The keywords of the new modernisation between reassemblages and hybridisations

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Abstract: Can we speak of a new form of modernisation? And what concepts characterise it? Starting from these questions, the research examines, from a comparative perspective, the key words that describe modernisation, from classical theories to the present day. In this paper we will show that: (a) if the ontological perspective changes, the way of interpreting terms and, consequently, the discursive repertoires of modernisation also changes; (b) but if we start from what the authors who have dealt with the topic have in common, it becomes clear that the classical words of modernisation have not been removed, but made ambivalent or reflexively problematised; (c) after the classical and post-classical theories of modernity, authors of the first decade of the 21st century have added words that hybridize what their predecessors had distinguished.

Keywords: Dualism; Emergentism; Modernisation; Monism; Ontology; Discursive repertoire.

INTRODUCTION

Every term possesses a 'denotative' dimension that establishes a literal and collectively shared meaning. At the same time, each term is the result of numerous 'connotative' dimensions that are the outcome of cultural and discursive repertoires involving gradations of meaning shared by specific communities (Spillman 2022: 69; Swidler 2001: 13; D'Alessandro 2025a; 2023). Such repertoires descend from theories of reference that presuppose ontologies in a stated or assumed way (Silvestri 2012:161; Crespi and Cerulo 2022). This is evidently also the case with the term modernisation and its repertoires. These repertoires also include discourses that emphasise the advent of post-modernity (Lyotard 1979); repertoires that do not recognise the rise of modernity (Latour 2000; 2005; 2018; 2023); repertoires that call for trans-modernism or the overcoming of the post-modern stalemate (Donati 2011; 2023; Dépelteau 2018; Emirbayer 1997); repertoires describing a new modernity managed by artificial intelligence (Bostrom 2016; Dennett 2023; Kurzweil 2024) or shared with other non-human beings on the basis of an anthropodecentred perspective (Caffo 2022; Bussolini, Buchanan and Chrulew 2018; Marchesini 2009; 2002).

The words used to construct theories depend on connotations that descend from ontologies. Ontologies change the way words are reassembled (Latour 2005) and, consequently, the way transformations are interpreted. Ontology deals with the study of the nature of being, existence, reality and the relations that determine what exists. By the ontology of a social theory (stated or presupposed) we mean the foundation from which one starts, and which orients the way one observes a phenomenon. Ontology influences the choice and definition of key words, the consequent selection of research objectives, the choice of methods and, finally, the interpretations of observed phenomena. Interpretations allow each author, according to his or her theory of reference, to trace back to the concepts that initiate his or her repertoire. To clarify this passage, it is appropriate to give examples. A conflictualist sociologist starts from a dualist foundation based on conflicting oppositions such as nature versus culture, structure versus agency,

ancient versus modern. A relational sociologist starts from the emergentist assumption that there is the relationship at the beginning, whereby in the relationships between structure and agency, nature and culture, subject and object, there is an intermediary entity ("between") that determines emergent effects that cannot be predicted a posteriori (Clayton and Davies 2006) and that these effects can create equilibria or imbalances.

For a functionalist, the dualist foundation lies in the recurrent restoration of the balance between order and disorder or system and environment. For a methodological individualist, the dualist foundation lies in the capacity of agency to transform structure or to free the subject partially from structure[1]. For a systemicist, the dualist foundation lies in the «difference between identity and difference» (D'Alessandro 2014: 12)[2]. For a "hybridist" it means starting from the monist abolition of the nature-culture dichotomy and considering humans and non-humans alike as the result of a networked agglomeration of actants (Latour 2005: 32; D'Alessandro 2025b).

For a neo-evolutionist it means postulating, following a monist ontology, unlimited enhancements of the natural through the artificial until a perfect symbiosis is achieved (Harris 2007).

For anti-anthropocentrist vitalists, it means extending the concepts of person and personality to non-human living beings and thus abolishing boundaries, following an essentially monist ontology (Osborne and Rose 2023; Marchesini 2009; 2002; Pepperel 1995).

The examples above are simply some of the paths selected in this study. These examples demonstrate that ontologies can inspire numerous combinations of old and new words that reaffirm or modify discursive repertoires, as we will see in more detail in the following paragraphs, examining the main authors who have examined modernization processes in different historical periods.

In some cases, these keywords repropose a dualism based on the logic of oppositions, sharp boundaries or dialectical balances (as was already the case in classical paradigms). In other cases, they construct hybrid paths that merge categories, returning to ancient forms of monism.

