed dialectically or in any case with a binary code (0/1). The identity of the person is sought in the distinction (as a negative difference) from the other. For example, civil society is that which is not identified with the state, and therefore its identity is the negation of political society. In this way, social relations are "mobilized": that is, made acquisitive and placed at the disposal of potential continuous change, unlike the relative stability that characterizes the monistic paradigm. The identity of A is relational not in that it shares something with the existing world, but in that it self-constructs itself by denying the existing. The Third is what results from this dialectical process. Unlike what happens in the monistic symbolic matrix, here the relationship is instead thematized, but only to be used instrumentally in order to produce a flow of mutual negations from which

an emancipatory historical evolution can be expected. Technically, the relationship is used as an operation of indefinite re-entry of a negating distinction which is entrusted with the task of producing social change (Luhmann, 1995), hence an ontologically flat, praxis, and parasitic vision of the Third.

In the negative dualism of modern thought, there is a mechanism that hides the loss of the end. This mechanism is the binary one. As Simmel (1989, 258) says, "the formula of the end is ternary, that of the mechanism only binary". For this reason, if in modern thought there can be a Third, it can only be mechanical.

III) Post-modern semantic matrix

Post-modern society must take note of the need to redefine identity taking into account the need to relate to others in a way that is no longer functionally dialectical, but super-functional. Supra-functional means that the relation, as such, does not separate or oppose its terms, but rather, while it distinguishes them (differentiating them by their operations), it connects them by uniting their operations without merging them (as happens in the modern Hegelian dialectic). The I (and every identity A) transpires to be increasingly weak and empty if it does not form itself in the relationship with the Other and through the Other. The I and the Other no longer have to specialize functionally (and therefore stand out for the separation of duties, services, and identities), but, conversely, find their own identity in relating to the Other by sharing something and distinguishing themselves through something else. This experience leads to the need to move towards new semantics, strictly relational, given that the functionalist paradigm is now saturated and it is necessary to equip oneself with an unsaturated paradigm, that is, one available for further relational openings.

The relational conception of identity is based on the principle that [A = Relation (A, non-A)]; in other words, the identity of A is given by relation (R) between A and non-A, where the relationship is neither of simple equality (monistic semantics), nor binary (dialectical semantics). In this case, identity is defined by relating to otherness. The ego re-finds itself by reflecting on the relationship with an "Other" by which it is stimulated to find its own identity in that which simultaneously connects it to and distinguishes it from the Other. This connection does not consist of sharing feelings, opinions or tastes but rather lies in the relationship as such, that is, in the relational good produced and enjoyed together. It is the identity that comes to light when the subject re-enters his own identity (the "I" of his "I") within the concrete social networks of which he is a part and of which he has been a part throughout his lifetime (Donati, 2021a). Relational identity implies that Ego distances itself from itself (gives space and presence of the other), which means that there is a contingency in the very unity of personal identity, which is therefore constructed in a complex way, through its internal complexity solicited and favoured by what is other than itself. For example, John thinks of (takes a look at) the vicissitudes of a conflicted life spent with his wife Mary and finds his identity not by denying the influence of such experiences on himself, but by redefining his own identity taking into account the relationship, however complicated, he had with her over the course of his life.

IV) Where does the relational matrix lead?

The relational matrix includes the dualistic conception as its limit case, in the sense that in the relational paradigm it is possible for the relationship between A and non-A to occur in the form of mutual exclusion, but only as a particular case. However, it is extremely instructive to think from the point of view of how relational semantics looks at dualisms. From the relational point of view, dualisms can be of two types:

a) there are dualisms that *generate grey oppositions*, in the sense that their relationship admits the existence of an intermediate grey area which is that of a spurious relationship in which the dual terms are confused (for example in the dualisms true/false, right/left, good/bad, etc., something can be a little bit true and a little bit false, a little good and a little bad, etc.); in this case, the relationship is not really a Third, but a sort of combinatorial compromise between the poles;

b) instead, there are dualisms that *generate the Third* and are therefore generative: for example, male/female couples, seller/buyer, elector/elect, and so on, defined by Romano Guardini[3] as "polar oppositions", in which the relationship is a reciprocal tension between two polar terms which is generative of a Third. So, for example, the male/female dualism generates the child, the elector/elected dualism generates political representation, and so on; in these cases, the dualisms are oppositions that generate a Third, which is the fruit of a relationship of complementary contingent reciprocity. Moreover, Guardini is responsible for the idea that the relationship can never be entirely mediated, and the non-mediatable openness of the relationship is what leads to the Other (the Third) with respect to the terms of the relationship.

