Realism and the Problem of Mediation between Structure and Agency

Margaret S. Archer

(DRAFT: not for citation)

ABSTRACT

Although Realists have been clear that 'structure' and 'agency' represent different sets of emergent properties and powers, the process of mediation between them has been under-theorised. Structural conditioning is generally held to operate through 'constraints and enablements'. However, these have to be exercised upon something determinate, namely 'projects' as conceived of and pursued by human agents. Therefore, two sets of causal powers are involved: *objective* structures and *subjective* projects. It is the latter which are under-theorised and call for realist theory of agency in order to grasp: (a) how actors and agents reflexively conceive of 'projects'; (b) how the strategic pursuit of projects activates, suspends or circumvents the constraining powers of social forms; and (c) how agents reflexively monitor themselves and their social circumstances in the attempt to realise their concerns in society.>

From the beginning, Realists have consistently recognised that 'structure' and 'agency' are distinct and irreducible parts of stratified social reality, each with their own properties and powers. Equally, they have accepted that it is the interplay between structure and agency which is responsible for social transformation and

social reproduction. This is central to Bhaskar's 'Transformational Model of Social Action' as it is to my own Morphogenetic Apprroach. However, considerably more effort has been devoted to conceptualising how structural and cultural properties are transmitted to agents, and then work as conditional influences upon them, than has been given to the other side of the equation, namely, how they are received and responded to by agents in return. It is this one-sidedness that I seek to redress in this paper.[1]

Basically, it is the interaction of two sets of causal powers which determine how structure conditions agency. On the one hand, structural and cultural properties tendentially influence agents (both individual and collective) by exercising the powers of constraints and enablements in relation to different courses of action - both potential and actual. On the other hand, agents own reflexive powers allow them to deliberate about which projects would realise their personal (and corporate) concerns within society and to act strategically in order to promote their concerns. *The mediation of structural conditioning by agency is what happens at the nexus where these two sets of causal powers intersect and interact.*

Conceptualisation of this mediatory process is one of the weakest parts of social theorising in general. It seems self-evident that the accounts proffered by 'upwards conflationists' and 'downwards conflationists' are bound to be unsatisfactory because each of them only recognises that one set of causal powers is in play. The agential voluntarism of the former neglects irreducible constraints and enablements; the structural determinism of the latter ignores the ineradicable, reflexive powers of agency. Although 'central conflationists' do indeed acknowledge that two sets of powers are involved, analysis of their interplay is by-passed because of the denial that these are distinctive emergent powers pertaining to different 'levels' of stratified social reality. Hence, the elision of structural instantiation with transformative potential produces the well-known voluntaristic bias, favouring transformatory agential powers, in Giddens; and the eliding of the positional with the dispositional induces the opposite deterministic bias, favouring structural powers of reproduction, in Bourdieu. Nevertheless, it remains the case that although social

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[1] This is the subject of my current book, *Human Reflexivity: Mediating between Structure and Agency.*

realists have fully respected the distinctiveness of structural and agential powers, realism has never supplied a full account of the process of mediation taking place between them.

However, realism's stratified social ontology already presumes that any process of mediation necessarily entails two sets of emergent powers; those pertaining to structure and culture (SEPs and CEPs) and those pertaining to agency, as personal emergent powers (PEPs). Therefore, we are inevitably dealing with the *interplay of their causal powers* when discussing the mediation of constraints and enablements, as with everything else about the interaction of structure and agency.

The general claim made here is that insufficient attention has been given to personal emergent powers (PEPs) when theorising about the mediatory process. This is important because we are not just dealing with a *confluence or conjunction* of structural and agential powers, where what is decisive is their congruence or incompatibility. That can be appropriate when dealing with two sets of inanimate properties and powers; but here, one set is inanimate and the other is animate. Emergent structural and cultural properties are as they are, at any given time, but the exercise of their powers as constraints and enablements has to be activated or caused to be suspended. Constraints may vary in their degrees of stringency from case to case, and in their impact upon groups in the same case, but they obviously have no capacity to monitor or to control their own imposition.