In still other cases they propose new forms of relationships, placing emerging processes at the centre, trying to avoid both monism and dualism.

The theses I intend to support with this research are as follows:

a) If the ontological perspective changes, the way of interpreting the key words and repertoires that characterise modernisation also changes. But this does not necessarily imply that previous repertoires have been eliminated or removed. They may even have been partially reworked without radically transforming the conceptual framework of the modernisation process.

b) If we start from what the different authors we will examine have in common, we can see that many repertoires (industrial revolution; adaptability of the capitalist system; question of technique/technology; ambivalence of disenchantment; modernity as permanent innovation; dysfunctions of individualism etc.) have not been removed, but simply reassembled in order to emphasise ambivalences and paradoxes (examples: 1. the thesis of the end of modernity was constructed from the reassembled repertoires of modernity; 2. post-modernity shares the repertoires of modernity etc.).

c) After the classical and post-classical theories of modernity, there are authors who hybridise or relate differently what previous authors had distinguished. But these new 21st century authors are not able to renounce the ontologies of the past (monism, dualism and emergentism).

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[1] Some authors consider Weber's theory of action to have a dualist ontology oriented by the conflictualist paradigm, which, however, differs from the Marxist, post-Marxist and critical approach because conflict and order have a different dialectical relationship (Crespi 1999a; Crespi 1999b; Crespi and Cerulo 2022).

[2] Those who advocate difference paradigms base their theories on the following binary distinctions: system/environment, open/closed, internal/external. While classical functionalism grounds the dialectic between order and differentiation as a process to achieve equilibrium, the systemic approach starts from the distinction that allows for fragile and temporary balances through binary strategies of complexity reduction. Luhmann, in this regard, states: «for the new functionalisms, it is enough to move from contingent differences» (Luhmann 2001: 78). He is interested in the *difference between identity and difference* as a starting point: a postulate beyond which it is not possible to go (D'Alessandro 2014:17).

MODERNITY AND CLASSICAL THEORIES: THE AFFIRMATION OF DUALISM

In classical authors there is a clear separation between natural facts and social facts, whereas discursive repertoires concerning cultural symbols and artefacts clearly belong to social facts.

Here we propose some key words that configured the semantics of early modernity: 1. Secularisation; steel cage; rationalisation; disenchantment (Weber 1919); 2. Revolution of the mode of production; alienation; commodity fetishism (Marx 1867); 3. Metropolitan blasé man as the modern subject par excellence; monetary economy as the universal equivalent of all values (Simmel 1908); 4. Contrast between ancient and modern in the polarisation between community and society; interpersonal relationships based on shared values versus social relationships governed by contracts and conventions (Tönnies 1887); 5. Transition from mechanical solidarity to organic solidarity; pathologies of individualism; anomie; crisis of personal identity in the face of the pressures of modern society (Durkheim 1897).

In this first phase, where the link between sociology and modernity, constitutive of disciplinary identity, is stabilised, the elements that the authors and interpreters of modernity share are the capitalist economy, individualism, urban life and rationalisation.

These terms (which contain within them highly articulated repertoires) are traversed by a concept that we could define as catalysis: «a constant tension directed towards destructive creativity, that is, the tendency to superimpose the new on top of the old» (Longo 2005: 7; Harvey 1993: 31-32).

Modernity implies a revision of the dialectic between the old and the new, where the former is perceived as limiting with respect to the latter. In early modernity, all classical authors describe the process of «permanent innovation» (Martinelli 2010: 6) that distinguishes the modern from the pre-modern. But the (stated or presupposed) ontology that guides these authors, even in their theoretical distinctions, is clearly based on the opposition between natural phenomena and social facts that presupposes dualist ontology. Many post-classical authors from different schools of thought have noted this latent dualism (Harvey 1993; Archer 1995; Latour 2005; Keller 2010; 2021; Donati 2022; Descola 2021). Nature appears to be an ordered dimension, consisting of certain laws, clear causes, stable relationships and predictable effects on the basis of available data.

On the contrary, the world of society and its historical evolutions is characterised by variability, instability, uncertainty and unpredictability. In particular, the four pillars of early sociology - while observing the transformations of modernity under the lenses of conflict (through Marx), action (through Weber), the ordering function (through Durkheim) and the relationship (through Simmel) - share the distinction between what is incontrovertible law of nature and what is social (Crespi, Cerulo 2022; Crespi 1999a; 1999b). The term "social" is interpreted as a combination of the cultural and the artificial, as produced by the human. Is there a substantial difference between the different dualist variants? Certainly, there is. On the one hand, functionalists and conflictualists seek stable and permanent laws that can approach those of nature; on the other hand, exponents of methodological individualism and almost relational[3] theorists emphasise the non-measurable or unpredictable part of the human factor. However, all the founding fathers of sociology reasoned by clearly distinguishing between nature and culture, structure and agency, subject and object, freedom and necessity, macro and micro, west and east, urban and non-urban. The relationship between mutability and stability is at the centre of their reflection (Longo 2005: 10). Their considerations influence later authors, particularly on the consequences of progress and individual difficulties in identity construction.

