

REFLEXIVITY IN SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY AND SOCIAL ACTION

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Abstract. *The present paper constitutes a theoretical overview of the well-established, yet highly contested, concept of reflexivity as one of the main buzzwords in sociology throughout the last two centuries. Its central aim is to comprehensively describe and critically discuss the changing historical relationships between reflexivity, sociological knowledge and everyday social life. In a rather detailed way, it carefully discerns the complex scientific meaning-making of reflexivity, from phenomenology and ethnomethodology to contemporary critical theory and the sociology of science, and extensively elaborates on its various interconnections to social action. Within this analytic framework, reflexivity is particularly associated with issues of consciousness and meaning, as well as with systematic theoretical efforts of effectively transcending old subject-object or action-structure dualistic dichotomies.*

Key words: *Reflexivity, Scientific Knowledge, Social Epistemology, Meaning, Social Action, Sociological Theory.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The first-generation social sciences, methodologically backed either by positivism or by dialectics, or even by hermeneutics, have created particular pictures of social development. Positivism-inspired social science has proceeded under the aegis of "progress" which, on the one hand, identified itself with the alleged capacity of the scientific mind to construct "pure" concepts and, on the other hand, fabricated collective entities by unifying individual actions, since the individual is the only "non metaphysical" entity. Dialectics-inspired social science has proceeded under the aegis of societal "evolution" and discovered the coincidence between the real and the ideal in revolutionary action, within the prospect of human emancipation as well as of the end of class exploitation. Eventually,

hermeneutics-inspired social science has proceeded under the aegis of "retrospection" – that is, along the lines of retrospective meaning-makings of the past – and in principle retained a historicist orientation.

In addition, social theories are concurrently formulated, in the context of the critique of "Whiggish" approaches to history. The articulation of the idea of "contingency" overwhelmingly counters the strong naturalistic conception of the human sciences and passionately rejects (social or cultural) ethnocentrism. Nevertheless, novel tendencies within social theory systematically attempted either to synthesize or to transcend earlier notions about "continuity" and "contingency". That is the reason for the subsequent formulation of new concepts, like reflexivity. In the first instance, reflexivity attempts to understand the various ways of constructing the social and scientific present, while in the second instance the knowledge of the present helps the creation of a future freed from established orthodoxies.

Those novel tendencies actually converge at the theorization of the human sciences as the mediator between the mental schematizations of the social world and social reality, as well as at the theorization of scientific groups as the main agent of the transformation of social categories. Thus, regarding knowledge as social, they prioritize the reflexivity of scientific groups and their interconnection to the new entities of the social world. This prioritization aims at the creation of a sociological third way between positivism and methodological individualism or varieties of social constructivism. It is therefore obvious that the present article cannot contain the whole range of reflexivity issues; it just places the center of its analytic gravity on particular uses and aspects of reflexivity from a synthetic standpoint.

2. THE SCIENTIFIC MEANING-MAKING OF REFLEXIVITY

Reflexivity enters the social sciences through phenomenology. The most significant phenomenological inscription in the sociological field is attempted by Scheler, who proposes the interaction between "mental forms and positive contents" – that is, between culture and technical civilization – as the "utmost law of sociology". He theorizes human history as occurring "once and for all" and, thus, perceives the search for a "law" governing the chronology of historical events as a "false ideal". Scheler looks for a "... law capable of expressing the agential logic of mental and pragmatic factors, in relation with which ... a particular totality containing groups' lives is built up"¹. So, our analytic attention turns to current interactions as far as the requested "law" does not involve what came up in the course of time but potential future's dynamics.

According to social phenomenology, reflexivity is an essential human capacity and social science constitutes its extension, while it becomes perceived as a second-order construct of indigenous constructs². In addition, phenomenology used the conception of reflexivity as a mental capacity for creation, as well as for the purification of human experience, while elevating "ego cogito" to a transcendental subjectivity. That is, human civilization could be "guided and enlightened by vivid scientific positions and trans-

¹ M. Scheler, *Problèmes de sociologie de la connaissance*, Paris, PUF, 1993, p. 41.

