

CALL FOR PAPERS

The Relational Turn in Sociology: Implications for the Study of Society, Culture, and Persons

Special issue of the academic journal **Stan Rzeczy** [State of Affairs]

The relational approach, which has a long tradition, has re-emerged and strengthened, forming a new, vital movement of divergent variants in sociology. Initiated and systematically developed by Pierpaolo Donati, it has grown into what is called the Italian relational turn, later followed by a proliferation of relational sociologies of various origins, including the works of Harrison C. White, Charles Tilly, Mustafa Emirbayer, Pierre Bourdieu and others. After the postmodern diffusion and beyond the stagnation of interpretative against normative conceptualizations of social life, relational sociology offers new conceptual tools and plays a leading role in reconstructing sociology both on theoretical and applied planes.

Modern sciences are founded on the study of relations, rather than essences or substances. From the outset, the relational approach has had to pave its way in sociology against holistic ("science of society") and nominalistic ("science of individuals") orientations. Social relations are among the key sociological concepts and have been studied as constitutive for social bonding. On the micro-level, interpersonal relations have been in the center of attention in the area where sociology and social psychology overlap. The relational turn consists not only of focusing on social relations; it also involves introducing relational categories of analysis.

The category of social relations is certainly not new in social theory. What is new is the way of looking at them. Contemporary relational thinking assumes radical changes in the ontological, epistemological, and phenomenological status of social relations. Refocusing on social relations, on their constitution and emergent effects leads us to a new way of describing, understanding and explaining social and cultural phenomena as relational facts.

A particularly significant feature of relational sociology resides in its capacity to broaden the theory of the human subject not only as a self, agent, and actor, but also through the development of the concept of the person; more precisely, through deeper research on the relational constitution of the human person as a social subject emerging from relational reflexivity (dialogue between 'I', 'Me', 'We', 'You' in a situated social context) – in other words, a view of the human person as *homo relatus*. Analyzing these processes leads to a *sui generis* relational theory of agency.

Various or divergent theories of contemporary social and cultural processes evoke relationality, but relational analysis differs from "relationistic" positions. Most existing

approaches, both historical and modern, cannot be considered relational sociology in a true sense unless the social relation is conceived as a reality *sui generis* and society is conceptualized as a network of social relations.

“Turn” refers to a gradual transformation of the field of scientific theories, rather than to a scientific revolution. Several characteristic features of a “turn” appear to correspond well with significant traits of the relational turn:

- an epistemological rupture, which is brought about by introducing an innovative vocabulary that opens up new analytic perspectives;
- an attempt to reconstruct the scientific domains of knowledge under conditions of their growing fragmentation;
- introduction of a novel perspective that shows existing knowledge in a new light;
- moving on from the research object to the category of analysis.

These are the features of a genuine new intellectual movement that enters into debates and polemics, particularly as regards various ways of understanding relations and relationality.

The synergistic effect of a creative exchange of ideas between the founders of theories that have been independently pursued – the relational theory of society developed by Pierpaolo Donati and the theory of morphogenic society, developed on the basis of critical realism by Margaret S. Archer – proves particularly fruitful for the study of the after-modern and the new possibilities of a morphogenic society, in which the challenge of re-articulating social relations remains of central importance.

The aim of this special issue is to reflect upon the innovative potential of contemporary relational theorizing of society, culture, and persons and to go beyond superficial statements on relational sociology by addressing these issues through in-depth investigations. We invite authors to take on problems of relational sociology by discussing its main assumptions, by conceptual clarifications, by re-articulating the concepts pertinent to understanding social phenomena in relational terms, and by empirical studies guided by methodological rules of relational analysis.

/// Please submit your proposal including the title, an abstract of around 500 words, name of the author, e-mail address, affiliation to redakcja@stanrzeczy.edu.pl by **15 January 2017**. The editors will decide upon acceptance of the proposal by **25 January 2017**.

/// Authors of approved proposals will be invited to submit their manuscripts (max 40 000 signs, including tables, figures and references) until **30 March 2017**. All manuscripts will be peer-reviewed. Publication is planned for November 2017.

/// For any queries, please contact Elżbieta Hałas (ehalas@uw.edu.pl) or Pierpaolo Donati (pierpaolo.donati@unibo.it), the guest editors of the special issue.