Beyond their differences, these authors construct the fundamental repertoires on early modernisation: a) from the industrial revolution to the ability of the capitalist system to change in order to consolidate; b) from the question of technology to disenchantment; c) from modernity as permanent innovation to the pathological dysfunctions of individualism.

The authors of the "classical" phase use the term modernity, but do not use the key word "modernisation": «they prefer to employ concepts such as those of capitalism and industrial society

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[3] Early authors who emphasised the role of relationships such as Simmel failed to go beyond dualism. They do not understand what is meant by emergentism. We will have to wait for complexity theories to have emergentist relational theories (Waldrop 2019).

instead of the concept of modernisation» (Martinelli 2010: VIII). For them, «modernisation and westernisation are concepts considered synonymous, both used to indicate the evolutionary path that leads to the acquisition of the characteristics proper to western civilisation" (Silvestri 2012: 155). These authors remain anchored to an ontology that dichotomises the relationship between nature and culture-society. Even an author such as Simmel reiterates a distinction between nature and culture, understanding the latter as a set of practices that allow a reciprocal relationship between the objective and the subjective: «Culture is (...) a very particular synthesis of the subjective spirit and the objective spirit, the ultimate meaning of which resides without a shadow of a doubt in the perfecting of the individual» (Simmel 1998: 214).

In this Simmel remains profoundly Kantian, an extreme separator between subject and object, human and non-human. The human is considered a concept that is an exception to the rest, as it has a biological nature characterised by stable laws and then a cultural-symbolic "double nature" that intentionally produces artefacts, modifies the surrounding nature and reflects on itself. Keywords such as artificial, artifice, technique and technology depend on the super-concept of "culture" for the founding fathers of sociology. The "dual nature" oscillates between predictability ("first-degree nature" dominated by certain laws) and unpredictability ("second-degree nature or culture" that through the categories of the spirit seeks to circumvent the predictable and recurring rules of the laws of nature). Latour observes that because of this dualism, ontologically based on the distinction between nature and society-culture, the conceptualisation of the division between "ancient and modern", but also the distinction between an "us" (Western, modern and industrialised) and "the others" (non-Western, pre-modern) has occurred. This boundary later disappears with the theory of multiple modernities through the introduction of key words such as "hybrid", "pulverised", "multiple" (Appadurai 1996; Eisenstadt 2003; Cotesta 2010; Latour 2005; 2018; D'Alessandro 2025c), in the realisation that even our idea of nature is a cultural construction. According to Latour, modernity «never began. A modern world has never existed» (Latour 2005: 63). The self-deception of past authors (self-deception that did not allow them to observe the nature of modernisation) lies in the ontological fallacy of the dualism that distinguishes nature and society (Latour 2005).

Yet, as we shall see in Chapter III, post-classical authors (observers of a second phase of the modernisation process) will add ambivalent repertoires, without questioning the dualistic foundation of the classics; while in Chapter IV we shall describe authors who propose new keywords by hybridising and reassembling the repertoires of post-classical authors (Latour 2005) but proposing monist or emergentist ontologies.

MODERNISATION IN POST-CLASSICAL THEORIES: THE RISE OF REPERTOIRES BASED ON REFLEXIVITY AND AMBIVALENCE

"Modernisation" is a term accepted by 20th century post-classical authors. It represents the set of processes of change through which a given society tends to acquire the economic, political, social and cultural characteristics considered typical of modernity (Martinelli 2010). Numerous authors elaborate definitions and linkages that differ from classical theories. Here again, I propose an examination that seeks to grasp the distinctions in an attempt to find commonalities.

