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**Re-conceptualising the concept of Agency in the Structure/Agency Dialectic:
The Importance of Habitus and the Unconscious**

Realists argue that the relationship between structure and agency is dialectical, that is interactive and iterative. However, I argue that authors like Margaret Archer (1995, 2000, 2003) and Colin Hay (2002a) develop a conception of agency premised on notions of agential reflexivity and full-consciousness, thus neglecting the agent's capacity for pre-reflexive and pre-conscious actions. This leads to an over-emphasis upon agency, which, in turn, neglects the idea of structural constraint and facilitation, consequently undermining the idea of a dialectical relationship between structure and agency. After critically examining Giddens (1979, 1984, 1993) acknowledgement of pre-conscious actions, I turn to Bourdieu arguing that his concept of *habitus* offers a way to develop a realist conception of the structure/agency relationship. In particular, I suggest that the concept of habitus, by incorporating the unconscious, provides a better understanding of the dialectical relationship between structure and agency.

Overall, this paper is divided into three substantive sections. The first section examines the work of Archer (1995, 2000, 2003) and Hay (2002a), while the second section focuses upon Giddens' (1979, 1984, 1993). In the third section I briefly explore Bourdieu's (1979) discussion of habitus.

1. Archer and Hay

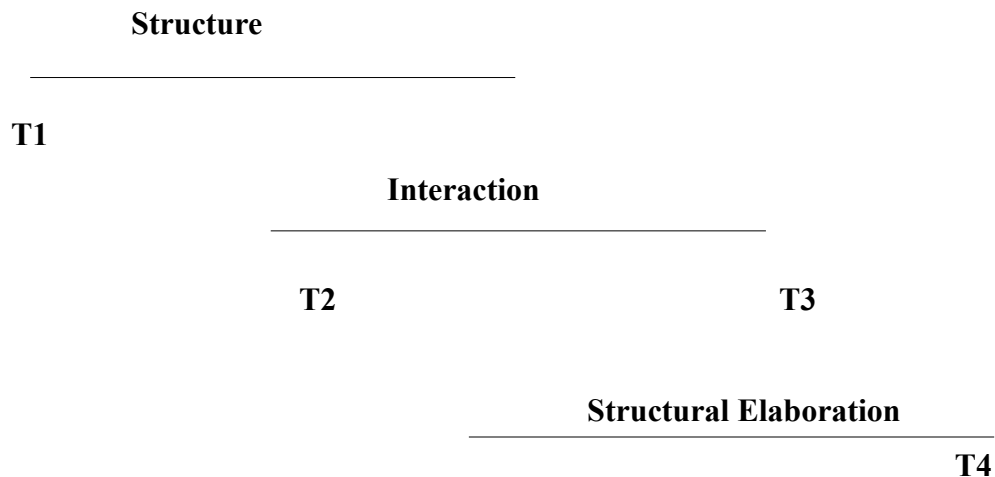
a) Margaret Archer: The Exclusion of the Unconscious from the Concept of Agency

Margaret Archer has made a significant contribution to the development of critical realism and, more narrowly, to the structure/agency debate in developing the morphogenetic approach (1995). I would argue that Archer's position is very different from that of Hay and Giddens, although in my view similar to Bourdieu. One of the most

important points in Archer's work is that she regards structure and agency as both ontologically and analytically distinct and, as such, they have independent causal power. Archer argues that structure and agency are irreducibly different, are relatively autonomous and as distinct causal powers, have the ability to affect social outcomes (2003: pp.1-2). Archer argues (1995) that we must examine how structure and agency interact with one another over time and, consequently, she strongly criticises the way in which Giddens 'brackets off' the affect of structure, instead advocating a morphogenetic approach.

The morphogenetic approach identifies a three-part cycle of change. To Archer, not only are structure and agency ontologically separate, but in addition structure precedes agency. As such, Archer starts with the structural, for example, economic, social, political and environmental, context of action, at T1; a process she terms structural conditioning. These conditions affect, but don't determine, the interests that agents have. While agents are constrained and facilitated by structural conditioning, their actions are also shaped by their abilities, skills and personality at T2 and T3. In acting, agents can change the structural context at T4, to a greater or lesser extent, and sometimes in a way they didn't intend, in a process termed structural elaboration or reproduction. Crucially, the structure that is created is not new, it is an adaptation of the prior structure; hence, the use of the term morphogenesis. This structural elaboration becomes the structural context at T1 in the next cycle.

Fig 1. The Morphogenetic Sequence (Archer: 1995: p.76)



Unfortunately, the concepts of agency developed by Archer in her work on the morphogenetic approach (1995)¹ and those developed first, in *Being Human* (2000)² and second, in the *Internal Conversation* (2003)³ seem to be inconsistent. As we saw, Archer's morphogenetic approach emphasises the 'structural context' of agency as a crucial basis of the interaction between structure and agency and heavily criticises Giddens for failing to examine the iterative nature of the relationship. However, in her later work (2000, 2003) she, in effect, 'brackets off' structure and develops a conceptualisation of agency (2000, 2003) which doesn't seem to fit happily with the morphogenetic framework.