Conversely, the agential property of reflexivity means that people can indeed do things like monitoring their environments, controlling themselves if not their circumstances, and reflexively determining what strategic course of action to adopt. Given this difference, we should surely expect agential deliberations to affect *how* 'the causal powers of social forms is mediated through social agency'. [2] Furthermore, we could reasonably expect that such deliberations would not produce standardised outcomes, uniform for all those who are similarly placed, but would instead display personal variability. It would then follow that we would have succeeded in explaining *why* even the most stringent structural or cultural constraint or the most generous

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[2] Roy Bhaskar, *The Possibility of Naturalism*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, Hemel Hempstead, 1989, p 25-6.

enablement does not work like a hydraulic pressure. Sociological explanations, which often still implicitly work in terms of 'pushes' and 'pulls', could finally shed their covert version of 'social mechanics'. Until then, the realist statement that the 'causal power of social forms is mediated through social agency' may rightly repudiate reification, but it remains far too indefinite finally to put social mechanics to rest. That is, whilst ever realists remain silent about the mediatory process denoted by that word 'through'.

Socio-cultural constraints and enablements and human projects

There are no such things as constraints and enablements *per se*, for they are not entities. These are causal powers which are internal to structural and cultural emergent properties: to SEPs as distributions, organisations or institutions, and to CEPs, such as propositions, theories or doctrines. To constrain and to enable are transitive verbs; they have to impede or to facilitate something. As with all such causal powers, they can remain unexercised and it is a wholly contingent matter whether they are activated or suffered. In other words, constraints and enablements do not posses an intrinsic capacity for constraining and enabling in general. For anything to exert the power of a constraint or an enablement, it has to stand in a relationship such that it obstructs or aids the achievement of some specific enterprise. The generic name given to such enterprises is 'projects' - and only human agents can hold them in a developed form.

In short, constraints and enablements derive from structural and cultural emergent properties (SEPs and CEPs). They have the generative power to impede or to facilitate projects of different kinds from groups of agents who are differentially placed. However, the activation of these causal powers is utterly contingent upon agents conceiving and pursuing projects upon which they would impact. Otherwise, constraints and enablements remain unexercised. Because they are relatively enduring, SEPs and CEPs retain their generative potential to exert constraints or enablements *were* anyone or any group to adopt a project upon which they would impinge.

In other words, it is essential to distinguish between the existence of structural

and cultural properties and the exercise of their causal powers. Properties pertain to structures and cultures: for example, science will always now contain the knowledge necessary for the construction of nuclear bombs, whatever global prohibitions on their manufacture may be passed. Conversely, whether constraints or enablements are exercised as causal powers is contingent upon agency embracing the kinds of projects upon which they can impact. Moreover and crucially, *the exercise of constraints and enablements will only be a tendential influence because of human reflexive abilities to withstand them and strategically to circumvent them.* The effect of these socio-cultural causal powers is therefore at the mercy of two open systems: the world and its contingencies and the human agent's reflexive ingenuity, creativity and commitment.

The Need for Realism's Agent

Yet to gain any explanatory purchase upon the projects which agents reflexively conceive and pursue we need a fuller conception of 'realism's agent'. This I sought to provide in *Being Human: The Problem of Agency,* after putting forward the argument that agents who possessed a *continuous sense of self* (or, in other words, were reflexively self-conscious) represented a transcendentally necessary condition for the very existence of society. The following section summarises those sources of individual difference (or concrete singularity) which enable people to conceive of different projects within the world in general and society in particular. This entails no concession to individualism because such projects *may* be intra-personally conceived, but even if so, they are then modified by collective actors (social movements, interest groups, pressure groups, parties etc) by being subjected to inter-personal scrutiny.

The Emergence of Personal Identity

The emergence of a continuous *sense of self* arises from our placement in the world, rather than being narrowly dependent upon our sociality. In addition to their crucial capacity to know themselves to be the same agent over time, they also become the bearers of further emergent properties and powers which are what make them recognisable as subjects who respond differently to the world and act within it to change it. The next step is therefore to account for the emergence of the *personal*

identity of agents, derived from their interactions with the world, its natural, practical and social orders. However, *personal identity* depends upon the prior emergence of a *sense of self*, because the latter has to secure the fact that the three orders of reality are all impinging on the same subject - who knows it reflexively.

Fundamentally, *personal identity* is a matter of what we care about in the world. Constituted as we are, and the world being the way it is, humans ineluctably interact with the three different orders of reality, the natural, practical and social. Humans necessarily have to sustain organic relationships, work relationships and social relationships if they are to survive and thrive. Therefore we cannot afford to be indifferent to the concerns which are embedded in our relations to all three orders.