The first Frankfurt school criticises the Enlightenment reason of modernity, seeing modernisation as a process that renders the sphere of objective science incommunicable with the sphere of moral concepts and that of aesthetic judgement (Horkheimer and Adorno 1947). The second Frankfurt school, particularly Habermas, defends the classical correlation between the deliberative value of Enlightenment reason and modernisation, considering the latter an unfinished project in progress (Habermas 2019). Luhmann introduces the concept of the 'improbability of the Enlightenment project', where modernisation constitutes that process of the constant readiness to restructure expectations (Luhmann 1977: 50; Luhmann 2006). Baumann and Crespi show the ambivalent nature of modernisation as a creative destruction that solves certain problems by creating others and outlines emancipatory visions

that it then betrays, in a continuous process of steps forward and steps backwards between ancient and modern (Baumann 1989; Longo 1995; Crespi 1999; Fornari 2024). Beck, Giddens and Lash introduce the different repertoires of «reflexive modernisation», adding the following keywords: «reflexivity», «counter-modernity» and «post-traditional society».

They emphasise the rise of a second phase of modernisation that reflects on the consequences of the first (Beck, Giddens and Lash 1999). Eisenstadt introduces the repertoire of «multiple modernities» to falsify the simplistic correlation between modernity, industrialisation, progress, democracy and the West (Eisenstadt 2003; Cotesta 2010). Goody falsifies the Weberian thesis on the uniqueness and exceptionality of the West by showing that capitalism did not originate in Europe and was not fostered by the rise of Calvinism (Goody 2006; 1996). Lyotard emphasises the «crisis of grand narratives» and the strong «decline of rationality» as factors in the transition from modernity to post-modernity (Lyotard 1979) but does not renounce the repertoires of modernity. He points out that the processes of urbanisation and industrialisation continue to expand along with the logic of capitalism, which also makes intellectuals subjects who can simply sell their knowledge to those who can only consume. Touraine examines the fundamental characteristics of post-modernity, noting the transformation of modern society into a constantly programmed technocratic society. In his more mature works, he thematises the entry into «hypermodernity», a key word he introduced in order to describe the new processes of modernisation. The new form of modernisation conceals dangers linked to unprecedented forms of domination but is also the bearer of new social movements that assert - in a new way compared to the past - the rights of human subjects (Touraine 2019). The French sociologist, whom we might define as a "post-classical" but certainly not "post-modern" author, intuits that new processes of modernization determine a "programmed society," capable of "planning change," even in a self-reflexive sense. Touraine perceives the dialectical dynamics between domination (new techno-social apparatuses) and resistance from new actors (collective movements, but also individual boycotters). It is no longer the struggle of capital and factory labor that is at the center, but rather the struggle against the apparatuses by users, consumers, or inhabitants, defined not so much by their specific characteristics as by their resistance to the domination of these apparatuses (Touraine 1978: 169). Zuboff, Milanovic, and Nowotny question the correlation between democratisation, capitalism, technological innovation, modernisation and equality (Zuboff 2018; Airoldi and Gambetta 2018; Milanovic 2020; Nowotny 2022; Airoldi 2024) and introduce terms such as «surveillance capitalism», «dictatorship of the algorithm», «oracular algorithm».

But what are those repertoires of modernisation that have not been challenged by the aforementioned authors, despite their theoretical and terminological distinctions?

What follows is a description of the arguments that, according to my analysis, have not been removed but consolidated on the basis of the newly introduced keywords. What changes, from classical to post-classical theories, is the profound awareness that the evolution of modernisation implies increasing ambivalences and paradoxes. But classical repertoires remain present, in latent or reworked forms. Here are the ambivalent repertoires: a) the constant but excessive increase in technological innovations enables economic growth, but has an ambivalent impact on social, environmental and economic transformations, causing positive and negative externalities; above all, a logic based on risks and attempts to predict and calculate them is consolidated (Beck 1986); b) as the complexity of systems increases, the process of differentiation remains the only complexity reducer capable of determining possible otherwise (Luhmann and De Giorgi 1992). Even scholars who do not follow systemic theories admit the inevitability of differentiation. However, the reduction of complexity paradoxically increases the complexity of the system from the point of view of the highly formalised differentiation of elements and interactions: on the one hand it reduces, on the other hand it adds; on the one hand it solves, on the other hand it determines new problems, different from those of the past and less manageable. This paradox is similar to what Weber predicted with the repertoire of the bureaucratic steel cage that creates continuous specialisations in an attempt to programme and plan everything, generating new problems caused by the bureaucratic process itself.

The complexity of organisations leads to a constant increase in procedures. Today, we are also witnessing the proceduralisation of creative processes through the hypertrophic growth of models and techniques

for stimulating lateral thinking (D'Alessandro 2021). Human agency is increasingly constrained within programmed patterns and formats that guide agency.