² See A. Schutz, *Collected Papers vol. I. The problem of social reality*, Martinus Nijhoff, la Haye, 1962, p. 48.

formed through them into an autonomous culture³. These new attempts, primarily involving the phenomenology of the scientific mind, became rapidly diffused within the social sciences. Since its starting point is "collectivities" rather than the "cognizing subject", sociology discovers within phenomenology a new possibility for theoretically reconstructing the social world under the prism of individual consciousness.

Such a conception of reflexivity is mainly adopted by ethnomethodology. The central guiding idea here involves the spontaneous synchronization between the mental and the real. Ethnomethodology predominantly focuses on the study of practice – that is, on the unfolding of actions and interactions beginning from the present and orientating to the future – through the study of the relations between "external" and "indigenous" categories⁴. This is achieved by the incorporation of phenomenological reflexivity into the Durkheimian classification theory. Thus, classification theory is mainly expressed by personal antonyms and temporal/spatial adverbs (indexicality), while reflexivity, as an essential human capacity, is responsible for the mobilization of personal experience towards the subjective orientation at the interactional level. Therefore, reflexivity is regarded as an essential capacity adjusting the actors to situations, or to the specific contexts of social phenomena.

Furthermore, the interconnection between reflexivity and critique appears from the early 70s, in the context of distancing the social sciences from ethnocentrism. For example, Alvin Gouldner transcends the methodological and theoretical contexts of ethnomethodology and proposes his "reflexive sociology" as a third way, in order to avoid any identification with an apologetic theory of class ethnocentrism. For Gouldner, the historical mission of reflexive sociology is to enrich the professional life of the sociologist with new sensitivities, as well as to elevate his/her consciousness to a new historical level⁵. So, any project of "reflexive sociology" presupposes a "new praxis" that would transform the sociologist himself/herself. As an ultimate result, our consciousness comes to deeply reflect upon our sociological work and social position. Eventually, reflexive sociology demands a permanent focus on the "value" of sociological consciousness and our devotion to the sociological profession⁶. In sum, what reflexive sociology pursues is not isolation, but the change of the self of the sociologist, and subsequently his praxis in the world⁷.

In the same period, the so-called "Strong Programme" emerges on the basis of the acute critique exercised against Robert Merton's sociological work, as well as of the post-Kuhnian set of problems around the relationship between the sociology of science and the sociology of knowledge. Concurrently, new approaches come into light, with new questions and new answers, involving issues of everyday life, science, different rationalities⁸, knowledge and objectivity⁹, within various intellectual contexts.

The "Strong Programme" in the sociology of science is in principle characterized by a critical mood or, more specifically, by the negative judgement of others' intentions. That

³ E. Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, Athens, Roes, 1993, p. 23.

⁴ D. Watson, "Catégories, Séquentialité et ordre social", *Raisons Pratiques*, no 5, 1994, pp. 151-184.

⁵ See A. Gouldner, "Pour une sociologie réflexive", *La revue du MAUSS*, no 4, 1989, pp. 11-25.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁸ See H. Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall, 1967 - H. Garfinkel, M. Lynch, E. Livingston, "The work of a Discovering science construed with materials from the Optically Discovered Pulsar", *Philosophy of the social sciences*, 11, 1981, pp. 131-158.

⁹ J. Habermas, *Connaissance et intérêt*, Paris, Gallimard University Press, 1976, p. 7.

is, they accuse Thomas Kuhn for his philosophical attempt to save the "sacred" character of science. The first criticisms either involve a form of pragmatism (Bloor) or an ethnomethodologically inspired anthropology (Latour, Woolgar) or various interest-imputing interpretations (MacKenzie, Barnes). In sum, there is a common epistemological aspiration that could be condensed in Bloor's urge to "interpret nature and the content of scientific knowledge"¹⁰. Besides, the sociologist has the obligation to use the same instruments with which he/she studied his/her object for doing self-analysis¹¹. In the last instance, however, the "strong programme" resulted in "asymmetry ... not because of distinguishing science from ideology in epistemological terms, but because of bracketing nature and putting on the side of society the whole burden of explanation"¹². The pragmatist reconsideration of the strong programme's principle of reflexivity obviously serves the goal of a generalized symmetry between science and the social world, aiming to self-consciously prevent sociology from pretending the detached observer¹³.