Our emotional development is part of this interaction because emotions convey the import of different kinds of situations to us. In other words, the natural order, the practical order and the discursive order are the intentional objects to which the emergence of three different clusters of emotions are related. Because emotions are seen as 'commentaries upon our concerns', then emotionality is our reflexive response to the world. A distinct type of concern derives from each of these three orders. The concerns at stake are respectively those of 'physical well-being' in relation to the natural order, 'performative competence' in relation to the practical order and 'self-worth' in relation to the social order.

- In nature human beings (and many animals) have the power to *anticipate* what the import of environmental occurrences will be for their *bodily well-being*. Anticipation is the key to affect. We know what the bodily consequences of fire or icy water will be, and somatically this is projected as fear; if we did not anticipate it there would be nothing other than the pain of the event. It is from the interaction between environmental circumstances and embodied concerns that, because we are conscious beings, we can anticipate their conjunction and supply this to ourselves as an emotional commentary. The relationship between properties of the environment and of our embodiment are sufficient for the emergence of emotions like fear, anger, disgust and relief.

- In the practical order there is a distinct cluster of emotions which are emergent from our subject/object relations and which concern our *performative achievement*. These are the two strings made up of frustration, boredom and depression, on the

one hand, and satisfaction, joy, exhilaration and euphoria, on the other. The task/undertaker relationship is quintessentially that of subject confronting object and what exactly goes on between them is known to the subject alone. Each task makes its own demands upon the undertaker, if a skilled performance is to be produced. It thus carries its own standards which give the undertaker either positive or negative feedback. In other words, the sense of failure and sense of achievement are reflected emotionally. Positive emotions foster continued practice and negative affect predisposes towards its cessation.

- In the social order we cannot avoid becoming a subject among subjects and with it come 'subject-referring properties' (such as admirable or shameful) which convey the import of normativity to our own concerns in society. Generically, the most important of our social concerns is our *self-worth* which is vested in certain projects (career, family, community, club or church) whose success or failure we take as vindicating our worth or damaging it. It is because we have invested ourselves in these social projects that we are susceptible of emotionality in relation to society's normative evaluation of our performance in these roles. Our behaviour is regulated by hopes and fears, that is anticipations of social approbation/disapprobation. Simply to be a role incumbent has no such emotional implications – pupils who vest none of their self-worth in their school performance are not downcast by examination failure. Therefore, it is our own definitions of what constitutes our self-worth that determines which normative evaluations matter enough for us to be emotional about them.

However, a dilemma now confronts all people. It arises because every person receives all three kinds of emotional commentaries on their concerns, originating from each of the orders of reality - natural, practical and social. Because they have to live and attempt to thrive in the three orders simultaneously, they must necessarily, in some way and to some degree, attend to all three clusters of commentaries. This is their problem. Nothing guarantees that the three sets of first-order emotions dovetail harmoniously, and therefore it follows that the concerns to which they relate cannot all be promoted without conflict arising between them. For example, an evasive response to the promptings of physical fear can threaten social self-worth by producing cowardly acts; cessation of an activity in response to boredom in the practical domain can threaten physical well-being; and withdrawal as a response to social shaming may entail a loss of livelihood. In other

words, momentary attention to pressing commentaries may literally produce instant gratification of concerns in one order, but it is a recipe for disaster since we have no alternative but to inhabit the three orders simultaneously, and none of their concerns can be bracketed-away for long. It is only on rather rare occasions that a particular commentary has semi-automatic priority, as in escaping a fire, undertaking a test or getting married.

Most of the time, each person has to work out their own *modus vivendi* in relation to the three orders. What it entails is striking a liveable balance within our trinity of inescapable concerns. This *modus vivendi* can prioritise one of the three orders of reality, as with someone who is said to 'live for their art', but what it cannot do is entirely to neglect the other orders. Yet, which precise balance we strike between our concerns, and what precisely figures amongst an individual's concerns, are what gives us our strict identity as *particular persons*. Eventually our emergent *personal identities* are a matter of how we prioritise one concern as our 'ultimate concern' and how we subordinate but yet accommodate others to it, because, constituted as we are, we cannot be unconcerned about how we fare in all three orders of reality. Because these concerns can never be exclusively social, and since the *modus vivendi* is worked out by an active and reflexive agent, *personal identity* cannot be the gift of society.