In *Being Human* Margaret Archer argues that two deficient 'models of man' have dominated social theorising (Archer: 2000): 'modernity's man' reduces man to 'instrumental rationality;' while 'societies being' sees man merely as a product of society's influences. In responding to these reductionisms, Archer conceptualises an agent who has 'selfhood - a continuous sense of self' or reflexive self-consciousness (2000: p.19, my emphasis). However, in countering a focus on the 'passive agent' in social theory, Archer over-stresses 'selfhood' and the consciousness involved in agents' actions and, in turn, denies that agents also have an unconscious level.

i) Human Subjects: Social Identity and Personal Identity

In this section, I want to focus on Archer's discussion of how the human subject obtains 'social identity' or, more broadly, on how Archer conceptualises social interaction. I will also consider the different social identities available to the human subject, namely, agents (primary and corporate) and actors.

Archer distinguishes between 'personal identity' and 'social identity', arguing that they are distinct, but related, phenomena and suggests that there is a dialectical relationship between the two. It is my argument that this relationship, as described by Archer, is not

¹Archer, M. (1995). *Realist Social Theory: the Morphogenetic Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

² Archer, M. (2000) *Being Human: The Problem of Agency*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

³ Archer, M. (2003). *Structure, Agency and the Internal Conversation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

truly dialectical as ‘personal identity’, which includes the realm of emotions and the *internal conversation*⁴, is given too much autonomy from the effects of social influence. Whilst Archer acknowledges that the human subject is involuntarily exposed to much structural influence, she restricts this influence to what she terms the ‘social self’, whilst maintaining reflexivity as the main characteristic of ‘personal identity’. In my opinion, the influences that the subject is exposed to under the realm of the ‘social self’ must, on Archer’s own terms, as described in the morphogenetic approach, be expected to impact on personal identity as well.

Archer’s argues that her conception of the human subject is based on a *stratified* view containing four different strata, namely: the self; the person; the agent; and the actor (2000: p. 254). She suggests that the latter two elements of the human subject are our ‘social selves’, which emerge through our involuntary involvement in the social world. She goes on to suggest that this social self is: 1) dependant on the prior emergence of a *continuous sense of self*; and 2) co-dependant with the emergence of ‘personal identity’. It is important to re-emphasise that the emergence of our social selves is something which occurs at the interface of structure and agency as independent properties and powers have to be granted to both ‘structures’ and ‘agents’. This position grants the existence of people’s emergent powers (PEPs) and structural and cultural emergent power (SEPs and CEPs) within a dialectical relationship as set out in the morphogenetic approach (1995: p. 175).

Archer suggests that, whilst the ‘continuous sense of self’ is natural to the human subject, personal identity emerges once the reflective self surveys the social world and then determines where their ‘ultimate concerns’ (2000: p. 2) lay and how they filter through how other concerns are to be accommodated to them. Personal identity is presented as a property which depends upon the prior emergence of the self, but is also dependant on the social order as it is subject to the influence of the social world. Whilst Archer is keen to delineate personal identity from social identity, she suggests that the two are intertwined, and presents their emergence as a dialectical process. Archer argues that personal identity is always broader than social identity because it is the former which both animates the latter and defines its standing relative to other concerns. Social concerns do not

⁴ I return to the notion of the internal conversation at a later stage in the paper.

necessarily outweigh other concerns and this leads Archer to argue that: “Social identity is only assumed in society: personal identity regulates the subject’s relations with reality as a whole” (2000: p.257). Whilst it is clearly important to recognise self-conscious agential reflexivity and, more broadly, the personal life of the agent; personal identity cannot be exempt from structural influence at its core: it is my argument that structural influence would not respect the neat delineation of the personal from our social selves. Whilst Archer presents the relationship between personal and social identity as dialectical, personal identity clearly dominates and perhaps shapes Archer’s conception of agency, which relies heavily on agential reflexivity. I would argue that Archer’s position here ultimately leads to a privileging of agency within the structure and agency dialectic⁵.

ii) Agents (Primary & Corporate) and Actors

The *social self* is viewed as an emergent identity and one which does not emerge in a single movement, unlike *upwards conflationism*⁶ or *downwards conflationism*,⁷ and is presented as being developmental and traces the process by which the human subject gradually becomes to acquire a social identity (at maturity). Archer provides descriptions of different forms of social identity available to human subjects, namely ‘agents’, primary and corporate, and ‘actors’ (2000: Ch.8).

‘Agents’ are defined as *collectivities* sharing the same *life-chances* (2000: p. 263). Consequently, everyone is necessarily an agent, since being an agent is simply to occupy a position on society’s distribution of scarce resources. However, being part of a collectivity does not give strict social identity as it only means that we are part of a group who are equally privileged or under privileged. As such, agency is therefore a term which is always and only employed in the plural⁸. In contrast to agents, Archer suggests that it is only ‘social actors’ who properly exist in the singular and who alone meet the strict

⁵It is important to note that Archer has also been accused of privileging structure in the morphogenetic approach. This criticism is premised on the argument that because structure features as the first cycle (T1 stage) in the morphogenetic approach, this leads to structural reification and the over-determination of agents as structure precedes agents and any interaction they might engage in (King: 1999).