This reconsideration, which has derived from several parallel intellectual movements (including post-structuralism, constructivism, feminism, discourse analysis, ethnomethodology and post-modernism) during the 1980s, eventually yields the model of the "network of things" (associating with both humans and non-humans) which in turn produce new things, circulate "semi-subjects", and have a significant impact on social structures¹⁴. Thus, the transformed objects of nature emerge as "social actors"¹⁵ who embody both the social and the scientific history. In this respect, reflexivity is closely connected to the concept of "network", since "... scientific objects circulate in a parallel way as subjects, objects and discourse"¹⁶. The "embodied history" offers social actors the possibility for coping with the asymmetry between nature and society, or between natural sciences and humanities. As Latour more recently asserts, if the only source of creativity is the reflection of science upon its past, then, the only valid designer of the future is the one who can solve the problems of the present, that is, science itself. By this move, the history of society becomes fully embodied within the history of science¹⁷.

Yet, during the 1980s, the research focus is increasingly turned towards the articulation between social categories and human sciences. For example, some currents in anthropology locate reflexivity within a perspective of methodological univocality¹⁸, while the "post-modern" anthropological trends proceed in the inversion of "double hermeneutics"¹⁹. In general, the development of the so-called "cultural critique" includes reflexivity in the theoretical framework of the "critique of ethnocentrism". Of course, this involves

¹⁰ D. Bloor, *Sociologie de la logique, les limites de l'épistémologie*, Tr. Fr. Paris coll Pandore, 1982, p. 3.

¹¹ See D. Bloor, *Knowledge and social imagery*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1976, p. 7.

¹² B. Latour, *We have never been modern*, Athens, Synalma, 2000, p. 155.

¹³ See L. Boltanski et L. Thévenot, *De la Justification: Les économies de la grandeur*, Paris, Gallimard, 1991.

¹⁴ See B. Latour, *The pasteurization of France*, Harvard, Harvard University Press, 1988.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

¹⁶ B. Latour, *We have never been modern*, p. 112.

¹⁷ See B. Latour, *L'espoir de Pandora: Pour une version réaliste de la science*, Paris, La Deconverte, 2001, pp. 87-95.

¹⁸ D. Foley, "Critical ethnography", in *The postmodern turn: New perspectives on Social Theory*, Cambridge University Press, 1994.

¹⁹ S. Seidman, "The end of Sociology", in *The postmodern turn: New perspectives on social Theory*, Cambridge University Press, 1994.

"self-reflexivity", which takes the form of psychological introspection and intends to restore univocality. Self-reflexivity can thus be defined as the negation of the evolutionary ideal as well as of the social categories created in the context of previous theoretical conceptions²⁰.

During the 1990s, the research focus turned, on the one hand, towards the history of institutions, the formation of which is performatively contributed by the social sciences, and, on the other hand, towards a debate involving the mutual development between the social world and the social sciences. In the first case, the main area of study is the concurrent interrogation of the history of democracy and of the history of the subject through the social scientific mediations. So, reflexivity is a kind of "historicization" of the social institutions as well as of the relevant social theories²¹. In the second case, the problem of the reflexive relationship between the social world and the social sciences is resolved in two ways: either at the level of "reflexive individualization" (Beck, Giddens, Lash), or at the level of the conception of a wider transformation where reflexivity covers the temporal dimension and social identities the spatial one²².

The notion of "reflexive relationship" is suggested to help sociology escape from the crisis which resulted from the total eclipse of the consensus among classical theories. Hence, within the perspective of the "re-integration" of sociology, the concept of "double hermeneutics" emerges as the most fundamental underpinning of the theory of "reflexive modernity". In his attempt to transcend the binary opposition between critical rationalism (Popper) and historicism (Kuhn), Giddens proposes the conception of "frame of meaning" referring to hermeneutics²³. Double hermeneutics involves the self-understanding of modern science, through social science. In this case, the social sciences construct the self-image of the social world, while all knowledge claims in conditions of modernity are inherently circular.