In dualistic dialectical semantics, distinction is a division, a slash, for which one is on one side or the other. In relational semantics, the distinction is a relationship (the Third) that unites while differentiating the terms, that is, the resolution of the enigma that the relationship carries (Donati 2021c). Both personal identity and social identity, whether of a person (acting subject) or of a social form (for example, a family or business), are relational. This observation finds a generalization in quantum physics in the sense that, while binary bits are simply read in 1 and 0, quantum bits allow computers to read any number between 0 and 1, making much more sophisticated calculations possible and fast. From an ontological point of view, in my perspective, quantum has highlighted the fact that between 0 and 1 there is a relationship, rather than a clear separation (the slash like that described by sociologists such as Luhmann), so that the distinction does not mean a radical denial, but it admits – indeed it implies – a certain sharing.

These cultural shifts seem also to enter the Christian religion. Historically, as a sociological fact, it can be said that Christian Churches have passed from the pre-eminence of semantics [A = A] (the ideal of individual perfection), typical of ancient and pre-modern times, to semantics [A = non (non-A)] inaugurated with the Protestant Reformation, for which perfection necessarily passes through imperfection, since sin and frailties are seen as inevitable, even necessary, ways in which to strive for salvation.[4] The current problem of Christian Churches is that of how to go beyond the two semantics prevalent in the past in order to overcome both a monism that is no longer tenable and the negative dialectic, to pave the way for a new understanding of the Third as an appreciation of human relationality in the light of the Trinitarian theological matrix (Maspero, 2013).

From a sociological point of view, for Christian believers, the need for the Third is experienced in the face of the task of sanctifying ordinary life, which consists of dealing with earthly things – when the Ego is confronted with the Thing to do – with a contemplative spirit. The Third is the relationship that allows one to keep Martha and Mary together, that is, to engage in an absorbing way in human affairs while maintaining a supernatural point of view. The Third is the contemplative spirit that allows one to do things well from a human and social point of view while remaining open to transcendence. It consists of relating to earthly things in a certain way (the way of the Spirit) so that we can concentrate on them without alienating ourselves in them. It is the Third that allows us to deal with the things of the world to which we necessarily belong without these activities rendering us slaves to the world.

3. Understanding the relational order of reality from which the Third emerges

In my opinion, today's problem is not so much that of discussing the ancient problem of whether the Third is given or not (*tertium datur* or *tertium non datur*?), but of understanding how the Third exists or is possible in today's society and in that of the near future. How are we to understand the Third of the relational semantics outlined in table 1?

The relationship is a Third that acts on the terms not because it comes from outside, or because it is a sort of combination (agreement, pact, contract, etc.) between its terms, but because it involves the characterizing element of the relationship which is the reciprocity contained in it if, ontologically, it must be a relationship (rel-action = reciprocal action) and not something else, such as a simple inter-action or transaction. Reciprocity is the founding element of society because it renders social agents capable of obtaining, maintaining, and generating interpersonal relationships in connection with social institutions (Papilloud, 2018). Reciprocity is here understood not as *do ut des*, but as a symbolic exchange: that is, as a mutual giving of oneself between subjects who value each other. This reality can only be seen if we look at the social world "according to a relational gaze" (Donati, 2021b).

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3. The polar opposition defined by Guardini (1925) is that particular relationship characterized by connecting two determinations that are opposed, yet presuppose each other, without their relationship being either a pure exclusion, which would be a contradiction, or a pure connection, which would be an identity. Hence, polar opposition is that particular type of relationship which is formed by both a relative exclusion and a relative inclusion. "It is this kind of relationship that we call polarity".