⁶ Archer defines upwards conflationism as allowing agents too much subjective will power in their deliberations in the social world (1995: pp. 34- 46).

⁷ Downwards conflationism refers to the opposite of upwards conflationism, in that agents are denied agency and social influences determine behaviour (1995: pp. 46-57).

⁸ Usage in the singular, that is reference to a single agent, thus denotes a collectivity or a group (Archer: 2000: p.261).

criteria for possessing unique identity. Actors acquire their social identities from the way in which they personify the roles they wish to occupy. Unlike agency, which is universal to all members of society, not everyone can succeed in becoming an actor – that is in finding a role that they can invest themselves in and will express their identity.

Archer suggests that, at the start of life, the human subject simultaneously becomes enmeshed in society's structural and cultural properties. This, Archer suggests, 'occurs involuntarily, unconsciously, but inexorably' (2000: p.261) and it is through this involuntary assignment that we all become 'primary agents'. Archer's reference to the 'unconscious' here is interesting, as at no stage in her discussion of agency does she recognise the unconscious as an aspect of agency, and as being central to the socialisation process. Archer goes on to suggest that agents are agents of something - agents of the socio-cultural system into which they are born or that they transform. Because of the pre-existence of those structures, which shape the situations in which we find ourselves, they impinge upon us without our 'compliance, consent or complicity' leading to social stratification (2000: p.262). Archer warns against the idea that the process is voluntary or relates to joining a process often termed as 'being part of society's conversation' (2000: p.258). Archer argues that this process is often involuntary and is much closer to a notion of 'conscripted' as 'society's conversation' is often pre-structured in terms of its access, its deliberations and its non-discursive context (2000: p.259). Archer's position here clearly restates her position at T1 in the morphogenetic cycle, namely that structures pre-exist agents and that social interaction with structures exists at T2. Although, Archer acknowledges an unequal social context or socialisation process which does not rely on our 'compliance, consent or complicity', I would argue that the T1 stage of the morphogenetic approach necessitates an aspect of the unconscious within our conceptualisation of agency.

'Corporate agents' are presented as being different to primary agents in that they are able to express their concerns through PEPs and affect the world or their social identity. Archer argues that corporate agents include self-conscious, vested interest groups, promotional interest groups, social movements and defensive associations (2000: p.265). Primary agents lack a say in structural and cultural modelling; they neither express interests nor organise for their strategic pursuits, either in society or in a given

institutional sector. To lack a say in systemic organisation and re-organisation is not the same as to have no effect upon it, but the effects are unarticulated in both senses of the word – uncoordinated in action and unstated in aim (2000: p.266).

iii) Examining the *Mediatory Process*: How does Structure Influence Agency?

In *Structure, Agency and the Internal Conversation* (2003), Archer examines the process ‘linking’ structure and agency and argues that it is agents who are key to understanding this linking process. Acknowledging Bhaskar’s⁹ observation that ‘the causal power of social forms is mediated through social agency’ is central to realist social theory, Archer argues that, unless we accept that structural and cultural factors ultimately emerge *from people*, then social forms are reified (2003: p.2: my emphasis). She argues that, whilst this statement specifies that the causal power of social forms ‘is mediated through agency’, realist social theory has made little progress in examining the process of ‘mediation’ or what the term ‘through agency’ actually means and duly aims to rectify this neglect (2003: p.2).

Archer argues that realist social theorists, amongst others, have usually interpreted the word ‘through’, and the mediatory process more generally, as referring to ‘social conditioning’ (2003: pp. 2-3). Archer suggests that, even if conditioning is the medium through which interaction occurs, this still implies something to be conditioned and, because conditioning is not determinism, then this involves the interplay between two different kinds of causal powers: those pertaining to structures; and those belonging to agents. The mediatory process has also been thought of in terms of ‘constraints’ and ‘enablements’. However, Archer suggests that agents have generally been ignored in this process and structures need to be able to ‘constrain something’ or ‘enable something’ (2003: pp.5-9). Archer argues that an adequate conceptualisation of the dialectical process between structure and agency must deal with this ‘interplay’ and that it is essential to distinguish between the existence of structural properties and consider in more detail the properties of agents. I would agree with Archer’s general point that we need to examine the mediatory process in more detail and outline the specific characteristics of agency

⁹ Bhaskar, R. (1989). *Reclaiming Reality*. London: Verso. Also, see Chapter Two for a more in-depth discussion of Roy Bhaskar and his conception of critical realism.

which enable the dialectic to take shape. However, as will be shown below, Archer's description of agents fails to do justice to the properties necessary for the mediation process to be fully dialectical, because Archer highlights *agential reflexivity* as the unique property of agency or the medium through which structural influence occurs on agency. I would argue that this is a fundamental flaw and negates the possibility of the myriad forms of structural influence which exist and must be allowed to influence agency outside of, and from within, *agential reflexivity*.

