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**abstract** After reviewing Peirce's replacement of 'introspection' by the 'inner conversation', the role of extended reflexivity is reviewed in Beck, Giddens and Lash and compared with Bourdieu's view about its limited nature, and with recent attempts to defend a 'reflexive habitus'. Conversely, this article argues that reflexivity mediates between the objective structural and cultural contexts confronting agents, who activate their properties as constraints and enablements as they pursue reflexively defined 'projects' based on their concerns. The increased scope, range and changing mode with which reflexivity is practised are linked to pre-modernity, modernity and trans-modernity.

**keywords** collective reflexivity ♦ internal conversation ♦ introspection ♦ mediating structure ♦ modes of reflexivity ♦ morphogenesis

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## Reflexivity as internal conversation

Although the historical recognition of reflexivity came 'early', its incorporation into sociological thinking was delayed until the late 19th century. Though its importance is now accepted by contemporary theorists, there is no consensus about the human practice of reflexivity, its origins, operations, or outcomes. That 'reflexivity' had no takers among sociology's founders is understandable for Durkheimians, seeking to expel subjectivity, but less explicable for Weberians, concerned with the meanings underlying actions. This becomes odder still if Plato's characterization of this capacity in the *Theaetetus* is re-examined: because reflexivity is specifically described as a process of personal opinion formation that, since about 'anything', could well be about the social:

I mean the conversation which the soul holds with herself in considering of anything. I speak of what I scarcely understand; but the soul when thinking appears to me to be just talking – asking questions of herself and answering them, affirming and denying. And when she has arrived at a decision, whether gradually or by sudden impulse, and has at last agreed, and does not doubt, that is called her opinion. I say, then, that to form an opinion is to speak, and opinion is a word spoken – I mean to oneself and in silence, not aloud or to another. (Plato, 1992: 189E–190A)

One reason for the neglect was methodological. How was anyone to come by this self-knowledge? 'Introspection' had been accepted as its reliable source for 2000 years, based upon 'looking inwards' (*spect intra*), which had underlain medieval Confessional practices. However, Kant had voiced his difficulties with introspection in 1804, when sociology was barely in *statu nascendi*.

Kant maintained that our self-knowledge was an 'indubitable fact', but one that we were unable to explain. His problem with introspection was that it had to assume a split within the self such that we could simultaneously be both the observer and the observed – subject and object at the same time:

That I am conscious of myself is a thought that already contains a twofold self, the I as subject and that I as object. How it might be possible for the I that I think to be an object (of intuition) for me, one that enables me to distinguish me from myself, is absolutely impossible to explain, even though it is an indubitable fact. (Kant, 1983 [1804]: 73)

On these Kantian grounds, Comte made a particularly forceful argument that introspection was 'null and void': 'The thinker cannot divide himself into two, of whom one reasons while the other observes

him reason. The organ observed and the organ observing being, in this case, identical, how could observation take place?' (Comte, 1975: 34–8).

To many, this seemed an irrefutable argument against introspection and, consequently, against our having any immediate knowledge of our mental activities. However, it is strictly an attack upon the observational model of self-awareness alone. It has no force at all for our other senses through which we can be both the observer and the observed simultaneously. In fact, this criticism is only valid with regard to perception. We are simultaneously subject and object for 'touch' when we wash our faces, for 'smell' when we sniff our skin, for 'taste' when we lick our mouths and for 'hearing', in listening to our own voices. It is the eye alone that cannot see itself seeing and thus Comte's objection would have no force in relation to conceptions of self-knowledge that did not depend upon *self-perception*. Rejection of the observational model and the replacement of sight by hearing was the huge achievement of the American pragmatists, who eventually displaced the 'internal Spectator' and returned to the Platonic 'internal Conversationalist'.

Nevertheless, John Stuart Mill's (1973 [1882]: 64) riposte to Comte had many takers because it preserved the 'indubitable fact' that we have knowledge of our own mental activities. And it required only one revision to the concept of introspection, rather than involving its complete overhaul or overthrow. What he proposed was to solve the subject–object problem by inserting a small time lapse, such that what we were engaging in was *retrospection* rather than *introspection*.

The nub of Mill's argument was that if the object of consciousness was suspended in memory, then no unacceptable split-consciousness attended the subject who inspected the recent past from the standpoint of the present. Yet, Mill's riposte was double-edged because it served to make introspection uncontentious, precisely because it made it anodyne: introspection could be absorbed into an unobjectionable study of memory (by psychologists such as Wundt and Titchener) – but without apparent sociological remainder (Lyons, 1986: 15).

William James was conversant with the Comte–Mill debate, which he cites in *The Principles of Psychology* (1890: 188–9), declaring himself fully for Mill: 'The attempt at introspective analysis ... is like seizing a spinning top to catch its motion, or turning up the gas quickly enough to see how the darkness looks' (pp. 243–4). Yet, he became a crucial figure bridging psychology and sociology in the appropriation of reflexivity into the latter. In James's work devoted to thinking ('reasonings'), we can detect the origins of an alternative to the observa-

tional model of self-knowledge. Here, Kant's scantily developed notion of our 'eavesdropping' on ourselves, which implies that we are 'self-listeners' rather than 'self-observers', began to be tentatively fleshed out. Within subsequent American pragmatism (Lewis and Smith, 1980), it is possible to trace the (re)germination of the notion that our mental activities take the alternative form of an 'internal conversation'.

If James had taken the first step towards superseding the idea of internal perception by substituting the 'internal listener', what was heard was an inner monologue by the self. The conceptualization of reflexivity as inner dialogue was developed first by Peirce and later elaborated by Mead (Archer, 2003: 64–90). In 1868, Peirce remarked, 'Thought, says Plato, is a silent speech of the soul with itself. If this be admitted, immense consequences follow; quite unrecognised, I believe, hitherto' (Peirce, 1994 [1867–71]: 172). The first consequence was that the reduction of the introspective process to a study of memory could be accepted without regret. As Colapietro notes, to Peirce, 'the principle function of internal reflection does not reside in taking stock of what we have already thought or in attempting to view what we are presently thinking; it resides in engaging in an inner dialogue – indeed an inner drama – and in judging the outcome of that dialogue or drama' (1989: 117), as a guide to action.