4. According to Luther's famous saying: "Pecca fortiter, sed crede fortius", which means: "Sin greatly, but believe still more greatly".

We can distinguish three ways or orders of knowledge of reality: according to substance (*secundum substantiam*), according to accidents (*secundum accidens*) (*accident* understood in the Aristotelian sense of a reality that depends on the substance, which I use as a synonym for *contingent*), and according to the relation (*secundum relationem*). Substance, accidents (i.e., contingencies), and relationships are three orders of reality that require appropriate tools of knowledge. The basic problem is how to connect these three orders of reality. This can only be done by admitting the existence of the Third (*tertium datur*), which is precisely the relation as a co-principle of substance in determining reality. It is in the relation, as far as human realities are concerned, in which contingencies are placed. The ancients considered the relationship as the *ens minimum* (the smallest "being"), a thing of little importance, because they did not have the relational outlook on the world that has been developed by modernity.

On the other hand, modernity has developed relationality above all in a self-referential key, that is, as a projection of human subjectivity. In order to escape the self-referentiality of the Ego and of the social systems which modernity has reached, it is necessary to introduce the Third. In a nutshell: for a true relationship to emerge between Ego and Alter, it is not enough for the Ego to see the You as a subject rather than as an object (Buber), or for Ego to reflect itself in the face of the Other (Lévinas), since these relationships indicate an intersubjectivity as a reflection of the Ego in the You and vice versa. A meaningful social relationship is formed only if the Third emerges between the I and the You.

The fact that many authors do not see the third can be explained by the fact that most adopt a vision "according to the substance" (as in the case of the "essentialists" who have a vision of the nature of entities as a fixed reality, i.e., "an *idem* without an *ipse*")[5] or a vision "according to pure contingencies" (as in the case of "relationalists", for whom relations only flow and process without structure, i.e., "neither *idem* nor *ipse*", because everything is pure eventuality). In contemporary culture, blindness to the Third prevails in metaphysical, ontological, and epistemological relationalism, according to which the Third is a pure event without structure (Dépelteau, 2018).

Today, the relationalist turn that leads the relational perspective to become radically relativistic manifests itself as a conflation between human and non-human, as a paradoxical inversion between the two, as a simulation and cancellation of the boundaries between them.

Radical relativistic sociologies forget that the empirical study of social relationships makes it possible to distinguish the contribution of individual human subjects with respect to external social conditioning. The interdependence between the human and the social does not equate to a conflation of the two. In the words of Tony Tam (1989, pp. 388-400), "interdependence is not a circular idea". If the centrality of units in a social network depends on each other, how can we say that any part of a unit's centrality is self-originat-

ing? The answer is that, even if we espouse a worldview in which every individual is dependent on every other, we can still meaningfully separate the self-originated from the derived (alter-originated) component. In other words, the boundaries between an Ego and its social context can be precisely demarcated even in a totally endogenous system. "Sociology's fundamental premise does not imply that the self is lost in the midst of social interdependence". This, to me, means that the social-human and the social-non-human can be distinguished in the social relations that make up society.

4. The third included requires a "relational gaze" to be seen

It is time to review the anti-humanistic tendencies of modern Western culture. The prospects of the social sciences are today marked by the need to redefine the system of observation of the society from the point of view of the human.

This is a question of acknowledging that modern social sciences have lost the human because they have placed it either in the individual or in collective entities, while it can only be seen "in relation", that is, through the Third.

Even today, social sciences are caught between individualism and holism. On the one hand, some believe that the human resides only in the individual person: for them, the human cannot be attributed to the society, simply because the society has no reality of its own.[6] On the other hand, some believe that the human resides in some collective entity, such as a culture:[7] for them, the human being (and the human in general) is a "cultural artifact" of collective patterns.

The social sciences oscillate between one extreme and the other simply because they have little relational awareness. For this reason, they claim that the human is nowhere (see authors such as Foucault, Baudrillard, Lyotard, Derrida, and Luhmann's avowedly anti-humanistic sociology) and see the society as increasingly problematic. These perspectives do not see the connection between humans and society simply because, in the observation system that is adopted, the human has already lost its relational character from the beginning.