Archer argues that: "structure and agency constitute two distinctive and irreducible properties and powers and that human reflexive deliberations play a crucial role in mediating between them" (2003: p.14). She describes personal reflexivity as 'the missing link in mediation' and argues that an account of how structures influence agency is entirely dependant upon the proposition that our human powers of reflexivity have causal efficacy – towards ourselves, our society and relations between them (2003: p.16). The 'internal conversation' is also described as a 'missing mediatory mechanism', which is needed to complete an adequate account of social conditioning. Archer advances the 'internal conversation' as the process of mediation 'through' which agents respond to social forms – fallibly and corrigibly, but, above all, intentionally and differently (2003: p.16). Archer attributes three properties to the reflexive deliberations of agents. They are viewed as: a) genuinely interior; b) ontologically subjective; c) causally efficacious (2003: p.16).

Archer's discussion about the process of mediation makes explicit reference to the forms of structural influence with which this paper is primarily concerned, namely those that I would argue would be better conceptualised as having influence outside of *agential consciousness* or in the unconscious. Archer refers to 'structural factors working upon us, without our awareness - as in the 'unacknowledged conditions of action'' (2003: p.4), but argues that, although these are influential, but unacknowledged, agents negotiate them through their subjective and reflexive capabilities. Archer gives the examples of the influences of objective structural/cultural factors in creating vested interest and motivating us to defend them, or in reducing our aspirations by limiting our social horizons. Archer concludes that in such cases:

it might be thought that if objectivity shapes subjectivity in these ways, then the latter makes no independent contribution to outcomes. However, it would be erroneous... to believe that subjectivity has been banished from these processes of conditioning (2003: p.4).

It is my argument that, as Archer argues, subjectivity and reflexivity are part of the structural and agential mediatory process, however, in my view, it is important to acknowledge that structural influences (unacknowledged conditions of action) also affect agents in subjective, but perhaps unconscious ways. Structural influence, in terms of unacknowledged conditions of action and, in turn, unacknowledged consequences of action, must clearly affect subjectivity and reflexivity can be a part of this process. However, much of what affects agents, such as the influences of class and gender, for example, affect agents in subtle ways, which require an understanding of agency which includes aspects of the unconscious.

Archer conceptualises subjectivity as a: 'personal interior property, with a first-person, subjective ontology, and with powers that can be causally efficacious in relation to one-self and society' (2003: p.14). She argues that agents are involved in their own 'projects' where they diagnose their own situations, identify their own interests and design projects. She suggests that at all three stages agents can be 'fallible' and: 'that they can mis-diagnose their situations, mis-identify their interests, and mis-judge appropriate courses of action' (2003: p.9). Archer goes on to state that: 'the fundamental question is not whether they do all this well, but how they do it at all' (2003: p.9). She suggests that the identification and enactment of an agent's projects occur 'via the internal conversation' and that: '(T)his is the modality through which reflexivity towards self, society and the relationship between them is exercised' (2003: p.9).

I will discuss the internal conversation in more detail below, but here it is important to highlight a crucial problem in Archer position; agential fallibility is only understood within the realms of reflexivity or through the internal conversation and again no space is given to the unconscious. The crucial point is that, for Archer, 'mis-diagnosis of situations' by agents or mis-identification of interests' and, hence, we can assume unintended actions all occur at the level of consciousness and as a result of a failure to

recognise situations, given limited knowledge and prior experience and unintended consequences. Here, the structural context within which agents operate has no independent role in conditioning, or affecting, the agent. The agent interprets her structural context, and change or reproduction only occurs when the agent reflexively *makes* a decision through their reflexive capacities. In my view, agential fallibility and the making of mistakes is a realm of behaviour that must incorporate an understanding of the unconscious. Consequently, agency dominates in Archer's conception of agents.

iv) The Role of the Internal Conversation in the Mediation Between Structure and Agency

In attempting to bring together the different strands of the argument developed in *Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach* (1995), *Being Human* (2000) and in *Structure, Agency and The Internal Conversation* (2003), Archer argues that the *internal conversation* enables agents to reflexively deliberate upon the social circumstances that they confront. Agents are said to possess personal identity, have (ultimate) concerns, be capable of internal deliberation about their social circumstances and, therefore, able to confront social constraints and enablements.