This reconceptualization of reflexivity as a process of inner dialogue ('musement' to Peirce) transformed the passive 'looking in' into active participation: into speaking, listening *and responding*. Since intra-communication was directly related to determining people's future courses of action, the import of this mental activity was acknowledged in sociology. However, it also raised two issues that require further clarification in turn.

### *Simultaneity and alternation in internal conversation*

By questioning and answering ourselves in self-talk, such dialogues presume that *we alternate between subject and object* in the turn-taking process. Yet, how is it possible to think of such alternation since the thought that I produce (as subject) is identical to the one that I simultaneously hear (as object)? Logically, an alternation between two identical things is meaningless.

James's insight into 'thought tendencies' provides the key to making sense of the idea of an alternation between the same self as subject and object, without reinvoking a split consciousness. By concretizing an inchoate premonition in words, welcoming the felicitous ones and rejecting the inappropriate, the subject creates an object, an utterance that is different

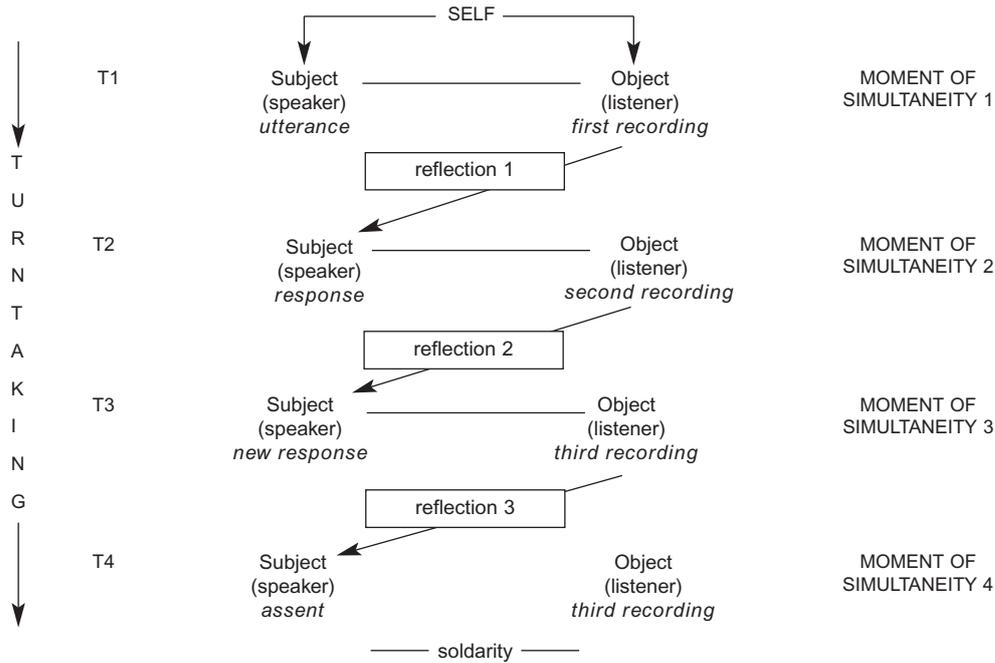


Figure 1. The internal conversation

from her ‘premonitory’ notion. By simultaneously hearing the articulated thought, the subject confronts her object. She may then find it wanting (we say to ourselves or to others ‘I didn’t mean to put it that way’) and seeks to reformulate it, revise it, or even retract it. This assigns ‘simultaneity’ and ‘alternation’ meaningful places within the reflexive internal conversation. I am the subject who internally voices a question, but that utterance is also an object to which I, as subject, can then respond. My response is also an object which, on hearing it, can be questioned by me the subject and again be answered, with this new answer representing a novel object which I, the subject, may then still doubt. The two will go on alternating until solidarity is reached – as illustrated in Figure 1 – or the issue is postponed or abandoned. This is what enables us to say to ourselves, ‘No, you’re wrong’ – and proceed to correct ourselves, which is how reflexivity internally monitors the attitudes held and courses of action endorsed.

**Who is speaking to whom?**

In the course of Peirce’s work he refers to a ‘critical self’ whose habitual action orientations are alive and active in the present, and also to a future ‘You’. If these are *analytical* distinctions (between the past ‘Me’, present ‘I’ and future ‘You’) they are unproblematic. Yet, Peirce uses a courtroom analogy to capture how deliberations are conducted. The problem is ‘Who is speaking and who is responding?’, because an analytical distinction can do neither. Nor, it

would seem, can either a past or a future self! He proposed his own solution, but one different from that later developed by Mead, which became canonical in social theory.

Peirce himself refers to ‘different phases of the ego’, specifically to a present ‘I’, who alone acts but in dialogue with the makings of a future ‘You’, and with a ‘critical self’, which Norbert Wiley (rightly) argues occupies the role of the ‘Me’, which is missing in Peirce (1994 [1867–71]). This past ‘Me’, or ‘critical self’, is fundamentally made up of habits, constituting dispositions to respond in a given manner to given circumstances. This ‘Me’ is a summation of the past, which provides us with an orientation to the future, from its deposition in the present (Davis, 1972: 16). In self-questioning about what is to be done, the ‘Me’ supplies answers honed by past experience. As the personal conscience, Peirce’s ‘Me’ is thus very different from Mead’s ‘Me’, as the ‘generalized other’, which furnishes society’s guidelines to action. The former is a personalized sediment, the latter a socialized deposit.