An up-to-date social science cannot, and certainly must not, think that it can start from pre-established anthropology and "apply" it to society. However, nor is it possible to do the opposite: that is, to deduce anthropology from pure social behaviours, although the latter is the philosophy with which the most sophisticated artificial intelligence is generated today (Cristianini, 2021), given that pure behaviourism does not account for the meaning of human relations. So, where is the solution?

To find a solution, it is necessary to maintain the point of view of the human in the observation system of social science. Relational sociology proposes viewing things in the following way.

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5. As I have explained elsewhere (Donati, 2021c), for me, the *idem* is the identity of Ego always equal to itself, while the *ipse* is the identity that Ego finds and regenerates by passing through the relational vicissitudes it has experienced during its lifetime.
6. The most classic position is that of Max Weber (1968), stating that sociology can only proceed from the actions of a single individual, of a few individuals or of numerous separate individuals. This is the reason why it must adopt strictly individualistic methods. In light of this position, one understands Margaret Thatcher's famous statement that "society does not exist, only individuals exist".
7. For example, Geertz (1973) and Alexander (2003).

First of all, it is a question of distancing oneself from the reductionisms of modern and postmodern sociological theories that have adopted the two prevalent modes of observation, namely:

a) the whole society is a system and the human is in the environment of the system (this is the holistic perspective inaugurated by Émile Durkheim, continued in the various types of structuralism, and ultimately assumed by Luhmann);

b) nothing of the social is system, because the social is everything and only what exists in individuals (this is the perspective of the ontological and methodological individualism inaugurated by Max Weber and continued with rational choice and many other approaches).

Although many authors have tried to combine these two perspectives in various mixes (see the long debate agency vs. structure), the divergence between the human and the social has increased rather than decreased.

It is therefore necessary to assume a different mode of sociological observation that I call relational (not relationalist), according to which:

c) society is made up of relationships in which the need for the human/non-human distinction can never be annulled; consequently, social relations differ according to contingent processes on both the human and non-human sides. Society lies in the fact that functional mechanisms recall and require rel-actions (reciprocal actions), and not merely "behaviours" for which the subjective orientations of the actors are irrelevant or even factors to be eliminated. I speak of "society of the human", rather than "human society", meaning that the human character of society is no longer an immediate datum (devoid of practical and technological mediations), but must be produced in a reflexive way through mediations. These mediations are new conferrals of meaning to those connections between human and non-human, in which it is necessary to distinguish the human from the non-human. Only in this way can we distinguish the society of the human from other societies which are called animal societies, technical societies and so on.

This perspective proposes a relational reading of society that does not separate the internal (subjective) point of view of the actors from the external point of view (that of social institutions) towards their orientations, but rather maintains the intrinsic connective reference between the internal and the outside through the Third. In this lies the possibility of a theory of society that observes it as a reality that differentiates itself into different forms of sociability. This differentiation occurs based on the relationship that the subjects observe and realize between their internal point of view and the demands placed on them from the outside, that is, on the basis of the Third.

The pluralization of society is presented as a process of morphogenesis in which, on the one hand, society forms are born in which the bond is destroyed (clear separation between the society and the human), and on the other, society forms are born in which the human and the society are (re)connected through new relational distinctions.[8]

I deduce that both theoretically and empirically, the regeneration of the human is the product of qualified morphogenesis of the social bond, in the sense that the "regenerated man" is the fruit of a new way of seeing and practicing his social relationships.

A man without ties is a man without qualities, and indeed not even a "man". A new man is one who knows how to manage the social bond because he knows how to see and face the enigmas of the social relationship, indeed the relationship itself, that is the social bond itself as an enigma: the enigma of how it is possible to have a reciprocal bond characterized by unity of the differences between the subjects, avoiding the outcomes that lead to conflict between them and/or to the destruction of the relationship.