Archer identifies a three-stage process involving the objective and subjective components of the mediatory process between structure and agency:

- 1) Structural and cultural properties objectively shape the situations which agents confront involuntarily, and possess generative powers of constraint and enablement in relation to...
- 2) Agents' own configurations of concerns, as subjectively defined in relation to the three orders of natural reality (nature, practice and society)
- 3) Courses of action are produced through the reflexive deliberations of agents who subjectively determine their practical projects in relation to their objective circumstances (2003: p.135)

Archer suggests that the third stage represents the elaboration of strategy by self-conscious, but fallible, social subjects towards non-reflexive structural powers. This final stage is conducted through the internal conversation, combining agential concerns, projects and practices (2003: p. 133). Thus, we see that the internal conversation is presented as a primarily reflexive medium through which agents elaborate their personal projects. I argue that Archer's position on the internal conversation and its role in the mediation between structure and agency does not assist in understanding structural influences which occur through sophisticated, complex and, perhaps, epistemologically impenetrable methods. For example, let us consider the structural impact of class: we do not negotiate our class position reflexively? We may seek to understand and change our class positions through reflexivity, and perhaps even through something akin to the internal conversation, but, surely, the method by which we, in the first instance, and throughout our lives, mediate our class positioning, occurs in non-voluntary and unconscious ways. Archer examines involuntary placement through structural constraints, for example, the positioning of the new born baby. However, her argument here refers simply to the effect of unacknowledged structural constraints on different personal projects, but fails to adequately explain, how other than through reflexivity these structural conditions affect agents (2003: p.136). Further, and perhaps most importantly for the morphogenetic approach, reflexivity as a mediatory process does not help to explain the T1 stage of the morphogenetic cycle, or the structural context into which agents emerge, given that agents themselves, through feedback loops over time, help to create the structural context as a result of prior agential behaviour.

In the next section, I turn to Colin Hay and examine his construction of the concept of agency, which is also developed within a dialectical conception of structure and agency. Like Archer, Hay is shown to also neglects the non-reflexive and non-intentional aspects of agency. As I have argued previously, such a conception is problematic as it is not properly dialectical as structure and agency do not have independent causal powers and autonomy in interaction.

b) Colin Hay: Still Too Much Agency

Crucially, Hay denies the possibility of any ontological separation between structure and agency, arguing that it is impossible to separate the independent affect of structure and agency. As such, while distinguishing between structure and agency is analytically possible, it is empirically impossible because we cannot study the affect of structure independent of the way in which agent's view it¹⁰.

Hay argues “neither agents nor structures are *real*”¹¹, since neither has an existence in isolation from the other (2002a: p.127). He suggests that their existence is ‘relational’ (structure and agency are mutually constitutive) and dialectical (their interaction is not reducible to the sum of structural and agential factors treated separately) (2002a: p.127). Hay suggests that whilst it may be useful analytically to differentiate between structural and agential factors, ‘it is important that this analytical distinction is not reified and hardened into a rigid ontological dualism” (2002a: p.127). Taking issue with Giddens’ analogy, Hay suggests that structure and agency are best seen not as flip-sides of the same coin, but as metals in the alloy from which the coin is forged – (we cannot see either metal in the alloy only the product of their fusion): they do not exist as themselves but through their relational interaction/ in practice completely inseparable (2002a: p.127).

i) The Strategic Relational Approach (SRA)

Hay considers the terms ‘structure’ and ‘agency’ to be unhelpful ‘theoretical abstractions’ (2002a: p.127), arguing that they imply an analytical and ontological separability which is misleading. Instead, following Bob Jessop (1990, 1996), Hay advocates the strategic relational approach (SRA). He argues that we should consider the dialectical interplay of structure and agency in real contexts of social and political interaction, suggesting that we should replace the terms structure and agency with what he terms as a more useful distinction between ‘strategic action’ and ‘strategically selective context’ (2002a: p.127).

Hay and Jessop argue that they overcome the conceptual dualism between structure and agency by bringing agency into structure – producing a structured context (an action setting) – and by bringing structure into agency – producing a contextualised actor (a situated agent). Next, a repeat move is required, bringing the situated actor back into the

¹⁰ Here, we can see the basis of what Hay terms his ‘as if’ realism (Hay: 2005).

¹¹ My emphasis

structured context and the structural context to the situated actor - this is said to produce a new conceptual pairing in which the dualism of structure and agency has been dissolved leading them to locate a strategic actor within a strategically situated context (2002a: p.128).

In emphasising a strategic context of action, Hay argues that this approach acknowledges that agents both internalise 'perceptions' of their context and consciously orient themselves towards that context in choosing between potential courses of action. In this approach strategy is defined as: 'intentional conduct oriented towards the environment in which it is to occur' (2002a: p. 129). Hay argues that actions are motivated by the intention to realise certain outcomes and objectives. Yet, for that action to have any chance of realising such intentions, it must be informed by a strategic assessment of the relevant context in which strategy occurs and upon which it subsequently impinges (2002a: p.129).