That we all have concerns in the natural, practical and social orders is ineluctable, but exactly *which* concerns, and in precisely *what* configuration, is a matter of human reflexivity. We reflect on our priorities, evaluate them and, in the process, we 'transvalue' our emotions. The process of arriving at a configuration, which prioritises our 'ultimate concerns' and accommodates others to them, is both cognitive and affective: it entails both judgements of worth and an assessment of whether we care enough to be able to live with the costs and trade-offs involved. We are fallible on both counts, but our struggling towards a *modus vivendi* between our commitments is an active process of reflection which takes place through an 'inner dialogue'. In it we 'test' our potential or ongoing commitments against our emotional commentaries, which tell us whether we are up to living this or that committed life. Since the commentaries will not be unanimous, the inner conversation involves evaluating them, promoting some and subordinating others, such that the ultimate concerns we affirm are also those with which we feel we can live. Since the process is corrigible (we may get it wrong or circumstances may change), the conversation is ongoing.

I believe that our 'interior conversations' are the most utterly neglected

phenomenon in social theory, which has never examined the *process* of reflection that makes us the particular active subjects that we are. This I have begun to unpack as an interior dialogue, as a process of forging *personal identity* by coming to identify the self as the being-with-this-constellation-of-concerns.

By this act of identity-formation, a new source of imports comes into being. We now interpret and articulate imports in the light of our commitments which define us, and this brings with it a transformation of emotional commentary. In short, our new commitments represent a new sounding-board for the emotions. For example, if marriage is one of our prime concerns, than an attractive opportunity for infidelity is now also felt as a threat of betrayal; its import is that of a *liaison dangereuse,* because we are no longer capable of the simplicity of a purely first-order response. Our reactions to relevant events are emotionally transmuted by our ultimate concerns. This is reinforced because our commitments also transvalue our pasts: the vegetarian is disgusted at once having enjoyed a rare steak, and the 'green' inwardly shudders at once having worn a fur coat. The effect of these retrospective feelings provides positive reinforcement for present commitments, but the same process works prospectively, for the simple reason that our lives become organised around them. We consort and concelebrate with those sharing our commitments, and 'discomfort' is the transvalued feeling that keeps us apart from those with counter-commitments. For instance, feminists report unease in predominantly male gatherings which struggle for political correctitude.

The *modus vivendi*, which depends upon durable and effective transvaluation, is an achievement; not one which can be accomplished immediately and not one which can necessarily be sustained. For children and young people, who undoubtedly have inner dialogues, the establishment of a stable configuration of commitments is a virtual impossibility, because they are still learning about themselves, the world and the relations between them. Nor is its achievement a maturational certainty. Some remain at the mercy of their first-order emotions, drifting from job to job, place to place and relationship to relationship. Drift means an absence of *personal identity* and the accumulation of circumstances which make it harder to form one. The downward spiral of homelessness or addiction is downwards precisely because it condemns people to preoccupation with the satisfaction of first-order commentaries - the next night or the next fix. Furthermore, there are destabilised commitments, resulting from an external change of circumstances, some of which are predictable (for example, in the life-cycle), others are because of the contingencies of life in an open system (for instance, involuntary redundancy). These are

nodal points which prompt a radical re-opening of the 'internal conversation', but for all people the dialogue is a continuous reflexive monitoring of our concerns, for our commitments are promissory and provisional: subject to renewal or revision.

This exploration of our reflexivity has focused upon our voluntarism, because every version of the 'oversocialised' view (*Society's Being*), or the pre-programmed view (*Modernity's Man*) traduce our personal powers to live meaningful lives: they dismiss the power of *personal identity* to shape our lives around what we care about most and commit ourselves to. Nevertheless, we do not make our personal identities under the circumstances of our choosing, since our embeddedness in nature, practice and society is part of what being human means. Specifically, when we come to the next stage, that of examining the emergence of our *social identities*, we have to deal with our involuntary placement as *social agents* and how this affects the *social actors* which some of us can voluntarily become.