The contemporary subject cannot break out of pre-established socio-technical binaries (Latour 2005). People go through incremental processes of sophisticated repression of their impulses in order to avoid processes of exclusion and stigmatisation (Elias and Scotson 2004), which, however, are nevertheless and inevitably reproduced; c) flexibility and increased social mobility bring about efficiencies but also dysfunctions. From the classics to Sennett (2016), extreme adaptability to rapid changes, in time and space, remains a constant in the discursive repertoires associated with modernisation processes. Again, this phenomenon lends itself to ambivalent interpretations.

While on the one hand flexibility might represent an activating factor of agency (from the point of view of autonomous creative expressiveness), in everyday working practices it turns into its exact opposite. The flexible person must constantly change and adapt in order not to lose his or her place in the world. This sense of precariousness affects the personality severely, weakening it and generating anomic behaviour. This was predicted by Durkheim. Thus, on the one hand, the unrepeatability of individual performance is celebrated, while on the other hand, the advent of the human-engine is proposed that can be replaced or enhanced by non-human artefacts (co-bots, neuronal enhancement and artificial intelligence); d) secularisation and disenchantment produce ambivalences, paradoxes and new forms of conflict between civilisations. On the one hand, the process of modernisation brings about the emancipation from faith; on the other, the return of faith to the intimate and private life of families. On the one hand, the stability provided by instrumental reason relativises all emotional turmoil. On the other, the loss of meaning negatively affects the existential motivation of the individual, who seeks new motivation in religious sects or in a personal form of religiosity. All post-classical authors admit that "individualism", "rationalism" and "utilitarianism" have become universal values of modernity, beyond the national cultures of reference. As these values also pervade developing societies, these values lead to situations that result in the clash of civilisations (Huntington 1996). However, even those who oppose the three universally posited values admit their inevitability. Weber predicted this dynamic; e) despite the nostalgia for the analogue and interpersonal relationships not mediated by artificial means, all post-classical authors who also address the issue of the digital, take note of the inevitability of technological determinism as a platform and infrastructure within which to continue to produce transformations, in a global system transformed into a "home world" (Mann 2008; Borghi 2021) dominated by numbers, ratings and universal standards (Thévenot 2022). But this inevitability increases neurosis and the loss of alternative knowledge. The world moves towards a digitised single thought. The individual reacts ambivalently, following the path with a growing sense of helplessness and frustration.

The question of technology and its ambivalent drifts had already been posed by the founding fathers of sociology, albeit less analytically; f) the relationship between technology and capitalism requires a constant, pervasive and global communication process. Communication tools evolve as they are embedded within the modern logic based on permanent innovation and creative destruction. The permanent communication flow is increasingly personalised and customised producing perverse effects related to *echo-chamber*, *filter bubble*, misinformation and social isolation (Thackara 2008; Pariser 2011; Quattrociocchi and Vicini 2016). Communication tools act as repeaters of the values of modernity. In the transition from an old to a new instrument of communication, we always witness the same process: at first, there is a demonisation of the new medium with respect to the old medium; subsequently, a convergence develops that leads to a relocation of the old and an enhancement of the new (Mcluhan 1964; Airoldi 2024). Today, we witness on the one hand the process of convergence, on the other hand the rise of artificial communication managed by chatbots (Esposito 2022).

This transition leads to clear ambivalences regarding the credibility of sources, fake news and the convergence of human and non-human communication. Communication as a means of asserting an ideology was anticipated by Marx, while the question of manipulated news and the excess of information and stimuli producing disorientation and loneliness was already present in Simmel (1995; 1908); g) post-classical authors examine the compression of time and space. The two categories are permanently reconfigured on the basis of communicational, technological, labour, financial and climatic needs. Modern life is constantly accelerating - a theme already analysed by Simmel when he introduces the

repertoire of nervous life in the metropolis. People suffer from a lack of time and run even faster in order not to lose positions. From the first to the third Frankfurt School, the theme of temporal acceleration and that of spatial contraction declined established discursive repertoires, albeit with articulated differences (Rosa 2019); h) post-classical authors falsify the correlation between capitalism, democracy and widespread prosperity. In the West, liberal capitalism produces growing inequalities that undermine democratic coexistence. On the other hand, political capitalism, exemplified by the Chinese model, produces its efficiency levels by dispensing with democracy (Zuboff 2018; Milanovic 2020). We could say that among post-classical modernisation theorists, analytical reflection on ambivalences, paradoxes and attempts to oppose modernisation is affirmed. But in essence, post-classical authors remain within a dualist conceptual framework that opposes *matters of fact* to *matters of concern* (Latour 2005; Santarelli 2015; Archer 2021).