Hay argues that Jessop's contribution to the debate on structure and agency is to recognise, in strategic action, the orientation of actors towards an environment, but, also, that the strategic environment is strategically selective (2002a: p.129). In a given set of intentions or preferences, social and political outcomes are said to be contingent upon strategic choices. However, the context itself presents: 'an unevenly contoured terrain which favours certain strategies over others and hence selects for certain outcomes while militating against others' (2002a: p.129). Over time, such strategic selectivity in the context will throw up a series of systematically structured outcomes. Hay points out that whilst 'outcomes are 'strategically selected for', they are not inevitable (2002a: p.130).

ii) Hay's Concept of Agency

Like Archer, Hay (2002a, 2002b), I would suggest, largely operates with a conception of agency premised on agential consciousness and intentionality, despite the fact that he is very critical of rational choice theory (Hay: 2004). In *Political Analysis*, Hay defines agency as: 'the ability or capacity of an actor to act consciously and, in so doing, to attempt to realise his or her intentions' (2002a: p. 94). Hay is critical of 'narrow definitions' of agency premised on 'mere political actions or conduct.' Consequently, he

emphasises that agency: ‘implies a sense of free will, choice or autonomy - that the actor could have behaved differently and that the choice between potential courses of action was, or at least could have been, subject to the actor’s conscious deliberation’ (2002a: p. 95).

In his broader discussion of agency Hay’s emphasis is largely on agential intentionality and reflexivity and he does not explicitly address the issue of the unconscious. However, there is a reference to this issue in a footnote in the chapter on structure and agency in *Political Analysis* (2002a) which I quote in full:

The distinction between situations in which actors behaving deliberately, consciously weighing up their options and those in which actors behave intuitively, such that their intentions, motivations and strategies remain unconscious or, better, pre-conscious, is an important one. Nonetheless, in so far as such forms of ‘practical consciousness’ might be brought to the surface, and thereby rendered conscious, the latter should be regarded as exhibiting agency. A classic example is the act of crossing a busy road. Such a seemingly simple task involves a series of quite complex calculations and choices, which though seldom rendered explicit, might well be brought rapidly to the surface – as for instance when an angry motorist gesticulates that your actions have caused her to swerve in avoidance (2002a: p.266-7).

Clearly, Hay acknowledges the unconscious or the pre-conscious,¹² as he terms it. However, two points are clear from Hay’s brief comment on this matter. First, it would appear that Hay considers it necessary for intuitive thoughts, at the level of practical consciousness, to rise to the level of consciousness in order for them to be considered as ‘exhibiting agency’ (2002a: p. 267). This position denies that the unconscious or thoughts at the level of practical consciousness can affect or exhibit agency without being

¹² Whilst Hay favours the term ‘pre-consciousness’ to the ‘unconscious’, (2002a), he also refers to ‘practical consciousness’ in the quote above, which indicates a reference to Giddens’ (1979, 1984) conception of agency. Giddens offers the concepts of discursive consciousness, *practical consciousness* and unconscious motives/cognition in place of the traditional Freudian psychoanalytical schema of the ego, super-ego and the id (1984). Giddens suggests that the Freudian distinction of ego and id ‘cannot easily cope’ with the analysis of practical consciousness, which lacks a ‘theoretical home in psychoanalytical theory’. Giddens suggests that the notion of the pre-conscious, as preferred by Hay (2002a), is ‘perhaps the closest notion to practical consciousness in the conceptual repertoire of psychoanalysis, but as ordinarily used, clearly means something different’ (Giddens: 1984: p. 7).

‘rendered conscious’. Further, I would argue that Hay’s position here reflects his epistemological and methodological concerns relating to researching agency. Whilst these are certainly important issues that I will return to later they should not determine our acceptance of the existence of the unconscious. Secondly, I would argue that the unconscious is largely left under-theorised in Hay’s account of agency (as highlighted in his comment being relegated to a footnote) because this concept operates outside of, and is perhaps antithetical to, Hay’s concept of ‘strategic action’, and therefore the SRA, and poses significant epistemological and methodological concerns. In short, the SRA relies upon strategic and intentional actors, and the unconscious does not fit into this schema.

iii) *Strategic Agents*

The *strategic* relational approach (SRA) clearly considers ‘strategy’ to be an important concern for, and feature of, agency and it could be argued that, as in the case of rational choice theory and rationality, SRA places too much emphasis on strategy as a defining feature of agency. However, Hay acknowledges the danger in eliding strategy and agency and rejects the notion that all action is the product of overt and explicit strategic calculation, suggesting instead that ‘all action contains at least a *residual strategic moment* although this need not be rendered conscious’ (2002a: p.132: my emphasis). Hay also makes a distinction between ‘intuitively’ and ‘explicitly’ strategic action (2002a: p.132).

Hay describes ‘intuitively, routine or habitual strategies and practices’ as based upon ‘perceptions’ (accurate or otherwise) of the strategic context and the likely consequence of specific actions. As such, they can be regarded as strategic insofar as such practices are orientated towards the context in which they occur. Hay gives the example of a person crossing the road: this is described as intuitive action but contains an inherently strategic moment. Hay argues that although such an understanding and lay knowledge can be rendered explicit, invariably it remains unarticulated and unchallenged. Insofar as the assumptions which implicitly inform such routines, habits, rituals and other forms of un-reflexive action can be rendered explicit, these practices contain a significant strategic component. Following Giddens, Hay suggests that such strategy is manifest in ‘practical consciousness’ (2002a: p. 132). In contrast, ‘explicitly strategic action’ also relies upon

‘perceptions’ of the strategic context and the configuration of constraints and opportunities that it provides but here such calculations about the context are rendered explicit and are subjected to interrogation and contestation in an overt and conscious attempt to identify options most likely to realise intentions and objectives (whether individual or collective) (2002a: p.133).