We can say that a society form is human if, and to the extent that, the social relations of which it consists are produced by subjects who mutually orientate themselves based on the supra-functional sense that exists in the Third. A society form is poor in humanity to the extent that the subjects do not orientate themselves reciprocally based on the relationship that connects them (because in this case there are only one-sided reactions or the will of individual vindications) and it is even less human when the meaning of the actions is only functional (or of pure systemic autopoiesis), because in this case, the actions lack reflexive intentionality, even if acted on by human persons.

Placed in this framework, the relationship between the human and the social becomes more instructive. The human and the social become increasingly interactive, and in this sense and for this reason, more "relational". In the relational framework, the distinction between human and non-human society can be thought of and observed as a blind spot without putting either one or the other in a radically indeterminate fluctuation, as it occurs when the terms of the relation are conflated. The human can be re-distinguished from the non-human and *vice versa*.

5. The Third and the human character of social forms

More analytically, we can articulate a conceptual framework that allows us to make the relational perspective more explicit in this regard:

a) a social form is human to the extent that it is relational, that is, the fruit of the reciprocal action of subjects-in-relation to each other, which generates the Third;

b) in the social relationship, the characteristics of the human (the biological, affective, cognitive, and symbolic elements) are related to each other; the relationship is the place-time in which the single elements or dimensions with their causal qualities and properties operate and manifest themselves; the relationships are placed in a context and turn to generate other relationships, that is, another social context;

c) social action is human insofar as it not only presents one of the aforementioned elements or dimensions of the human (for example rationality or symbolic-interpretative capacity), but generates a specific human social form;

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8. On the concept of "relational distinction", see Donati (2021a).

d) between the human and the social there is distance, precisely because the relationship implies a distance, but there is also interdependence and interaction, and therefore history of the Third;

e) the human quality of social forms requires particular management of the boundaries between social relations (intersubjective and structural) and their latent sphere of ultimate values (Donati, 2021c); this means that it is necessary to observe social relations in such a way as to distinguish – keeping them co-present – the immanent and transcendent elements in order to understand what in the human is irreducible to the society.

For semioticians, the "relational" approach is something to be assumed by default: the same notions of sign, semiosis, semiosphere, and so on refer to networks of dynamic relationships which constitute the very elements of which they are composed. The sign, for example, in the Saussurian perspective is a relationship between the signifier and the signified. What is more, this relationship is constitutive, in the sense that the signifier as signifier and the signified as signified are not prescribed outside of this relationship. The "father" sign indicates a relationship because this sign indicates a generative relationship of the child and implies the inverse relationship (it is the child who renders the one who generates him "father"), without the terms being given outside of their relationship. In modern social sciences, on the other hand, the usual research strategy has been, and still seems to be, the "art of separation": the elements and their relationships are analysed in a fragmentary way as distinct and separate units. What relational sociology proposes is that the elements and their relationships should be "considered distinctly" (analytical epistemology), but not as "separate".

Hence also the possibility of a new relational anthropology, which the observation system must be able to maintain and develop with a fully relational *gaze* if it wants to understand (in the sense of *cum-prehending*) society facts as "total facts".

As for the practical implications of research, I would like to explain myself with some examples: families, citizenship, and architectural artefacts as social phenomena.

a) From a sociological point of view, the human of the family is not the fact that it is made up of human individuals, which is a necessary but not a sufficient condition. Individuals constitute many other social forms that are not family and often stay in the family as if they were elsewhere. The human character of the family lies in the fact of living a sui generis social relationship, that is, a reciprocal action that builds a specific form of relationality between people, which consists of the construction of a conscious and reflexive We. This We-relationship is the Third that makes up the family, at least as a desire and a project. It is this Third that humanizes the family because it offers transcendence, indicating its "ought to be" as a unique and non-fungible relationship for its members.