Mead’s scheme appears less problematic if the self alone is dialoguing with an internal representation of society’s normativity. However, Mead’s scheme lacks a specific ‘You’, although he makes very similar references to a future self who stands for social values different from those of the ‘Me’ or ‘generalized other’ (Wiley, 2004). In *The Semiotic Self*, Norbert Wiley performs the same manoeuvre as he did in endowing Peirce with a ‘Me’ (the historic phase of the ego); Mead’s future self becomes the ‘missing’ ‘You’. In

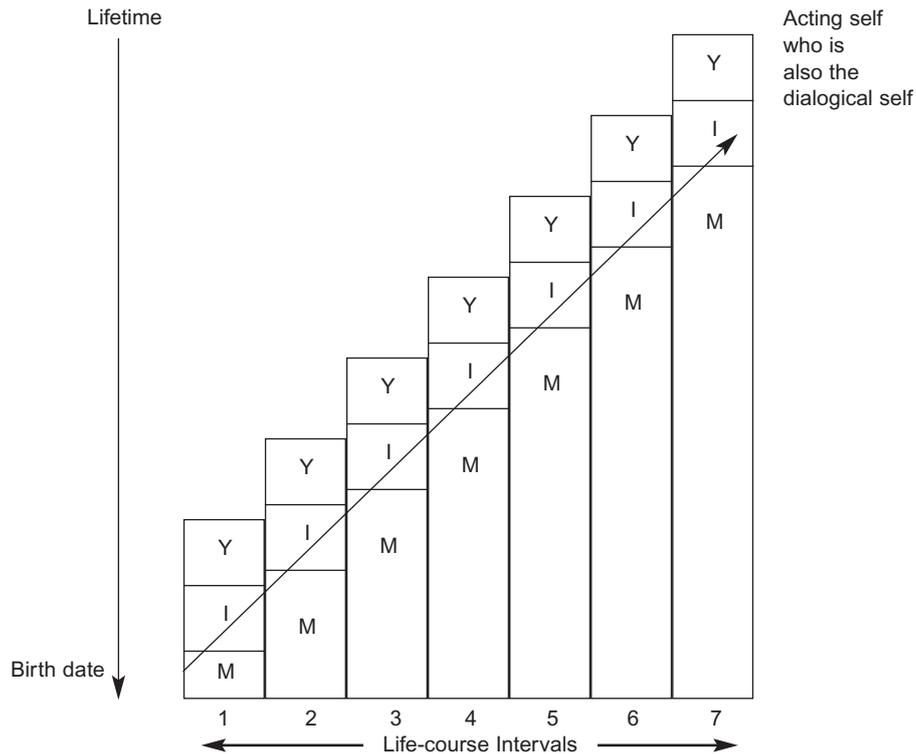


Figure 2. Relational phases of the self

unifying the two thinkers in this way, Wiley (1994) made an enormous contribution towards reanimating sociological interest in the reflexive process, as a source of self and social change. However, the unified triadic scheme 'Me-I-You' re-posed the problem of 'who is speaking to whom?'

To entertain the notion of different voices issuing from different 'aspects of the ego' is tempting because it is indeed necessary to allow for past experience and future aspirations being influential. Yet it is essential to maintain that the only 'aspect' which *can* be allowed 'voice' is the present self. This 'I' is indubitably constrained and enabled by the past, and its reproductory or transformatory future begins to be forged in the present, but these processes should not be reified by endowing the past 'Me' or the 'You'-to-be with the power of speech or of hearing. In short, I am my own and only interlocutor. But have we come full-circle back to the initial problem?

No, because the solution consists in regarding the distinctions between the 'Me', the 'I' and the 'You' as relational and temporal; all three change over time and therefore the respective pronouns, which remain constant, in fact point to changing referents in each case. Today's 'I' is not the same as that of last week, last year, or of our adolescence or childhood. The 'I' alters as it moves along the time-line, which is also the 'life-line' of each person. Correspondingly, the past-self or 'Me' also changes, if only because it accumulates over the life-course, and the future-self or

'You' changes simultaneously, if only because its potential attenuates. Moreover, as the three alter in synchrony with one another, so do the relations between them.

If the 'I', the 'Me' and the 'You' are quintessentially temporal concepts referring to the real internal relationality of the self, then they are not reified entities. Even the constancy of the 'I', in reflexively sensing itself to be the same continuous being over time (Archer, 2000), does not mean that it is substantively unchanging. Similarly, the 'Me' and the 'You' change accordingly. For example, the past-self of a recent widower is now one to which has been added the experience of losing his wife, the sense of bereavement has accrued to his present 'I', and his future-self has acquired the potential for remarriage. Yet, has this created another problem: 'how do we distinguish between aspects of what is in fact continuous?'

No, because we can make an *analytical* cut at some point in time and for some purpose in hand, so that the activities of the acting 'I', and its dialogue with itself can be examined at a given T1, wherever that is situated historically. It is only by separating them in this way that the influences of the past upon the present can be identified and the effects of the present upon the future can be determined. Project the 'I' forwards and backwards over time and it is continuous. This is easier to grasp if it is thought of over the life-span of an individual, as in Figure 2.

The 'I' changes over time; partly as the consequences (including the unintended) of its own past life-projects, and partly because of the contingencies of life in an open system. Since our inner dialogues are self-referential, then the 'I' of any particular interval will have a different past-self and future-self to whom it will refer. During any one of Shakespeare's 'seven ages of man', that 'I' alone is the one holding internal conversations with itself. Additionally, the arrow in Figure 2 representing the 'I' provides two reasons why the internal conversation will be life-long and non-repetitious; the self is undergoing transformation and so too are the circumstances that it confronts. Reified 'voices' are denied to the 'You' and the 'Me': because they are not acting selves, then neither can they be speaking selves. But the 'I' takes them self-referentially into account – prospectively and retrospectively – thus reflexively shaping the trajectory of the 'I' across the life-course.

### Theoretical debates about reflexivity

Reflexivity is defined here as 'the regular exercise of the mental ability, shared by all normal people, to consider themselves in relation to their (social) contexts and vice versa' (Archer, 2007a: 4). As such, it is the process through which reasons become causes of the courses of action adopted by social subjects. Their subjective internal deliberations – internal conversations – are responsible for mediating the conditional influence of objective structural and cultural factors upon social action (Archer, 2003: 130–50). Although I maintain that reflexivity is indispensable to any social form (Archer, 2007a: 27–9, 49–54), it does not follow that its properties and powers or its mode of practice remain unchanging. On the contrary, reflexivity has a history – a long one – whose telling Vygotsky called for in 1934 (Vygotsky, 1964 [1934]: 153).