This brings us right to the intriguing complexity of Pierre Bourdieu's work, where the notion of the "self-observed observer", as well as of the positional standpoint from the inside of the "scientific field", poses as a general methodological stance²⁴. In addition, the ability of the critical sociologist to reflect upon his/her relationship with the sociological object, as well as upon his/her own intellectual activity, allows for the betterment of sociological analysis. Besides, the starting point for studying the social lies in what the French sociologist famously calls "participant objectivation" (objectivation participante)²⁵. Thus, Bourdieu's sociology is "a reflexive sociology which invites the sociologist in an attempt of self-socioanalysis ... aiming to make his research more rigorous"²⁶.

Bourdieu systematically used the term "reflexivity" during the 90s, with the emergence of a new analytic conflict between rationalism and relativism. By adopting "reflex-

²⁰ See, for example, M. Codeliez, *Brisez le miroir du soi*, Christian Chaserion, *De l'ethnographie à l'anthropologie réflexive*, Paris, Armand Colin, 2002.

²¹ P. Rosanvallon, *Le Peuple introuvable*, Paris, Gallimard, 1998, p. 355.

²² G. Therborn, "At the birth of second century sociology: Time of reflexivity, spaces of identity, and nodes of knowledge", *British Journal of Sociology*, 2000, 51(1): 37-57.

²³ A. Giddens, *New rules of sociological Method*, London, Hutchinson, 1976, p. 142.

²⁴ See P. Bourdieu, *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique*, Paris, Droz, 1972 - P. Bourdieu, *Le sens pratique*, Paris, ed. de Minuit, 1980.

²⁵ P. Bourdieu, "Sur l'objectivation participante", *A.R. S.S.*, no 23, 1978.

²⁶ P. Corcuff, *Les nouvelles sociologies*, Paris, Nathan, 1995, p. 40.

ivity" as a basic methodological stance, he mainly attacks scholasticism. At the knowledge level, the so-called "scholastic stance" is discerned in structural and hermeneutic anthropology, as well as in the "rational individual" of economic theory. The scholastic stance entails two different types of epistemocentrism. The first type, which is related to structuralism, identifies scientific thought with reality (through reality models). The second type, which is related to various hermeneutic currents in anthropology, implies that scientific thought, through reflexively transcending indigenous patterns of perception, can accomplish its universal generalisation²⁷.

Bourdieu's critique comprehensively opposes the theoretical arrogance of scholasticism, asserting that "... the subject of reflexivity, in the last instance, should be the very field of the social sciences"²⁸. Reflexive activity, since it refers to the theoretical field of sociology's knowledge objects and amounts to a process of "intellectual socioanalysis", exposes the "constructedness" of the scientific game, and not "... the game in its totality"²⁹. According to Bourdieu, reflexivity must include the social dimension of knowledge production, as well as the various effects of the intellectual fields and interests³⁰. He regards that the term "double historicization" leads to a socially and historically specific "autoanalysis" of the field of the social sciences in relation to the conditions which enabled its creation. The "double historicization" amounts to a two-level historical analysis. The first level, which covers the historical "autoanalysis", includes, on the one hand, the traditional sociological variables (class, gender, ethnicity) and, on the other hand, the relative social location in the "field". The second level includes the general history of "the field of the social sciences". Such a version of reflexivity involves not only the sociological theories and their agents, but also the social conditions in which they have been developed.

This dual historical analysis ultimately allows for the emergence of the field of the social sciences as the only form of subjectivity that constructs and re-constructs social reality. Hence, reflexivity refers to the knowledge of the history of social-scientific accumulation and amounts to a fundamental condition for the universality of the social sciences, while eschewing various forms of theoretical dogmatism or relativism. In this context, reflexivity is supposed to "allow for the historicization of rationality, since it shows that the progress of knowledge and its regulation is inscribed within the very structure of the scientific field"³¹. Therefore, reflexivity also allows for the rationalization of historicism, since nobody rejects progress, without refusing the continuous adjustment of critique³². In consequence, submitting reason to historicization "... can root out historical relativisation and the arbitrary, showing the way in which rules and norms of social games are enacted "... into objects and bodies"³³. Eventually, the absence of reflexivity subjects sociologists to "... the desires of their own customs ... departure for their opinions and errors"³⁴.