The emergence of Social Identity

Social identity is the capacity to express what we care about in social roles that are appropriate for doing this. The emergence of our 'social selves' is something that occurs at the interface of 'structure and agency'. It is therefore necessarily relational, and for it to be properly so, then independent powers have to be granted to both 'structures' and 'agents'. This is what is distinctive about the social realist approach. It grants the existence of people's emergent properties (PEPs) and also the reality of structural and cultural emergent properties (SEPs and CEPs), and sees the emergence of *agents* and *actors* as relational developments, occurring between them. Conversely, 'downwards conflation' presents 'agency' as an epiphenomenon of 'structure', whereas 'upwards conflation' regards 'structure' as an epiphenomenon of 'agency'. In realism, to recapitulate, the human powers (PEPs), upon which structural (SEPs) and cultural (CEPs) powers impact, leading to the emergence of 'agents' and 'actors', are those of *selfhood* and *personal identity*.

In fact, realism entails several moves to account for the emergence of social subjects, who themselves must be conceptualised as stratified. I have dealt with the three basic strata in *Realist Social Theory*, which can be summarised as follows:-

(i) How society impinges involuntarily upon the human self, to differentiate collectivities of *Primary Agents* , in virtue of their relations to socially scarce resources.

(ii) How *Primary Agents* collectively transform themselves into *Corporate Agents* , when

seeking to transform society; *Corporate Agents* being distinguished by their organisation and articulation of aims.

(iii) How social reproduction/transformation (morphostasis/morphogenesis) affects the extant role array and hence the potential social identities available for the development of *social actors*.

Taken together, these yield the following stratified model of agency, which, for any individual, develops over the life-course.

Human selfhood $\Rightarrow \Rightarrow \Rightarrow$ **Social Agent** $\Rightarrow \Rightarrow \Rightarrow$ **Social Actor**
(Grandparent)   *(Parent)*   *(Offspring)*

Now, if *social identity* comes from adopting a role and personifying it in a singular manner, rather than simply animating it, then it looks as though we have to call upon *personal identity* to account for who does the active personification. Yet it also appears that we cannot make such an appeal, for it looks, on this account, as though *personal identity* cannot be attained before *social identity* is achieved. How otherwise can people evaluate their social concerns against other kinds of concerns when ordering their ultimate concerns? Conversely, it also looks as if the achievement of *social identity* is dependent upon someone having sufficient *personal identity* to personify any role in their unique manner. This is the dilemma.

The only way out of it is to accept the existence of a dialectical relationship between *personal* and *social identities*. Yet if this is to be more than fudging, then it is necessary to venture three 'moments' of the interplay (P.I < ----> SI) which culminate in *a synthesis such that both personal and social identities are emergent and distinct, although they contributed to one another's emergence and distinctiveness.*

(a) The first moment is held to be one in which nascent *personal identity holds sway over nascent social identity* (P.I -> S.I). Confronted with a choice, let us say the first decision to be made about someone's occupational future, what resources do they have to draw upon? The answer has to be their experience of the three orders of reality, natural, practical and social, even though as minors they could only make 'dry-runs' at the internal conversation about them. Firstly, their experience in the

natural realm is not negligible. Through play, sport, travel and outdoor activities it is at least extensive enough to perform a regulatory function over what is sought or shunned when considering the array of occupational roles. My older son, a frustrated explorer, calls it 'life in a fleece', the younger one, who hated riding, will never be found applying for stable management. Secondly and similarly, constant interaction in the practical order has supplied positive and negative feedback about the kinds of activities from which satisfaction is derived, through exposure to a host of common activities such as painting, drawing, music, construction, sewing, mechanics, gardening, computing, religious practice, childcare, cooking and household maintenance. Thirdly, in their involuntary social roles children are reflexive beings, and it is they who determine which of the arenas they have experienced might become the locus of their own self-worth. The child, and especially the teenager, basically asks, 'do I want to be like that?', or, more searchingly, they interrogate themselves about which aspects of a role are worth having and which they would want to be different for themselves. In other words, they inspect not only their own involuntary roles but also the lifestyles of those who have put them there, which are sifted into elements worthy of replication versus others meriting rejection. 'I like studying x, but I don't want to teach' is a frequent verdict of many undergraduates.

The key point is that there would be no process at all unless the nascent personal identity brought something to the task of role selection. Otherwise we would be dealing with an entirely passive procedure of role assignment through socialisation.