b) In the case of citizenship, it is human not through the attribution of status to the individual by the State, but as a social relationship between associates. In the trans-modern world, national citizenship typical of modernity is no longer tenable due to the processes of globalization and the need to include those who are excluded from it because they live on the margins of society or are refugees, stateless, nameless migrants (non-people). Citizenship, to be inclusive, can

no longer be seen as a contract of mutual interest between individuals recognized by the state and the nation-state, because the rights of the citizen are no longer a gift of the state but have become the expression and construction of a set of rights which, in the various fields (civil, economic, political, society), refer to the rights of the human being as a person (individual-in-relationship). The task of this passage from pure state citizenship to societal citizenship is precisely the task of the Third. In particular, it is a task of the Third sector, if the latter understands that it does not exist as an added element with respect to the compromise between the State and the Market (*lab/lib*) to remedy their social failures, but instead exists to spread its own way of creating sociality, which is to generate the social capital of local communities according to the logic of the Third.

c) An architectural artefact or urban structure can be defined as the place of human intentionality that is expressed in it (in various degrees and types) through a configurative (or figurative) use of the relational space. Architecture or urban planning is a way of dressing social relations in space and with space. Designing accommodation or a residential area means designing a space of social ties. If the architectural habit of a house, a factory, a hospital, a church, or an urban neighbourhood is "well done", the people who live there will be able to have relationships that correspond to the human qualities of that place (such as house, factory, hospital, and so on), according to its intended meaning and to its own symbolic connections, otherwise the architectural or urbanistic habit will solicit another kind of relationship. Depending on the way it is made from an architectural point of view, a house can become a mere dormitory or a den, rather than a place to be together in an intimate way and take care of relational goods; a factory can become a place where mutual control or competition, rather than collaboration, is aroused; a hospital can become a health machine where the technical aspects of medical cure marginalize the dialogue between healthcare personnel and patients, as well as between patients and their families; a church can become a place to carry out activities of entertainment or rest or mere socialization among people, rather than being configured as a place for personal and community encounters with God; an urban neighbourhood can isolate families with distant and closed dwellings, or instead envisage meeting paths and common spaces that generate mutual relations of neighbourliness and solidarity between its residents. More generally, the architectural or urban configuration of a place is perceived as less human if the instrumental, procedural, technical, or even aesthetic imperatives (according to a certain idea of art) render that place unable to generate meaningful relationships between the people who live there. Therefore, the architectural or urban habit can be evaluated based on its ability to generate the Third, that is, to solicit relationships that help people's human qualities flourish rather than alienating them.

In short, the Third is not an element that adds something to something else, but rather is a relational form that hides and reveals the humanness of the ontological relationality of being in the world.

6. The future of any humanism depends on how we understand the Third

To conclude, the crisis of the contemporary society, on a global level, is a crisis of Western modernity to the extent that the latter has dehumanized itself because it has immunized itself from the Third: the relationship that connects the human and the social. However, despite this, in the lifeworlds (*Lebenswelt*) the demand for more human work, for more human life, for more human society, and in general for more human social relations, persists. Is it possible to overcome the contemporary crisis, avoiding transhumanist tendencies? The answer I have endeavoured to give is that the way forward is to adopt a relational perspective whereby social life, to be human, must be able to see and practice the Third included (*tertium datur*). What does this mean?

It means taking a look at the reality that does not consider the social relationship as an obstacle to individual freedom, but as the place where human freedom is exercised. Outside the relationship, freedom loses the qualities necessary to create relational goods. Relational evils are precisely the product of a kind of freedom that is, or wants to be, unattached.

Introducing the Third causes new confrontation between the various types of humanism and helps to overcome the dualism of humanism vs. anti-humanism, as it enables us to distinguish between the social-human and the social-non-human. To make this distinction, we must go beyond the neo-positivistic and neo-hermeneutic categories, as well as the individualistic and holistic, to adopt a perspective relational. The human/non-human distinction in society becomes more and more, and not less and less, relevant for a series of reasons that must be made explicit and analysed.

a) Negative reasons. The loss of the cultural category of the Third as a relationship that distinguishes while it connects leads, on the one hand, to accentuating divisions and dualisms in hierarchical and authoritarian regimes, and, on the other, it turns into a certain indifferentism and relativism in democratic regimes. I am particularly interested in highlighting this second type of outcome, which have negative consequences on the level of both scientific and practical reason.

Two types of consequences can be recalled as examples.