In the next section, we will look at new theories that, although born in the 20th century, assert themselves in the 21st century and try to add discursive repertoires: transhumanism, post-humanism, ethopolitical vitalism, A.N.T., relational theories starting from the foundations of critical realism (Donati 2022) or from constructivist, systemic and other emergentist variants[4] (Emirbayer 1997; Freeman Linton 2004; Clayton and Davies 2006; D'Alessandro 2010; Santarelli 2015; Dépelteau 2018; D'Alessandro 2023; 2024b). These theories are not 'new'. In some cases, they are based on a pre-modern philosophical materialist monism (the ontological assumption is to find a unity from which all has sprung). In other cases, they assemble and hybridise repertoires in different ways by tracing forms of emergentism already present in the past (the ontological assumption is to find relations and study the emergent effects of these relations). The aim of these theories is to overcome the dualism of post-classical authors.

THE NEW FORMS OF MODERNISATION BETWEEN ASSEMBLAGES, HYBRIDISATIONS AND RESISTANCES

According to the late Luhmann, a contemporary social system can be defined as such when the effects of communication appear (Luhmann 1998). Communications that produce other communications which, in turn, produce other communications and so on ad infinitum. Individuals are no longer the constitutive factor of the social system. This has been called the 'Luhmannian scandal' by some authors (Izuzquida 1990). Luhmann, anticipates the rise of those currents that marginalise the human. Transhumanism and Posthumanism. The key word transhumanism has existed since 1927, coined by the biologist Julian Huxley, but only entered the discursive repertoires permanently in 1998 when the Swedish philosopher Nick Bostrom founded, together with the British philosopher David Pearce, the international organisation called the *World Transhumanist Association* (WTA).

The Association's manifesto starts from the principle of the ultimate abolition of any kind of suffering through the use of technology. Transhumanism considers techno-poiesis to be a process capable of emancipating human beings from the biological, projecting them into a future in which it will be possible to extract the typical characteristics of human intelligence in order to graft them or replicate them on an artificial device (Bostrom 2016). The term 'post-human', on the other hand, was coined by Jeffrey Deitch in 1992 during an exhibition of the same name that brought together several artists whose works questioned human bodies and identities[5].

In 1995, with the essay *The Posthuman Condition*, Robert Pepperell elaborated an initial theoretical definition of the posthuman as a research project based on new assumptions capable of overcoming the humanistic tradition and building a consciousness that goes beyond the human brain (Pepperell 1995). In 2007, the neo-evolutionist sociologist John Harris introduced the concept of *enhancing evolution* into the repertoire of modernisation: the evolutionary improvement of the human being assisted by factors outside natural evolution, such as microprocessors inserted into the human brain to enhance memory

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[4] Historically, emergentism stems from an attempt to find a middle ground between opposing epistemological positions: mechanism and vitalism, materialist monism and Cartesian dualism.

[5] www.deitch.com/archive/curatorial/post-human

and learning capacity. In 2005, Bruno Latour considered the separation between *social kinds* and *natural kinds* useless. According to Latour, this separation was inherited from Kantianism. Taking into account the positions of Bergson, Tarde, Stengers and Whitehead, the sociologist-anthropologist wants to break down (as he states in his book) the barriers between epistemology and ontology. He considers the 'nature-culture' nexus as an agglomeration of networked actants. His Actor-Network Theory (ANT) traces humans and non-humans alike, abolishing even the distinctions between agency and structure. *Actor Network Theory* - which oscillates between theory and method - states that alongside humans there are other actors and/or actants who construct the interplay of associations and assemblages: natural and artificial non-humans (microbes, rocks, computers, road signs, vaccines, etc.).

This theory-methodology distances itself from Social Network Analysis, but also from relational sociology[6]. A.N.T. envisages a philosophical and ethnographic approach based on descriptive accounts and implemented in participant observation, charged with overturning the usual patterns of sociology. The Actor-Network theory envisages that agency cannot be confined within *matters of fact*, i.e. natural objects, because this way of defining non-human objects and beings represents an assemblage (a term that replaces the word 'construction') made by humans.

Latour's theory is constructivist, but not socio-constructivist, as the author himself states: «constructivism should not be confused with social constructivism, which is its opposite. When we say that a fact is constructed, we simply mean to account for the solid objective reality, mobilising various entities whose assemblage may fail» (Latour 2005: 145)[7].