²⁷ See P. Bourdieu, *Méditations Pascaliennes*, Paris, Seuil, 1997, p. 66.

²⁸ See P. Bourdieu, *Réponses: Pour une anthropologie réflexive*, Paris, Seuil, 1992, p. 35.

²⁹ P. Bourdieu, *Science de la science et réflexivité*, Paris, Raisons d'agir, 2001, p. 37.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

³¹ A. Georgoulas, *Social Theory Policies: Social Structures and Categories of Thought*, Athens, Gutenberg, 2006, p. 342.

³² P. Bourdieu, *Science de la science*, pp. 141-165.

³³ P. Bourdieu, *Méditations Pascaliennes*, *ibid.*, p. 113.

³⁴ P. Bourdieu, *Science de la science*, *ibid.*, p. 43.

3. REFLEXIVITY AND SOCIAL ACTION

The theories of social action involve syntheses between externalism and internalism, which interconnect the standpoint from which the subjects see the world to their position in the very structure of social relations. This historicization of social theory relates the history of social actions to the theoretical history of the social sciences. Besides, there is no single, coherent conception of social action within the field of sociology. That has resulted from the antagonistic co-existence and shifting boundaries of sociological currents. In other words, there is an on-going process of transformation, synthesis and interaction at the level of theory and knowledge.

W. Dilthey was one of the first who posed a sharp distinction between "mechanical events", which are observable in nature, and "facts referring to the consciousness and will" of social actors – what Husserl calls "intentional facts". Dilthey drew on the Kantian philosophical heritage in order to systematically study the world of will, conscience and action. In particular, he refers to the distinction between taken-for-granted judgments (involving numerical logic) and reflexive judgments (involving issues like the knowledge of aesthetics). In Dilthey's case, reflexivity is operationalized through the term "lived experience"³⁵.

For interpretative sociology's tradition, the social actor understands his/her action in a relational manner. That is, every human act has an interactive character. Dilthey is aware of this "character" and that is why he uses the concept of "collective interaction" (ensembles interactifs). Besides, according to him, no human action is meaningful without being based on rules and behaviours understandable to the wider community³⁶. For "symbolic interaction", the particularity of human action is located in the fact it puts in motion a web of mutual intentional actions based on a common understanding of symbols. Subsequently, common actions are possible because of this "common understanding of symbols" which enables the "symbolic interactions" between social members. Such a symbolic capacity urges the individual to become an object of his/her self – that is, to gain a reflexive capacity. However, animals could never take control of the aim to become objects of themselves as a whole. This signifies the highest expression of sociality because, during such a process, the subject turns into itself and coordinates itself³⁷.

In any case, both the system of norms – or the "generalized other" (de l'autrui généralisée) – and sociality (conceived as a general system of linguistic symbols) are interconnected to "I" through "self-consciousness". According to H. Mead, this kind of self-reflexivity is fundamental at two levels. First, the act of goal-setting isolates the fact from its own setting or, in Mead's terms, it turns facts into objects. In this respect, all subjective acts become meaningful to the extent to which they are indeed important for the pre-defined goals. Second, subjective action is not a mere "release"; it is the upshot of a mentally constructed and processed activity. So, action is constituted step-by-step, on the basis of the self-indication process. Self-indication is a dynamic process in which the subject evaluates and gives meaning to experience. Social action presupposes participation and engagement in a commonly meaningful world that enables collective action. In other

³⁵ See W. Dilthey, "Introduction aux sciences de l'esprit", in *Critique de la raison historique, tome 1*, Paris, Editions du Cerf, 1883, pp. 147-362.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ G. H. Mead, *The Philosophy of the present*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1980, pp. 85-86.

words, participation, communication, and exchange of signs refer to a commonly meaningful world, as well as a predictable common action.