(b) Of course their preliminary choices are fallible because the crucial missing piece of information is the experience of having made the choice itself. Yet, without taking the plunge, there is no other way in which it can be acquired; but in its acquisition, the individual herself undergoes change. This is why it is legitimate to disengage a *second 'moment', where the nascent social identity impacts upon the nascent personal identity* (S.I - -> P.I). All 'first choices' are experiments, guided by the nascent personal identity, but at this point, the 'terms and conditions' of investing oneself in the role, and choosing to identify with it, also become manifest. What appointees have to ask (internally) is whether they wish to invest any of themselves in their experimental enterprise in the future. Reflexively, their answer can be 'no' to

endorsing this social identity, in which case their choice is corrigible; they can search for an alternative source for their social identity. However, in the process of experimentation, they will have undergone certain subjective and objective changes. Subjectively, they have acquired some new self-knowledge which will impact upon their personal identity: they are now people who *know* that they are bored by x, disillusioned by y and uneasy with z. Yet, objectively they have changed too, because the opportunity costs have altered for their revised 'second choice' and corrected positions may be harder to come by.

(c)   Once subjects have found a satisfying social role, whether on the first or subsequent corrected attempts, they have a decision to make, namely, 'how much of myself am I prepared to invest in it?' *This is the moment of synthesis between personal and social identity, which takes the P.I < -- > S.I form.* Those who have experienced enough of a role to wish to make some of its associated interests their own have also changed, to the degree that they now *know* that they do indeed find such activities interesting. Quite literally they have lost their disinterested stance because they now see their self-worth as being constituted by occupying this role. However, most roles are greedy consumers: there are never enough hours in the day to be the 'good' academic, billing lawyer, or company executive, and a 'good' parent can be on the go around the clock. Does this mean that this crystallising social identity swamps personal identity?

This cannot be the case for three reasons. To begin with, most of us hold several social roles simultaneously. Now, if all of them are 'greedy', then who or what moderates between their demands? Were we to leave this as a matter which is simply arbitrated by the strength of these competing role demands, then we would again have reconciled ourselves to the passive subject. Secondly, if it is assumed that subjects themselves conduct the arbitration, then we have to ask who exactly is doing it? The answer can only be a person. However, if it is indeed the person who has these abilities, then we have to grant that if they have the capacity to 'weigh' one role against another, that they can also evaluate their social concerns against their other commitments. This is precisely what the 'adult' internal conversation is about. Certainly, as a recent role incumbent, new and socially derived information is brought into the inner dialogue, but *in relation* to the claims of other ongoing concerns. Only dialogically can their prioritisation and accommodation be worked
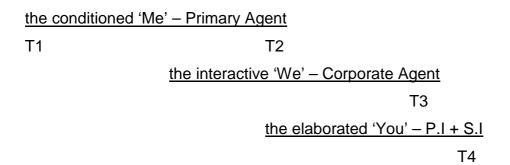
out.

The resultant is a personal identity *within which* the social identity has been assigned its place in the life of an individual. That place may be large ('she lives for her work') or small ('he's only in it for the money'), but there is nothing which automatically ensures that social concerns have top priority. It is the individual who prioritises, and even if conditions are constrainingly such that good reason is found for devoting many hours to, say, monotonous employment, nothing insists that subjects put their hearts into it. Thirdly, in determining *how much* of themselves anyone will put into their various ultimate concerns, they are simultaneously deciding *what* they will put in. It has to be the person who does this, and acts as he or she does in the role, precisely because they are the particular person that they have become. By allowing that we need a person to do the active personifying, it finally has to be conceded that our personal identities are not reducible to being gifts of society. *Unless* personal identity is indeed allowed on these terms, then there is no way in which strict social identity can be achieved. *In the process, our social identity also becomes defined, but necessarily as a sub-set of personal identity.*

We can now represent this acquisition of social identity as a process of progressive individuation, which is underpinned by the self-conscious human being who emerges through the 'primacy of practice'. This is the 'I' whose continuous sense of self is needed throughout. The 'Me' is the self-as-object who, in the individual's past, was involuntarily placed within society's resource distribution as a Primary Agent. The 'We' represents the collective action in which the self engaged as part of Corporate Agency's attempt to bring about social transformation, which simultaneously transformed society's extant role array as well as transforming Corporate Agency itself. This then created the positions which the 'You' could acquire, accept and personify, thus becoming an Actor possessing strict social identity.