At this point, the evolution between non-human animal, human animal and artificial non-human becomes an indistinct, borderless and always hybridising flow. Also, for Keller (Keller 2010) the boundaries between nature and culture are non-existent and the possibilities for hybridisation are unlimited. The well-known philosopher of science introduces the key word *'nurture'*. According to some post-classical authors, this keyword produces a conflation of nature and culture (Archer 2007).

Beyond the (not always clear) differences between the different authors taken into consideration, we can state that they have the following discursive repertoires in common: a) The hybridisation between human and non-human is always possible, with the exception of contingent rejections that will be resolved in the future; b) The classical categories of sociology are to be eliminated: agency, structure, time, space, subject, object, nature, culture, social reproduction etc.[8]: c) The modernisation process of human society will be directed towards a new mutation of the human race; d) In the future, machines will be "intelligences".

These authors introduce a paradigm shift from anthropology to anthropotechnics:

> On a structural level, the increasing complexity, the acceleration of social processes and the challenge of structures based on competitive games impose a strong pressure on the person to activate and optimise himself with an unprecedented dynamism that risks producing human maladjustment. On a cultural level, this corresponds to non-humanistic conceptions of the human condition, in which anthropology is replaced by anthropotechnics» (Maccarini 2021: 192).

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[6] Social Network Analysis (SNA) is a methodology that starts from the analysis of patterns and modes of communication between people, within communities conceived as networks in which people and groups are observed as nodes linked by relational flows. On this topic, see Linton Freeman (2004). SNA evolves within the framework of network theory, which is a part of graph theory. It defines networks as graphs whose nodes or edges possess attributes. Network theory analyses these networks on symmetrical or asymmetrical relations between their components. Relational sociology (or relational theory of society) was, on the other hand, first formulated by the Italian sociologist Pierpaolo Donati (Donati 1986). According to this perspective, society is made up of relations (precisely social relations) that must be conceived not as an accidental reality, secondary or derived from other entities (individuals or systems), but as a reality *sui generis*. There are also other relational theories that start from other ontologies for more details see Dépelteau (2018).

[7] Latour offers numerous definitions of his theory and his way of doing sociology. Many of these descriptions contradict each other. Furthermore, he claims to want to merge ontologies and paradigms that past authors had distinguished. He claims to be a «naive realist», but also a «relational theorist» and, finally, a «non-social constructivist». For a discussion of these aporias see D'Alessandro (2024).

[8] «It is hard to believe that we still have to absorb the same types of actors, the same number of entities, the same species of beings and the same modes of existence into the same types of collectors as Comte, Durkheim, Weber or Parsons, especially after science and technology have massively multiplied the participants to be melted down in the melting pots» (Latour 2005: 389).

In a different position to the radical hybridists are the ethopolitical vitalists (Osborne and Rose 2023; Descola 2021; Marchesini 2009). They argue that despite recent changes that question the uniqueness of the human, we remain persons, but we must renounce anthropocentrism and accept the consciousness and personalities of other living entities. Human beings, as persons, are constitutively embedded in material, social, semantic and cultural niches that they have constructed for themselves. All attempts to extract human properties into digital niches have failed.

The authors list many failures, rejections but also refusals to be empowered: «many people who have been implanted with deep brain stimulation electrodes to modulate the mobility problems caused by Parkinson's (...) ask for the devices to be switched off (...) people do not like the effects such devices have on their personality» (Osborne and Rose 2023: 7-8).

But according to the exponents of ethopolitical/ethological vitalism, the challenge of the new modernisation, in the future, lies on another question: can we extend legal rights to non-humans who have characteristics that allow us to assign them a personality? Such scholars trace in the most gifted animal living beings, certain factors that resemble the concepts of personhood and personality, following an orientation that is not humanistic, but vitalistic and anthropodecentred.

Here, too, we observe an attempt to break down boundaries and distinctions between the human person and living beings in a general sense, but to achieve a balance between the parts.

According to these authors, the concept of personality represents a category that has ethopolitical, but not biological or even cultural boundaries. Following this path, personalities could be defined from their way of responding appropriately to another being[9].

Finally, in opposition to post-classical but also anti-humanist currents, we observe relational theory, declined on the paradigm of critical realism (Archer 1995) or other paradigms (Emirbayer 1997; Dépelteau 2018). These theories were also already present in the 20th century but became fully established (with their repertoires) in the 21st century. Reflexive modernity represents a self-description of the crisis facing modernity, but overcoming the crisis requires going beyond the reflexivity of the modern subject, avoiding counter-modern, post-modern and transhumanist rhetoric (Donati 2011). The main theories of modernity described so far are the result of a hybridising monism or a «philosophical dualism, which arose as early as Descartes, that opposes the human being as subject and the human being as object. This dualism persists in sociologies that respectively place social action or the social system at the centre» (Donati 1986: 11) and continues in contemporary sociologies that implement simple variations of the same dualism.

