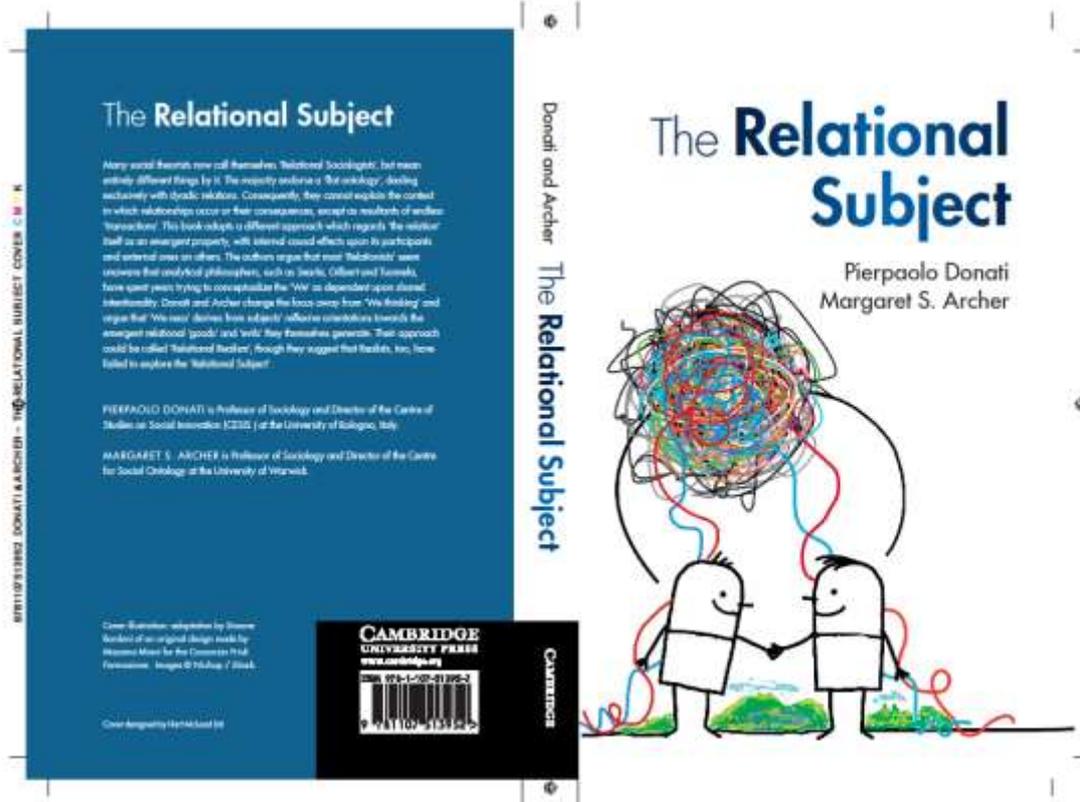


Pierpaolo Donati & Margaret S. Archer,
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More and more social theorists are now calling themselves ‘Relational Sociologists’. The trouble is they mean entirely different things by this term. It can cover anything from reductionist Methodological Individualism to a form of Holistic sociological imperialism that deems all our relations to be exclusively ‘social’. The majority, however, prefer to endorse a ‘flat ontology’, dealing exclusively with dyadic relations. Consequently, they cannot explain the context in which relationships occur and there is no such thing as context-less action. It also means that the outcomes of relationality can be explained only as the result of an endless series of ‘transactions’, whose aggregation would somehow account for social stability and change. Thus, they place a Big Etcetera after their micro-sociological excursions. Our approach is quite different. We regard ‘the relation’ itself as an emergent property, with internal causal effects upon its participants and external ones on others.

A second difficulty is that many of these ‘Relationists’ (as we term them) appear unaware that analytical philosophers, such as John Searle, Margaret Gilbert and Raimo Tuomela, have spent twenty years trying to vindicate a concept of the ‘We’, that gives rise to commitment, cooperation and collective action; one that also generates deontic rights: obligations, rights, duties etc. Uniformly, they have worked on different versions of shared *intentionality*. We do not; we change the focus. To us, ‘We-ness’ derives from subjects’ *reflexive orientations* towards the emergent relational ‘goods’ and ‘evils’ they themselves generate – then affecting their actions in a couple, a work group, sport’s team, orchestra, voluntary association or social movement. Our approach could be called ‘Relational Realism’, but it has something to offer to Realists too who, despite their humanism, have failed to explore the ‘Relational Subject’.