Consequently, it is engagement in a collective activity that structures the possibility of communication, not vice versa³⁸. Meaning is not based on the psychological constitution of the individual, but on the "structure of social praxis"³⁹. Therefore, any human act produces meaning only if it contains the element of reflexivity, which ensures the presence of symbolic consciousness⁴⁰. Rational elements activated in an interaction are connected to experiences whose durability "is relative to the condition where reflexivity is produced..."⁴¹. Such a viewpoint is in line with Mead's argument that the essence of "I" pertains to a cognitive order. Thus, the process of thinking and internalizing the "generalized other" (de l' autre généralise) is "... the very first stage of experience in the creation and development of the self"⁴².

According to ethnomethodology, the social world is a natural world which contains a common stock of knowledge and precedes any individual person. Subjects appropriate this common stock with respect to their goals. The description or interpretation of facts (reflexively categorized by social members) and the performative accounts of daily action are regarded as the elementary basis on which the re-construction of the social world takes place⁴³. In this viewpoint, social facts are not imposed as an "objective reality"; they must be perceived as realization practices⁴⁴. That is, ethnomethodologists champion the on-going realizations of life-world activities over the objectification of social facts and structures. In consequence, social reality is not ontologically or discursively prior; it is continuously "achieved" in the course of our everyday interaction⁴⁵. In the setting of this reflexive capacity, however, ethnomethodology decontextualizes thought categories from their structural presupposition, in order to re-locate them on the subjective experience of facts. In other words, ethnomethodology attempts to avoid the influential presence of structural factors, such as symbols, institutional arrangements, or stereotypical social roles.

According to Niklas Luhmann, the encounter of two social actors is not the upshot of symbolic exchanges (based on rules of action), but the consequence of what he calls "double contingency", due to common expectations. Luhmann does not theorize interaction as an inter-subjective relationship, but as a communicative relationship in the course of "autopoiesis". The latter relationship is highly vulnerable and, thus, not easily renewable. On the contrary, organization coordinates the present and the future of interaction, and renders decisions (taken within organizations) acceptable⁴⁶. For Luhmann, there is a communicative differentiation of social systems, which determines their reflexive autopoiesis. That means, reflexivity is systemic⁴⁷.

³⁸ See G. H. Mead, *L'esprit, le soi et la société*, Paris, PUF, 1973, p. 73.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 69.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 90.

⁴¹ Ibid., note 2, p. 77.

⁴² Ibid., p. 147.

⁴³ See H. Sacks, *Lectures on conversation*, London, Blackwell, 1995.

⁴⁴ See H. Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, ibid., p. 15.

⁴⁵ See N. Katrivesis, *Sociological Theory: Contemporary Currents in Sociological Thought*, Athens, Gutenberg, 2004, p. 204.

⁴⁶ See J. Clam, *Droit et société chez N. Luhmann. La contingence des normes*, Paris, PUF, 1997.

⁴⁷ J. M. Vincent, "La société de Niklas Luhmann", *Cahiers internationaux de Sociologie*, Vol. CVII, 1999, p. 359.

Following a different strand of thought, Giddens rejects any dualistic conception of the social world, which methodically opposes objectivity to subjectivity, social reality to social constructions, structure to agency. In this context, the term "duality of the structure" achieves a strategic role, in the sense that no ontological priority is given to structure and no logical or chronological priority is given to individual action. According to Giddens, such a term denotes a fundamental conclusion: social structures and human action entail each other⁴⁸. Put differently, social structures, which are reflexively produced and reproduced in everyday practices, both enable and constrain agency.

In the same spirit, Bourdieu distances himself from any reductive, dualistic approach. For instance, the habitus theory refers to a methodological attempt to re-pose the problem of social agency (annihilated by structuralists). In contrast to philosophical or anthropological structuralism which reduce active actors to mere structural agents or mere performers of norms and models, Bourdieu asserts that agents do not simply "follow rules"; they can also design tactics and strategies. Agency should not be equated to the mechanical implementation of a rule, or obedience to a rule. Social agents are not ... "automatically regulated, like clocks, ... Habitus produces strategies .. objectively adjusted to the situation"⁴⁹.