According to relational theorists, thinking in relational terms means thinking in emergentist terms to overcome opposing epistemological positions (mechanism versus vitalism; materialist monism versus Cartesian dualism; scientist objectivism versus humanist subjectivism). But it also means reaffirming ontological limits to hybridisations between human and non-human. The distinctions between human and non-human remain universal and non-contingent.

The human being is distinguished in the following dimensions: a) conscious self-reflexivity; b) comprehensibility of semantics; c) creative-transformative capacity of the analogical type (D'Alessandro 2023).

The positions examined so far show that a new repertoire is added to the modernisation debate involving the clash between those who want to hybridise and progressively eliminate the boundaries between human and non-human; and those who reassert the boundaries by attempting to observe the emerging relationships between these processes in a new way.

But are the underlying ontologies of these theories new? Monism, dualism, emergentism are reassembled or reworked in new ways, but they were already present at the time the founding fathers of sociology were writing. To hybridise and merge themes that had been dichotomised into dualism - as happens, for example, in Latour's theory - redetermines a form of monism.

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[9] Another essay would be needed to counter the aporias introduced by the vitalists. What is of interest in this paper is to understand what new repertoires have recently been introduced into the debate on the new modernisation processes.

Going beyond dualism and monism by declaring that the relations between natural and cultural facts produce non-linear emergent effects reaffirms philosophical emergentism.

CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of the research questions posed in the abstract, I have examined, from a comparative perspective, keywords and discursive repertoires that have remained stable with regard to the concept of modernisation, from classical theories to the present day. In the classical authors there is a separation between natural and social facts, whereas the discursive repertoires inherent in cultural symbols and artefacts clearly belong to social facts. They use the term modernity, but do not use the key word 'modernisation'. Through a dualism (Archer 1995), ontologically based on the opposition of nature versus society-culture, the conceptualisation of the division between 'ancient and modern' has taken place, but also the distinction between a Western, modern, industrialised 'we' and non-Western, pre-modern 'others' (Latour 2005). Post-classical theorists use the term modernisation to elaborate theories and reflections on the ambivalences of this phenomenon. However, they remain within a dualist conceptual framework. In the 21st century, we witness the rise of theories claiming to be new (in fact, they are latently present in the theoretical debate of the 20th century) and adding new keywords to describe the phenomenon of modernisation: transhumanism, post-humanism, ethopolitical vitalism, A.N.T. and relational theories. We witness an ontological clash between monists, dualists and emergentists: (a) Authors who consider modernity to be a self-deception based on a non-existent ontology that posited the nature versus society-culture opposition (Latour 2018; 2005; 2000); (b) Authors who propose an anthropodecentred ethopolitical vitalism that is open to the extension of the concept of personhood/personality to non-human living beings (animals) and, in the near future, to artificial intelligences endowed with credible agency (Osborne and Rose 2023; Descola 2021; Marchesini 2002); c) Authors who hope for the advent of a post-postmodernity through a relational subject capable of transcending the unproductive binarisms determined by modernity (Emirbayer 1997; Donati 2022; Dépelteau 2018); d) Authors who advocate the gradual incorporation of the human within the artificial and digital non-human (Bostrom 2016; Harris 2007) or the gradual extinction of the human in favour of new evolutionary forms (Kurzweil 2024).

As shown during the research, these perspectives move from different ontologies, stated or presupposed: monist, dualist or emergentist. These perspectives change the way of interpreting the keywords and repertoires that characterise modernisation processes. But if we start from what the different schools of thought have in common, it becomes clear that many repertoires have not been removed but simply reassembled in order to emphasise ambivalences and paradoxes.

After the classical and post-classical theories of modernity, there have been authors who have hybridised or differently related what had previously been distinguished: 1. Nature and Culture; 2. Human and non-human. But even in this case, the classical repertoires, and the main ontologies presupposing them, have not been removed.

The rise of a new form of observation of modernisation differs from its predecessors by the addition of a discursive repertoire that implies a clash between those who want to remove the boundaries between nature-culture/human-non-human and those who reaffirm the boundaries. There is an ontological clash between monists, dualists and emergentists that is different from the past but is fuelled by the same assumptions as in the past.

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