On the one hand, the absence or emptying of the human/non-human distinction leads to the animation of inanimate physical realities, such as the earth and plants, and the attribution to non-human animals of a subjectivity in some ways like that of humans. All these entities indeed have dignity and command respect, but this relationship of due recognition is a task of human subjects as their responsibility. To recognize the rights of these entities, it does not seem necessary to eliminate the differences between human and non-human sociality. Of course, human sociality shares something with the sociality of non-human entities, but these are different realities in terms of quality and causal powers. The difference is highlighted by the different ways of specifying the Third which is constituted in these different fields of sociality.

On the other hand, there is the problem of distinguishing the social relations between humans when they have an interpersonal and analogical nature from relations between humans mediated by digital technology and of a virtual nature. As we know, the worlds of new technologies, such as ICT, artificial intelligence and robotics, are becoming not so much an extension or enhancement of the limited capabilities of the human person, but rather a substitute for them. See, for example, the case of the Metaverse. Considering these artificial worlds ("technical societies") as *ipso facto* human entails the attribution of human reality to a virtual or hyper-real society that is not intrinsically human. When we assimilate the relationships between people and technological tools (for example between a person and a robot) to those between human persons,[9] the properly human social is distorted and enormous problems of communication and identity are created. Here too, the reason for the distortion is the diversity of the Third that is generated in social relations which are different in quality and causal properties.

However, it must also be admitted that these very comparisons generate the search for new relational modalities that see in the Third the solution to illuminating the blind spots of the human/non-human distinction.

b) Positive reasons. The human/non-human distinction is sought and re-proposed as a guiding distinction for the rehumanization of many areas of social life. There is talk of rehumanizing work and the economy, society services, bureaucracy, health systems, the education system, lifestyles and consumption, architecture, and urban planning, the world of mass media, and science itself. Very often, this purpose of "rehumanizing society" is only reactive, as it arises from a sense of frustration or helplessness and responds to the urge to return to some mythical past age. This humanistic reactivity leads to the idea, indeed unlikely, that it is possible to apply an *a priori* model of humanity to social life, which is wholly unrealistic. In still other cases, however, the emergence of a new "society *of the* human" is revealed: a way of experiencing social relations that, by producing new relationships through meaningful distinctions (significant of the Third) between human/non-human, can regenerate the human sense of the social forms that make up society.

This is the case, for example, of the search for more human working relationships, as they can give subjectivity to both poles of the relationship (employer/worker, supplier/customer, producer/product) through forms of trust and cooperation of various kinds. Or the idea that, in the face of certain conflicts or difficulties between spouses, or between parents and children, family relationships can and must be re-distinguished based on their ability to generate relational goods rather than relational evils. Or that the architecture of hospitals and health services must be redesigned to favour the maintenance of relationships between the patient, the family, and the patient's lifeworld. Or again the idea that communicative media can and must be rethought considering the effects they have on users, as an aid or an obstacle to communicative interaction that must fuel trust, cooperation, reciprocity rather than abuse, violence, or conflict.

In summary, it will no longer be possible to think that society can be immediately human ("immediately" means without any technological mediation between agents). Technological mediations involve the morphogenesis of the human. However, against the

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9. I must specify "human" persons to distinguish them from the so-called "electronic" persons.

thesis of an inevitable and progressive clear separation between the human and the social, it is possible, and indeed necessary, to hope that a new culture of the Third will emerge, capable of connecting them according to meaningful distinctions, since the meaning of their distinction is not a division, but lies precisely in their relationality: that is, in the Third.

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A RELATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON CULTURE AND SOCIETY

The Third (included) in the interdependence between the human and the social

Pierpaolo Donati
University of Bologna
pierpaolo.donati@unibo.it

Alma Mater Professor (PAM) of Sociology at the University of Bologna (Italy). Former President of the Italian Sociological Association, he is internationally known for his original Relational Sociology or Relational Theory of Society. Among his recent books are The Relational Subject (with M.S. Archer, Cambridge 2015) and *Transcending Modernity with Relational Thinking* (London 2021).

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