Although he does not proceed in analyzing practical strategies from the starting point of agential subjectivity, Giddens uses psychoanalytic conceptions. Beginning from the active self (le soi agissant), which involves the "model of actor's social stratification"⁵⁰, the British sociologist makes a distinction between "discursive consciousness", "practical consciousness" (which results from the reflexive capacity and is constantly "committed to the wave of everyday behaviours"⁵¹), and the "unconscious" that offers the subject a general cluster of inclinations. Both "discursive consciousness" and "practical consciousness" are connected to everyday life, where agency lies in "ontological security" – that is, a common sense about social relations.

Practical consciousness lies not only in the unconscious but also in the non-conscious knowledge about social rules, which enables social actors to manage social relationships⁵². The actors' capacity to reflect on the motives of their actions paves the way for the emergence of discursive consciousness. However, both "discursive consciousness" and "practical consciousness" lead us to "psychological mechanisms of retrospection, which operate in the settings of action"⁵³. In this respect, within the context of reflexivity, all human beings remain, in a regular way, in contact with the fundamental reasons of their activities⁵⁴. For Giddens, the concurrent utilization of "reflexivity" and "practical consciousness" seems to solve the problem of how the practical ingenuity of ordinary actors in their ongoing reflexive accomplishment of social order can be combined with an absence of full rational control over action⁵⁵.

⁴⁸ A. Giddens, *New Rules of sociological method*, *ibid.*, p. 120.

⁴⁹ P. Bourdieu, *Choses dites*, Paris, ed. de Minuit, 1987, p. 19, 21.

⁵⁰ A. Giddens, *La constitution de la société*, Paris, PUR, 1987, p. 90.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁵² See A. Giddens, "Modernity and self-identity. Self and Society", in *The Late Modern Age*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1991, p. 36.

⁵³ A. Giddens, *La constitution de la société*, p. 97.

⁵⁴ A. Giddens, *The consequences of Modernity*, Oxford, Polity Press, 1990, p. 31.

⁵⁵ See A. Giddens, *New rules of sociological method*, *ibid.*, p. 164.

On the other hand, Bourdieu's sociology of practice starts from criticizing those approaches which unnecessarily constrain "agency" within sociological analysis, at the expense of the "practical attitude" of the observed. From this standpoint, intellectualism is seen as a tendency to inscribe the intellectualist relation in the object of study (underestimating the practical relation)⁵⁶. In these terms, intellectualism amounts to a kind of objectivism which approaches social action from outside and, in the last instance, transforms it into an object of sociological knowledge without including the particular relationship between agency and the agent, as well as between the observer and the observed. Bourdieu opposes the intellectualist/theoreticist stance to a practical relational logic. Thus, for a set of actions, we can "move from practice to practice without passing from ideological discourse to conscience"⁵⁷.

In his analysis, Bourdieu distinguishes between the observer, who reflects upon his/her action, and the social agent, who acts according to the "logic of practice" that works in the context of habitus, situation, or embodiment (but not reflexivity). of course, this kind of agency does not require any conscious rational analysis; it is performed with the help of possessed predispositions which are unconsciously operationalized. Habitus is an unlimited source of free production of thoughts, perceptions, expressions and actions, which are always conditioned by the historical and social bases of their production⁵⁸. The repetition of experiences and behaviours enables the agents to progressively gain a measure of practical ingenuity, as well as an inclination to act, to express, or to think in a specific way.

Consequently, habitus is the matrix of schemes of perception, as well as the "generative grammar of practices"⁵⁹. Under this prism, no space is allowed for a reflexive pragmatism, except for periods of crisis, where prior experiences, dispositions, or possessed inclinations, cannot efficiently answer the questions posed by new life challenges⁶⁰. In general, although Bourdieu distances himself from Giddens's model, a "duality of the structure" overwhelmingly enters his work, in different conceptual terms. For instance, the concept of habitus seems to be the by-product and, at the same time, the generative "principle" of the structural conditions of society⁶¹, towards the prospect of transcending the subject-object dualism.