However, western social theorizing has regarded reflexivity as a homogeneous phenomenon. Either people exercised it or they didn't but, when they did they were engaging in much the same kind of practice and for much the same kind of reasons. At most, they could do so more or less, in what has recently become known as 'the extended reflexivity thesis' (Adams, 2006).

Thus, with some oversimplification, the great American pragmatists generically endorsed the formula that action would follow routine guidelines and resort would be made to reflexive deliberations only when subjects were confronted with unforeseen and problematic situations. However, there is nothing in their works that introduces a historical

panorama in relation to the *mode* of reflexivity practised. It seems that 'problematic situations' would always be encountered and the ahistorical response would be a resort to the same mental activities and inner dialogue that constituted reflexivity *tout court*. This is compatible with the 'extended reflexivity thesis'. Recent times (late modernity) can readily be deemed to present more 'problematic situations' and the response would simply be more agential reflexivity – but more of the same kind.

The main exponents of the 'extended thesis' are Beck, Giddens and Lash (1994) who, again with oversimplification, maintain that for a very long time traditionalism could operate as the guide to action and that only with the arrival of the 'juggernaut' or the 'risk' society did traditional action give way to reflexive action. This makes reflexivity itself a 'newcomer', largely confined to late modernity. Again, there is no suggestion that reflexivity – when it arrives – is other than a homogeneous mental practice. However, it does arrive on the recent historical scene and with the implication that its advent is for all. This is in opposition to Bourdieu's tenacious retention of the *socialized habitus* as the guide to action and his confinement of reflexivity to a practice that could only be collectively developed by members of the academic community (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 136ff.).

In contradistinction, I maintain that with the advent, development and the incipient passing of modernity, there has been not only a continuous growth in the extensiveness of reflexivity, accompanying the decline in routine action, but also transformations in: (1) *the scope of reflexivity* (that is, the proportion of the population practising it intensively); (2) *the reach of reflexivity* (that is, in the range of issues addressed reflexively); and (3), most importantly, *the modalities through which reflexivity is exercised*.

### The 'reflexive modernization' thesis

Confusingly, the adjective in this term appears to imply the emergence of some form of form *systemic* reflexivity, rather than an extension of *social* reflexivity alone, as Beck et al. (1994: 6) admit. However, an important claim is being advanced about *social* reflexivity, asserting that there are increasing pressures upon individuals to become more reflexive as global society progressively distances itself from traditionalism. It is one that is worth taking seriously.

This thesis is premised on the argument that 'in reflexive modernity, individuals have become ever more free of structure; in fact they have to redefine structure (or as Giddens puts it, tradition)' (Beck et al., 1994: 177). The main line of argument – heralded in *Risk Society* – emphasizes that the contemporary *disintegration* of entrenched structures both

'liberates' people and simultaneously propels them towards 'individualization'. In turn, this implies much higher demands being placed upon each person's reflexivity to choreograph his or her own life-course – particularly in the context of their 'disembeddedness' (Bauman, 2002) and, above all, given *the demise of routine action*. It is this decline that '*compel(s) the self-organization and self-thematization of people's biographies*' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 23–4; my italics). However, increased reflexivity is not an automatic consequence or corollary of decreased routinization. One alternative could be a growth in 'spontaneity', perhaps rooted in the impulses of Mead's rather mysterious 'I' (1974 [1934]: 113ff.); another could be Baudrillard's capricious 'playing with the pieces', in postmodernist fashion (1984: 24). On the whole, Beck's exemplifications of making a 'life of one's own' show closer kinship with the above than with reflexive deliberation.

Despite persistent references to 'reflexivity', Beck and his co-authors take no interest in it as a process. This seems to derive from the 'central conflationism' (Archer, 1995) shared by Giddens and Beck, that is, their elision of structure with agency, which is fundamentally incompatible with reflexivity. By definition, reflexive deliberation depends on maintaining a clear subjective–objective distinction. It can neither work nor be examined if there is any tendency to conflate the two by eliding the properties and powers pertaining to 'structure' and to 'agents'. Reflexivity depends upon a subject who has sufficient personal identity to know what he or she cares about and to design the 'projects' that they hope (fallibly) will realize their concerns within society. Equally, it depends upon the objectivity of their social circumstances, which, under their own (fallible) descriptions, will encourage them to follow one course of action rather than another. Deliberation consists in people evaluating their situations in the light of their concerns and evaluating their projects in the light of their circumstances. Any form of conflation fundamentally precludes examination of this interplay. It is submitted that the concept of 'institutionalized individualism' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: xxi), as the new structure of late modernity, could not be more conflationary in its clamping together of structure and agency.

Were it the case that macro-influences do recede, we should anticipate greater variability at the micro-level of individual agents, as the exercise of their personal powers is freed from external controls. However, the paradox is that increased individualization is *not* accompanied by increased individuation for these two theorists. There is no growth in real personal differentiation, which explains their lack of

interest in the *process* of reflexivity itself or in the types of subjective deliberations linking different personal concerns to correspondingly different biographical outcomes. *Both* structures and agents are characterized by such indeterminacy that they can have no determinate consequences for one another.

Personal biography is held to be discontinuous, subject to breakdown, reconstitution and reinvention. Its only continuity is not one of underlying and enduring concerns but of the narrative form imposed upon it by the fickle revisions of its narrator. In other words, this social being is ultimately a shifting ideational self-construct rather than a seat of action: at most, he becomes *provisional man* and she is *pro tem* woman. As such, their inner lives are capricious and kaleidoscopic in nature and effects. The decisions taken, and what reflexively went into their making, become uninteresting because they are *accorded* the interest of lottery players, rather than people striving for governance over their lives in society.

#### 'Habitus' in the context of non-routine action

Because to the theorists just examined, 'The deep layer of foreclosed decisions is being forced up to the level of decision making,' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 6), the implication is that the relevance of Bourdieu's 'semi-unconscious' and 'quasi-automatic' 'habitus' peters out towards the end of the 20th century.