Conclusion: Mediation and Reflexivity

The foregoing analysis aimed to secure a concept of the agent who was active and reflexive, which social realism requires; someone who has the properties and powers to monitor her own life, to mediate structural and cultural properties of society, and thus to contribute to societal reproduction or transformation. However, the process of being human is ongoing because throughout life we continue our

reflexive work. The 'internal conversation' through which we each conduct our inner deliberations, is never suspended, it rarely sleeps, and what it is doing throughout the endless contingent circumstances it encounters is continuously monitoring its concerns. Inwardly, the subject is living a rich unseen life which is evaluative (rather than calculative, as is the case for *'Modernity's Man'*) and which is meditative (rather than appropriative, as is the lot of *Society's Being*). What this subject is doing is conducting an endless assessment of whether what it once devoted itself to as its ultimate concern(s) are still worthy of this devotion, and whether the price which was once paid for subordinating and accommodating other concerns is still one with which the subject can live. This is the sense in which the mature emergent person continually re-inspects the 'I', the 'Me', the 'We', and the 'You', which have been part of his or her personal morphogenesis, and then applies his or her autonomous personal powers to pursue their replication or transformation. In the process they actively contribute to their own ongoing personal development and to the continuous shaping of reality - natural, practical and social.

the conditioned 'Me' – Primary Agent

T1   T2

the interactive 'We' – Corporate Agent

T3

the elaborated 'You' – P.I + S.I

T4

In a nutshell, the individual, as presented here in his or her concrete singularity, has powers of ongoing reflexive monitoring of both self and society. These are far outside the register of *'Modernity's Man*, of Rational Choice Theory, for example, who remains shackled to his own individualistic preference schedule. In

parallel, this subject is also capable of authentic *creativity* which can transform 'society's conversation' in a radical way, one which is foreign to *'Society's Being'*, as in Social Constructionism, who is condemned to making conventionally acceptable permutations upon it.

What is distinctive about social realism, but needs to be developed further, is that the reflexive deliberations of agents do indeed have their 'intrinsic' effects by modifying the lives of subjects, but also 'extrinsic' effects, by mediating societal properties (SEPs and CEPs). We make our lives, at least in part, by deliberating *upon* the structural and cultural contexts in which we find ourselves involuntarily. Unlike 'central conflationists', who amalgamate structural properties and agential properties into an undifferentiated amalgam of 'practices', realism upholds the subject/object distinction rather than aspiring to transcend it. Realists do so in order to explore the interplay between them, and thus to determine who is responsible for morphogenesis/morphostasis - where, when and how. Analysis of the stringency of constraints and of the degrees of freedom, differentially pertaining to different groups of agents, will go a long way towards explaining the 'who', the 'when' and the 'where' of social transformation versus reproduction. But, to capture the 'what' and the 'how' we have to introduce agential deliberations which, how ever public and collective they become, have necessarily made their detour through the reflexivity of every agent's 'internal conversation'.

It is our deliberations which determine what we will make of the constraints and enablements which we confront, what opportunity costs we are prepared to pay, and whether we consider it worthwhile to join others in the organised pursuit of change or the defence of the status quo. Agential subjectivity thus mediates socio-cultural objectivity. But, this must never be regarded as a standardised procedure, like information processing or the development of a generalised 'habitus', for two reasons. Firstly, it is evaluative through and through, and the key to variability in valuations is supplied by personal identity, and its sub-set, social identity. Secondly, it is crucial to insist that agents' knowledge of their own mental states is neither omniscient, infallible, indubitable nor incorrigible because there can indeed be social factors which affect our outlooks (by narrowing or broadening our horizons, inducing resignation or fuelling ambition), without the agent correctly diagnosing them or even having any degree of discursive penetration about them. However, precisely in order

to establish this convincingly, one urgently needs to know what is (and, equally importantly, is not) going on in the internal dialogue. One way or the other, to account for how agents reproduce or transform structures, we will not comprehend these processes unless we examine their reflexive deliberations (internal conversations).

A successful realist account of the process mediating between structure and agency involves accepting the irreducible objectivity of social forms and the inescapable subjectivity of social agents and then theorising their interplay. It cannot be achieved by means of 'transcending' the difference between that which is objective *sui generis* and that which is subjective *sui generis*