Hay’s distinction between ‘intuitively, routine or habitual strategies and practices’ and ‘explicitly strategic’ action is important and reflects the influence of Giddens’ notion of practical consciousness. Thus, here we see Hay acknowledging the normalised and routine behaviour that’s agents’ engage in without recourse to conscious intentionality or explicit articulation. This distinction is also important for the SRA as it means that agency is not reduced to strategic agency. However, as will be shown below, the SRA, in its general approach to structure and agency continues to view agency as strategic agency without acknowledging that the structural context can have an impact on agency outside of the strategic actions of the agent: thus, the relationship between structure and agency is not truly dialectical.

To argue that structure and agency are ontologically separate, as I do following Archer, is not to deny that structure and agency interact dialectically. Certainly, it is not to say that structures determine outcomes; that would be indefensible, given that agents, not structures, act. In contrast, I would suggest that Hay, by arguing that the two are co-constituted, must end up privileging agency and the ideational. Indeed, if structures only exist to the extent that they are seen as existing by agents, then they have no independent causal power and, thus, don’t seem to be worth studying. Despite Hay’s somewhat muted acceptance of practical consciousness, or the pre-conscious aspects of agency, it is clear that the SRA, with its emphasis upon strategic actors and the relationship between strategic actors and the strategically selective context; there is little room in this schema for examining structural influence upon agents which don’t involve strategic choice on the agent’s part.

2. Anthony Giddens: Structuration Theory and the ‘Duality of Structure’

Giddens' 'structuration theory' is based on his core notion of the 'duality of structure' (1979, 1984, 1993). Giddens' argument is that structure and agency are a duality, not a dualism; they are interdependent and internally related. According to this conception, the same structural characteristics are present in the subject (the actor), as in the object, thus, 'structure is both the medium and outcome of interactions' (1979: p. 15). Through the duality of structure, 'rules and resources' are drawn upon by actors in the production of interaction, but are thereby also reconstituted through such interaction. Giddens uses a coin as an analogy to evoke the relationship between structure and agency, arguing that one cannot see the affect of both structure and agency at one time, just like one cannot see both sides of the coin at once. So, methodologically, at any given time, one can only study either structure or agency while holding the other constant, or 'bracketing it off' (Giddens: 1984: p. 288).

Hay (2002a: pp.118-121) and McAnulla (2002: pp.278-280) criticise Giddens in broadly the same way, emphasising that the approach is not dialectical because it does not allow us to study the interaction between the two and, in empirical terms, tends to privilege agency, because, in his empirical work, Giddens 'brackets off' structure. As a result of this ontological and analytical duality, Archer¹³ describes Giddens as a 'central conflationist', arguing that he merges the individual properties of structure and agency (Archer: 1995 pp.93-134). Hay is also critical of this aspect of Giddens' work. However, as an advocate of analytical, and not ontological dualism, Hay, it can be argued, is also guilty of not denying structure and agency independent ontological status (Hay: 2002a).

Giddens' rejection of the ontological separation between structure and agency is clearly an important issue. However, his model, by bypassing the ontological separation between structure and agency, does appear to provide a more compelling account of structural influence, albeit at the cost of the ontological dualism between structure and agency. Stones argues that Giddens conception of the structure and agency relationship allows for structures to: 'enter into the constitution of reflexive and pre-reflexive motivations, knowledgeability and practices of people', as 'knowledgeability and memory traces' (Stones: 2001: p 184). Therefore, we see that structures have the capacity to affect agents at both reflexive and pre-reflexive and conscious and unconscious levels. In my view, this

¹³ Archer (1995) conceptualises the dialectical relationship between structure and agency to be that of 'ontological duality', while Giddens (1979) prefers the term 'duality of structure'.

is a good starting point for the development of a better conceptualisation of the dialectical relationship between structure and agency. In the following section, I examine Giddens' conception of agency in more detail.

a) Giddens' Stratification Model of Action

Giddens outlines his conception of the human subject in his 'stratification model of action'. In this model there are three layers of action: 'reflexive monitoring of action', 'rationalisations of action', and 'motivations for action' (1979, 1984). The model makes clear that all three levels of action are potentially implicated in the production and reproduction of social systems. Crucially, the model also incorporates the 'unacknowledged conditions of action' and 'unintended consequences of action'; these are important elements if we are to accept in respect of the former; structural influences condition action, albeit outside of the agents awareness, and in terms of the latter; how unintended consequences of action results from interaction and again, perhaps outside of the agents awareness.