Bourdieu's foundational premise was that 'there exists a correspondence between social structures and mental structures', that is, between objective social position and subjective disposition (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 13). In other words, the dispositional durability of habitus derives from the structured stability of positions and then, through socialization, serves to reproduce the social circumstances from which the habitus itself originated.

Indeed, the continuing pertinence of the dispositional habitus *depends* upon the endurance of the positions with which it is intimately linked, which precludes the acknowledgement of radical social change. As Calhoun comments, the non-reflexive workings of habitus assume 'a high level of homology among fields, an absence of systemic contradictions, and therefore a tendency towards social integration and stable reproduction of the encompassing field of power' (1993: 82). Only then can the subjective dispositions constituting the habitus ensure a pre-adaptation of individuals to the objective probabilities inscribed in their social positions. Indeed, Bourdieu (1990a: 55) assents that the workings of the habitus are antithetic to 'unpredictable novelty'.

Nevertheless, he described his project as one of uncovering ‘*transhistorical invariants*, or sets of relations between structures that persist within a clearly circumscribed but relatively long historical period’ (Wacquant, 1989: 361). Yet, how satisfactorily can his analytical framework be projected forward to deal with the transformations that were coming into view towards the end of his life?

Much has been made to hang upon his brief discussion of ‘crisis’, which appears to concede that, during major social disruptions, ‘routinized action’ cannot be appropriate and that people then do cope with change through conscious decision-making. However, in the following quotation, what he gives with one hand, he then takes away with the other:

Times of crisis, in which the routine adjustment of subjective and objective structures is brutally disrupted, constitute a class of circumstances when indeed ‘rational choice’ often appears to take over. But, this is a crucial proviso, it is habitus itself that commands this option. (Wacquant, 1989: 45)

But, this ‘crucial proviso’ means that our (apparently) conscious coping strategies remain orchestrated by the non-reflexive habitus, which furnishes the principles that less-than-consciously guide our actions (Jenkins, 1992: 77). Logically, it is hard to see how this can be – how routine principles of action, adjusted to a very different earlier setting, can supply appropriate guidelines for acting once that context has been ‘brutally’ displaced. Instead, this seems to be a formula for generating practices inappropriate to what is needed in the new context.

Certainly, Bourdieu insisted that any habitus was constituted by *transposable* dispositions, that is, tacit and practical skills transferable between non-identical contexts, because ‘habitus’ is not mere ‘habit’, but possesses the generative capacity to supply adaptive (if not creative) practices. Thus, he maintained that habitus is ‘the strategy generating principle enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 122). But how elastic can any ‘habitus’ be?

Since a habitus was always held to be the *embodiment* of a strong practical sense, giving a feel for the game, one can seriously question if today’s novel global games *can be played* by virtue of embodied practical mastery. In other words, new games with such names as ‘external investment’, ‘labour mobility’, ‘foreign exchange dealing’, ‘multi-lingualism’, or ‘permanent software upgrading’ need to be mastered by an intensively *discursive and deliberative approach*, one exceeding the possibilities of *embodied* skills – how can stock-exchange trading or computer programming be embodied?

In seeking to fend off such difficulties, some have

recently advanced the concept of a ‘reflexive habitus’. The aim is to project Bourdieu’s *dispositional* analysis forward, despite contemporary *positional* transformations, which theorists of ‘reflexive modernization’ are held to have identified more or less correctly:

What is being suggested here is that, in conditions of late-, high-, or reflexive-modernity, endemic crises ... lead to a more or less permanent disruption of social position, of a more or less constant disjunction between habitus and field. In this context reflexivity ceases to reflect a temporary lack of fit between habitus and field *but itself becomes habitual, and is thus incorporated into the habitus in the form of the flexible or reflexive habitus*. (Sweetman, 2003: 538)

The compromise concept of a ‘reflexive habitus’ seems to be compromised itself: it is either vacuous or an oxymoron.

On the one hand, it points to the necessary intensification of reflexivity under the conditions prevailing in the third millennium. What does calling this a ‘habitus’ add? Presumably, that people now have a *disposition* to be reflexive about their circumstances. But does this not simply redescribe what they do and, to some extent, have always done? To possess this ‘disposition’ boils down to the statement that most people now *expect* to have to think about the choices they make or maintain. Well, yes, they do, but it is still hard to see how calling this a ‘habitus’ explains anything about either their deliberative processes or about what they do. In fact, given how ‘habitus’ stressed the pre-adaptation of people to circumstances and the ‘semi-conscious’, ‘quasi-automatic’ nature of its operations – all of which Sweetman accepts – it is hard to think of any concept less helpful for dealing with conscious deliberations about making choices.

On the other hand, Sweetman maintains that ‘certain forms of habitus may be *inherently* reflexive, and that the flexible or *reflexive* habitus may be both increasingly common and increasingly significant due to various social and cultural shifts’ (2003: 530). What does ‘inherently’ mean here, given that Bourdieu consistently held the formation of any habitus to be the result of socialization? What type of socialization can provide a preparation for the unpredictable and novel? This seems to be both a contradiction in terms and a denial of habitus as a generative mechanism for appropriately playing the game, when it no longer provides directional guidance for subjects’ actions.

A final footnote on the durability of Bourdieu’s influence is the pervasive but uncritical use of the term ‘pre-reflexive’, serving as a redoubt where dispositions may have been acquired. For example, in her critical examination of Bourdieu’s over-reliance on

**Communicative reflexivity**

Internal conversations need to be confirmed and completed by others before they lead to action, thus fostering normative conventionalism

**Autonomous Reflexivity**

Internal conversations are self-contained, leading directly to action and characterised by instrumental rationality

**Meta-reflexivity**

Internal conversations critically evaluate previous inner dialogues and are critical about effective action in society, in promoting value rational action.

**Fractured reflexivity**

Internal conversations cannot lead to purposeful courses of action and only intensify personal distress and disorientation, leading (temporarily) to 'passive agents'

Figure 3. Dominant modes of reflexivity

homophily (similars becoming familiars), Bottero tasks him with not having examined 'how differential association might affect the extent to which people share pre-reflexive dispositions' (2009: 412). Such comments could only have bite if the meaning of 'pre-reflexive' was unproblematic, which it remains since not synonymous with 'pre-verbal'.