Ultimately, Bourdieu, like Giddens, links social theorizing with psychological terms. Habitus, as shown above, describes a system of durable dispositions, schemes of perception, inclinations and modes of action. In the last instance, those terms refer to different dimensions of practice. Particularly, in the issue of the emergence of social practices, interpretations reach "... psychological mechanisms of information selection, even the unconscious"⁶². However, conceptions like "practical consciousness" and "habitus" appear in both authors as mediating terms, between structure and agency, without further elaboration of the mechanisms which operationalize them⁶³.

⁵⁶ See P. Bourdieu, *Le sens pratique*, Paris, ed. de Minuit, 1980, p. 58.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

⁵⁸ See P. Bourdieu, *Le sens pratique*, *ibid.*, p. 80.

⁵⁹ P. Bourdieu, *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique*, *ibid.*, p. 178.

⁶⁰ See P. Bourdieu, *Reponses*, *ibid.*, p. 107.

⁶¹ P. Bourdieu, *Le sens pratique*, *ibid.*, p. 94.

⁶² Ph. Braud, *L'émotion en politique*, Paris, P.P.S.P., 1996, p. 35.

⁶³ See A. Joignant, "Agent, structure et cognition. Questions de recherche à partir de la sociologie de P. Bourdieu et A. Giddens", *Cahiers internationaux de Sociologie*, Vol. CVIII, 2000, p. 191.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

No doubt, the reflexive process is multi-dimensional and highly ambivalent. Through self-reference, reflexivity looks for inspiration, as well as for purification from loaded conceptions, but also for a re-formulation of fundamental value orientations. The search and critique of the past of sociology brings our discipline in confrontation with subjectivism. Yet it cannot transcend the elementary matrix on which concepts and symbols have been formulated. That is, the notion of reflexivity constitutes the very beginning for a new meaning-making of categories of thought.

In sum, reflexivity must not be treated as a "sacred cow". Consequently, on the one hand, reflexivity-inspired social scientific "explanatory patterns" should be applied to the social sciences themselves and, on the other hand, the concepts or paradigms "constructed" by the social sciences should be included in the historical conditions of the work of "construction". In this viewpoint, epistemological phenomena are included in the same process – that is, the process of the transformation of the contingent social world as well as of the schemes of its perception. Thus, transformation as a process, inasmuch as it is an outcome of the interaction between the social world and the social science, given that the latter creates some of the "surfaces" of the projection and meaning-production of the former, can be understood and interpreted through a sociology of the social sciences and the social scientific knowledge. However, we should keep in mind that social categories and mental structures are not autonomous cultural and scientific facts; on the contrary, they constitute an integral part of the political and class structures. So, the social sciences, on the one hand, produce socially oriented categories of thought and, on the other hand, somehow, legitimize in themselves the existing power relations.

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REFLEKSIVNOST U SOCIOLOŠKOJ TEORIJI I DRUŠTVENOJ AKCIJI

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Ovaj rad pruža teorijski pregled dobro utemeljenog, a opet veoma osporavanog koncepta refleksivnosti, kao jedne od najčešće ponavljanih reči u sociologiji tokom poslednja dva veka. Njegov osnovni cilj je da detaljno opiše i kritički razmotri promenljive istorijske odnose između refleksivnosti, sociološkog znanja i svakodnevnog društvenog života. Na dubinski način, rad pažljivo razmatra složeno naučno značenje – izgradnju refleksivnosti, od fenomenologije i etnometodologije do savremene kritičke teorije i sociologije nauke, te detaljno izučava njenu povezanost sa društvenom akcijom. U okviru takvog analitičkog okvira, refleksivnost se naročito vezuje za probleme svesti i značenja, kao i za sistematske teoretske napore da se efikasno prevaziđu stare dualističke dihotomije, poput subjekta-objekta i akcije-strukture.

Ključne reči: *refleksivnost, naučno znanje, socijalna epistemologija, značenje, društvena akcija, sociološka teorija*