**Different modes of practising reflexivity**

The previous sets of theorists were 'central conflationists', seeking to transcend the divides between 'structure and agency' and 'objectivism and subjectivism' simultaneously (Mouzelis, 2000). My own approach to reflexivity is theoretically opposed to both, because it is Realist and therefore holds that specific emergent properties and powers pertain to 'structure', 'culture' and 'agency' (Archer, 2003, 2007a, 2012). To avoid reification, Realists hold that 'the causal power of social forms is mediated through social agency' (Bhaskar, 1989: 94), but also advanced an unexamined process of 'conditioning' to account for the influence of the former on the latter. Instead, I ventured that reflexive internal conversation mediated between the objective structural and cultural shaping of the contexts confronting agents (Archer, 1995: 201), who activated their properties, as *inter alia* constraints and enablements, by the particular projects they deliberately sought to pursue in order to realize their personal concerns.

Reflexive deliberation accounts for subjects' evaluations of their situations in the light of their personal concerns, and their re-evaluation of their projects in the light of their situations. Without such an account, sociology settles for (third-person) empirical generalizations about what 'most people do most of the time'. Instead, by reflexively defining

their doings, subjects are ultimately responsible for shaping and reshaping the social order – while simultaneously being shaped by it, as persons, agents and actors.

However, people's modes of inner dialogue can be very different and empirical work confirmed the practice of four distinctive modalities (Archer, 2003, 2007a, 2012). Reflexivity is not homogeneous and the dominant mode varies with the subject's 'context' (with especial importance attaching to its 'continuity', 'discontinuity', or 'incongruity') in conjunction with the subject's ultimate 'concerns' (with particular importance attaching to their compatibility or incompatibility with natal social backgrounds). The four modalities were found to be distributed in roughly equal proportions in the general population – and are summarised in Figure 3.

Each mode has very different *external* (aggregate) consequences for the individual subject (e.g. distinctive patterns of social mobility [Archer, 2007a]) and for quite different parts of civil society. 'Communicatives' principally invest themselves in the family, thus making a huge contribution to social cohesion; 'Autonomous' subjects devote themselves strenuously to the market and contribute most to economic development; and 'Meta-reflexives' promote social transformation by gravitating towards employment in the non-profit-sector.

My recent work (2012) shows that, for the young and educated, 'Communicative reflexivity' becomes harder to sustain, given the demise of community and geolocality, and its decline augments Modernity's deficit in social solidarity (i.e. diminishing 'contextual continuity'). 'Autonomous reflexivity' remains strong and its practitioners respond to the challenge of combining social and geographical

mobility presented by multinational enterprises (i.e. representing the continued growth of ‘contextual discontinuity’). However, ‘Meta-reflexivity’ is proportionately gaining ground and augmenting the Third Sector (i.e. because of ‘contextual incongruity’ between natal backgrounds and novel opportunities). So, too, are ‘Fractured reflexives’ as the fallible victims of new social opportunities and the growing fragility of durable partnerships. In turn this prompts a speculative history of reflexivity, but one that in principle does not preclude substantive investigation.

Reflexivity is held to be a prerequisite for all forms of social life. Even in traditional societies, no culture was so consistent in its composition and no structure was so coherent in its organization to constitute a relatively enduring form of life without constant resort to the reflexively governed action of its members: to adopt social expectations as their own, to improvise through unscripted contingencies and to elaborate upon tradition itself to cover novel eventualities, occurrent even in morphostatic social formations. Nevertheless, reflexivity was limited both in extent and in kind by ‘contextual continuity’.

The progressive effect of Modernity, as morphogenesis (Buckley, 1967: 58) began its unsynchronized emergence in structure and culture, was one that entailed increased reflexivity: a growth in its scope (the proportion of those practising it intensively) and its reach (the range of issues addressed reflexively). However, the heterogeneous impact of ‘contextual discontinuity’ limited the reflexive response to *minorities* (as in the great Age of Ideology), its *slowness* enabled new forms of routinization to become entrenched (the urban working-class community), and its results were dependent upon the *collective mobilization* of sectional interests whose social movements were bound to the lineaments of Modernity because concerned with their own *incorporation* into existing political and civil society.

In the developed world, the coincidence of structural and cultural morphogenesis at the end of the 20th century intensified change dramatically. This is the tendential effect of morphogenesis, for variety to stimulate yet greater variety, when it becomes less trammelled by counterbalancing morphostatic processes. For the first time in human history, the *Reflexive Imperative* (2012) applies to all. As decisive structures become located transnationally and the cultural system extends a novel *situational logic of opportunity*, what is to be done and what represents the good life has to be answered by everyone. Reflexively, the population in developed areas confronts ‘contextual incongruity’ between new openings and the expectations emanating from their

family backgrounds. They must deliberate about matching their skills and concerns to novel but complementary outlets, to establish their own equally novel *modi vivendi*. Individual life-worlds are no longer amenable to orchestration by ‘habitus’, but neither is public life at the capricious mercy of individualized serial self-reinvention.

## Future directions of theorizing and research

Since the theoretical divisions over reflexivity, briefly discussed above, rest upon much deeper ontological divides, little progress can be expected from a sinking of their differences. Ironically, where these theoretical divisions are least – between ‘structurationists’ and ‘reproductionists’ since both endorse ‘central conflation’ – their empirical differences are greatest, especially concerning the disappearance or durability of social class. Certainly, reconciliations have been attempted: the notion of a ‘flexible habitus’ (Ostrow, 2000; Sweetman, 2003) seeks to link Beck and Bourdieu, but carries concept-stretching to breaking-point as does the idea of ‘hybridizing’ habitus and reflexivity (Adams, 2006). Others have proffered olive branches ‘refining’ Bourdieu and Archer (Elder-Vass, 2007; and to some extent Sayer, 2010) in order to defend the former’s ‘dispositions’ and run them in double harness with the latter’s ‘reflexivity’. Since I cannot see what grants any disposition immunity from reflexive scrutiny and transcendence on the part of the active agent, while Bourdieu foreclosed this by consigning dispositionality to the ‘quasi-unconscious’, prospects for ‘reconciliation’ seem remote.

However, the numbers of those who have come to the defence of ‘habitual action’ are surprising, but are not confined to those keeping Bourdieu’s memory green. They include Critical Realists, such as Elder-Vass, Fleetwood and Sayer (Archer, 2010) but, more predictably come from the ranks of contemporary pragmatists.

Sociologically more creative are the three directions of research stemming from these three separate origins. First, the idea of ‘making a life of one’s own’ has undoubtedly mixed with and swelled the stream of self-narratology into a river. Ethnographically, this often provides vivid vignettes of personal, or more often subcultural, self-invention and reinvention. However, its hallmark is usually an almost exclusive epistemological focus as if the ‘uncertainty’ and/or ‘ambiguity’ of the setting deprives circumstances and situations of any ontological significance – thus accounting for considerable syncretism with post-modernist approaches. Second, Bourdieu’s work on

reflexive methodology (Bourdieu, 1990b) has undoubtedly borne fruit among the one group he designated as collectively capable of detecting and correcting the unconscious forms of heteronomy infecting their practice – the academics (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 136–7). Alvesson and Sköldböck supply a generous array of references, but their foreword shows (2000: vii) what is common to much literature on qualitative methods – the ‘reflective approach’ tends to be taken as synonymous with practising reflexivity.

Those in sympathy with the third strand are increasingly examining diverse modes of reflexivity in relation to a widening panorama of practices and problems: agency (Wiley, 2009) multiculturalism and identity (Donati, 2008, 2009) and the transformation of late modernity (Donati, 2011), prayer (Mouzelis, 2009) organizations (Mutch, 2009), consumption (Garcia-Ruiz and Rodriguez-Lluesma, 2008), strategies for reconstructing life after Soviet hegemony (Mrozowicki, 2009).

### Future theoretic questions

Can we conceive of collective reflexivity? Many would respond negatively because any kind of thinking takes place within individual minds and they will (rightly) have no truck with a group mind. This was also a common response to those philosophers and sociologists who advanced the notion of collective subjectivity (Dominguez, 1995; Gilbert, 1989; Searle, 1995), namely, an invitation to ‘go quietly’ and accept Individualistic Reduction or be anathematized for Holistic reification. Reflexivity is predicated upon subjectivity and shares the same World 2 ontology (Archer, 2007b), but they are not identical. Because reflexivity is also a deliberative mental activity (which is not necessarily the case for intentions and beliefs) presumably the notion of a collective version of it would meet with an even more hostile reception. It is likely to be said that the moment personal reflexive deliberations become shared is also precisely the time at which internal conversations give way to external interpersonal conversation for sharing ideas. Yet, the idea of collective reflexivity is worth airing, especially in the context of collective subjectivity.

Searle’s (1995) defence of the latter is confined to intentional states (beliefs, desires and intentions themselves), as in cases where I am doing something only as part of our doing something – such as playing in a football game or an orchestra, where ‘we intend’ to win the game or execute the piece. In such instances, attempts at individualistic reduction, via ‘I believe that you believe that I believe ...’ and vice versa, cannot ‘add up to a sense of *collectivity*, i.e. ‘a

sense of doing (wanting, believing etc.) together’, where ‘I only intend as part of our intending’ (Searle, 1995: 24–6). It is a good defence, but not watertight. While it can be true that ‘We want to win the game’, it is not necessarily the case that this constitutes collective intentionality because different individual intentions are compatible with it, e.g. particular members wish to win in order to be talent spotted or, in a different kind of play, ‘upstaging’ others in the theatre. Thus, real collective subjectivity implies a genuine commitment to joint action, but the former cannot be deduced from the latter. Yet, such commitment would need to be authentic in order to speak of collective reflexivity. Moreover, from the examples Searle gives, collective intentionality arises from seeking ‘external goods’, which are only attainable through cooperation – no orchestral piece can be performed by one player. But reflexivity pivots upon seeking to realize what we care about most (Frankfurt, 1988) and our ‘ultimate concerns’ themselves concern ‘internal goods’ (MacIntyre, 1981; Sayer, 2005). Being intrinsic, their satisfaction could result without any of the empirical evidence provided by football games. Isn’t the case for collective reflexivity becoming even more dubious?

Vandenberghe (2007) produces a stronger argument for collective subjectivity because he adduces a process through which a mutual alignment of intentions takes place, rather than inducing them from empirical instances of collective action. Justice cannot be done here to the sequence he outlines of communication, goal-sharing, the formation of an *ego–alteri* orientation, leading to coordinated, interlocking and complementary actions whose ‘result is a common achievement, which we jointly and intentionally achieve together’. This works well for activities premised on mutual interdependence for their achievement, as in the development of social movements – Vandenberghe’s concern – as it would for other activities impossible without cooperation. Again, however, these achievements are (or are direct means to) attaining ‘external goods’. Such cooperation does not necessarily require commitment and could cease with the accomplishment of the task. In that case, the outcome would have resulted from similar or combined cost–benefit analysis, in which participants concluded that the collectively produced outcome was desirable but could not be attained alone. Conversely, the very notion of collective reflexivity seems to be dependent upon our wholehearted commitment to the intrinsic desirability of ‘internal goods’.

If collective reflexivity exists, it derives from the relationality of Ego and Alter, and their subjective acknowledgement – under their own descriptions – that it has a *worth surpassing* both of them. In other

words, their relationship has emergent properties and powers that generate ‘relational goods’ (love, trust, friendship, reciprocity) that cannot be produced by aggregation and are *also* deemed highly worthwhile in themselves. As ‘strong evaluators’ (Taylor, 1985), Ego and Alter, the members of a close family or friendship group, work team or superlative orchestra recognize the preciousness of what they have generated together, which cannot be reduced to the sum of each and every contribution and often defies interpersonal substitutions. This recognition means respect, even reverence, for the relational goods generated and concern for the preservation, prolongation and, in different ways, propagation of this worth, which means commitment to fostering the relationship itself.

A collective *concern* for this ‘internal good’ entails reflexive deliberation about the relation *qua* relationship and its well-being. It is collective reflexivity in so far as it has this common focus, this shared intrinsic commitment and this communal experiential basis as beneficiaries of worth unobtainable in any other way. In this manner, the equivalent to ‘Who I am is what I care about’ (Archer, 2000, 2006) for personal identity becomes ‘Who we are is what we care about’ for collective identity. But, ‘“We are what We care about” not because we think in the same way, or because we share external commitments, or because we have mutual intentionality, but because we are in a special relation, and *that* relation is what makes us reflexive in a social, instead of a personal way’ (Donati, personal communication).

There seems no reason why this should not be characterized in the same manner as modes of personal reflexivity: Communicative collective reflexivity practised among the family and closest friends; Autonomous reflexivity for the pragmatics of group well-being; Meta-reflexivity when considering relational enhancement or protection; and Fractured reflexivity if the contingencies of life in an open system including openness to the creativity and destructiveness of others would deprive us of its emergent fruits by destroying the bonds upon which that of great worth is relationally dependent.

This conclusion is speculative, except in one particular. If collective reflexivity exists, it is a relational property of people and one that cannot be attributed to the *systemic* level of the social, which lacks the prerequisites of subjectivity, commitment and a capacity to care. Donati provisionally toyed with establishing a parallel between personal reflexivity and institutional or systemic reflectivity (2011a, 2011b). In our current work together (Donati and Archer forthcoming) we base and defend ‘collective reflexivity’ not on the same thoughts being shared in

different heads, but, rather, by actors and agents generating emergent relational goods and evils and then orienting their actions towards reinforcing/protecting or exacerbating/intensifying these emergents. Thus, the couple, the team, or the members of a voluntary association orient themselves towards the properties and powers of what they generate together, instead of towards other particular persons or typical members. It is then possible to sustain joint action and co-commitment that is grounded in a collective reflexivity that does not depend upon or fall victim to the trap of the double-hermeneutic.

## Annotated further reading

Archer MS (2003) *Structure, Agency and the Internal Conversation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Here it is ventured that reflexivity, exercised through the internal conversation, mediates the effect of structure upon agency, thus avoiding reification and providing better explanatory purchase upon what agents actually do.

Archer MS (2007): *Making our Way through the World: Human Reflexivity and Social Mobility*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Developing the four modes of reflexivity, tentatively identified in 2003 – Communicative, Autonomous, Meta- and Fractured – these are linked to different patterns of social mobility and shown to make different aggregate contributions to social integration, social productivity and social transformation respectively.

Donati P (2010) Reflexivity after modernity: From the viewpoint of relational sociology. In: Archer MS (ed.) *Conversations about Reflexivity*. Routledge London. See also his *Oltre il Multiculturalismo* (2008) Rome and Bari: Laterza.

A rare contribution that discusses social differentiation through reflexivity. It also seeks to link Italian relational sociology and Anglo-American critical realism as the forms of social theory to make most use of reflexivity today.

Elder-Vass D (2007) Reconciling Archer and Bourdieu in an emergentist theory of action. *Sociological Theory* 25.

This represents the strong attachment of many social theorists outside pragmatism to habits and *habitus* and an attempt to run reflexivity and *habitus* in tandem. There is a response and a lively discussion of this issue, with contributions from Andrew Sayer, Frédéric Vandenberghe, Andrea Maccarini, Riccardo Prandini and Norbert Wiley, in *Conversations about Reflexivity* (Archer, ed., 2010).

Wiley N (1994) *The Semiotic Self*. Cambridge: Polity.

The first serious attempt to amalgamate the work of Peirce and Mead into a theory of internal dialogue

between the 'Me', 'I' and 'You'. It represents the retrieval of the reflexive internal conversation after 50 years of neglect.

Wiley N (2006) Inner speech as language: A Saussurian inquiry. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 36(3).

A concise discussion of how the characteristics of inner speech differ from those of ordinary language used in external conversation with an interlocutor.

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**résumé** Après avoir abordé le remplacement de l'«introspection» par la «conversation intérieure» opéré par Peirce, cet article examine le rôle de la réflexivité étendue à l'aune des travaux de Beck, Giddens et Lash puis la met en perspective avec les apports de Bourdieu, qui insiste sur son caractère limité, et avec des propositions récentes qui défendent l'idée d'un «habitus réflexif». A l'inverse, cet article plaide en faveur d'une conception de la réflexivité comme une médiation entre des contextes objectifs structurels et culturels auxquels les agents sont confrontés. Ces derniers activent leurs propriétés comme des contraintes et des éléments qui leur permettent de réaliser des «projets» définis de manière réflexive à partir de leurs préoccupations. L'intensité et l'ampleur croissante de la réflexivité et les différentes modalités selon lesquelles elle est pratiquée sont liées à la pré-modernité, la modernité et la trans-modernité.

**mots-clés** conversation intérieure ♦ introspection ♦ modalités de la réflexivité ♦ morphogenèse ♦ réflexivité collective ♦ structure de médiation

**resumen** Después de revisar el reemplazo de la introspección por la conversación interior efectuado por Peirce, este artículo examina el rol de la reflexividad extendida que ha sido revisado en Beck, Giddens y Lash, después de la cual fue comparado con la perspectiva de Bourdieu sobre su naturaleza limitada, y con los intentos recientes de defender un «habito reflexivo». A la inversa, este artículo argumenta en favor de una concepción de la reflexividad como una mediación entre los contextos objetivos estructurales y culturales por los cuales los agentes se encuentran confrontados. Estos agentes activan sus propiedades como restricciones y los elementos que les permitan perseguir los «proyectos» definidos de forma reflexiva

a partir de sus preocupaciones. El aumento del alcance, rango y modo de la reflexividad y las diferentes modalidades por las cuales la reflexividad está practicada se encuentran liadas a la pre-modernidad, la modernidad y la transmodernidad.

**palabras clave** conversación interna ♦ estructura de mediación ♦ introspección ♦ modos de reflexividad ♦ morfogénesis ♦ reflexividad colectiva