It is important to consider all three elements of Giddens' model individually in order to see how they combine and interact to construct the human subject. In much the same way as Bourdieu's concept of habitus relies upon a notion of routine and often unarticulated intentionality, Giddens's 'reflexive monitoring of action' refers to the 'intentional' or 'purposive' character of human behaviour, but, importantly, intentionality is defined as being 'process' or 'routine' (1979: p.56). Giddens' approach here is to be contrasted with the notion that actors have 'definite goals consciously held in mind' or are doing something 'purposefully' (1979: p.56). This provides a significant contrast to Archer and Hay's conception of the subject as actors who act in articulated and intentional manners.

Reflexive monitoring operates against the background of the rationalisation of action, meaning that actors: 'for the most part without fuss – maintain a continuing theoretical understanding of the grounds of their activity' (1984: p. 5). Actors are said to be able to 'explain' why they act as they do by giving reasons for their conduct.

Giddens considers motivational components of action to refer to the organisation of an actor's wants and argues that these: 'straddle conscious and unconscious aspects of cognition and emotion' (1979: p.58). Giddens suggest that 'the whole weight of psychoanalytical theory suggests that motivation has an internal hierarchy of its own' (1979: p.58) and, therefore, this leads him to suggest that 'a conception of the unconscious is essential to social theory', even if it departs from classical Freudian schemes (1979: p. p.58). Clearly recognising the dangers of an over-emphasis on the unconscious, Giddens suggest that the: "unconscious can only be explored in relation to the conscious: to the reflexive monitoring and rationalisation of conduct, grounded in practical consciousness¹⁴" (1979: p.58).

In addition to the concepts discussed above, Giddens conception of agency relies heavily on the three distinct, but related, concepts: discursive consciousness; practical consciousness; and unconscious motives/cognition (Giddens: 1984: pg. 7). I would argue that these three concepts provide the conceptual basis upon which we might develop a better understanding of reflexivity and its link to the agent's discursive capabilities concerning their behaviour and, moreover, how this is often mediated by differing levels of consciousness in the daily life of the agent. First, it is important to establish Giddens' definition of these terms. Discursive consciousness refers to: 'what agents are able to say about the conditions of their action (1979: p.57). Agents are also said to rely on something termed as 'practical consciousness' in much of their everyday action. '(P)ractical consciousness' is defined as 'tacit knowledge that is skilfully applied in the enactment of courses of conduct, but which the actor is not able to formulate discursively' (1979: p. 57). The unconscious refers to 'those forms of cognition and impulsion which are either wholly repressed from consciousness or appear only in distorted form' (1984: pp. 4-5).

On the issue of reflexivity, Giddens suggests that, whilst agents can be said to be reflexive in a continuous manner in their day-to-day life, reflexivity operates only partly on a discursive level. This leads Giddens to suggest that: 'what agents know about what they do, and why they do it - their knowledgability as agents is largely carried in practical consciousness' (1984: p. 7). Practical consciousness consists of all the things which

¹⁴Giddens' concept of 'practical consciousness' is discussed further below.

actors know tacitly about how to 'go on' in the context of social life, without being able to give them direct discursive expression.

On the other hand, reflexive monitoring of action also implies that agents are able to give accounts of their action through discursive consciousness. Giddens suggests that: 'the accounts that actors are able to give draw upon the same stocks of knowledge that are drawn upon in the very production and reproduction of their action' (1979: p.57)¹⁵. However, he makes the important point that the discursive capabilities of actors do not: 'exhaust the connections between 'stocks of knowledge' and action' (1979: p.57). This is an important point and suggests that agents have discursive consciousness enabling them to be articulate about their behaviour.

In my view, Giddens' understanding of agency allows us to conceptualise agency and, in particular, the impact of various degrees of consciousness and unconsciousness on the agent much more adequately than Archer or Hay do. Crucially, unlike Archer and Hay, Giddens recognises both that agents are not totally aware of the structural contexts within which they are located and that these structural contexts can still influence their actions. As Stones suggests, using Giddens' conception, we can take account of: 'habits, background assumptions, and (the fact that) much of what is done is seen but not noticed even by the actor herself' (Stones: 2001:). In this vein, Giddens identifies 'signification', along with 'domination' and 'legitimation', as the basic ingredients of social structure (1979). These structures are mediated by, and through, interpretive frames and norms within the memory traces of agents. Through signification and the seen, but not noticed, dimension of practical consciousness, we have a better understanding of how agents draw upon structures without reflexivity and that their behaviour doesn't just reflect a simple calculation of their utilities. In Giddens' model we have a much more sophisticated conception of how agents have differently mediated experiences of the real world. Here, agents do not have direct access to their material interests. As we shall see next, the work of Bourdieu, and in particular his work on the concept of habitus, allows further development of this point.

¹⁵ 'Stocks of knowledge' is a term Giddens borrows from Schutz, but he also uses the term 'mutual knowledge' to describe knowledge that agent use in everyday, routine action (Giddens : 1979: p. 58)

3. Pierre Bourdieu, Habitus and the Unconscious

a) *Habitus and the Unconscious*

Habitus is one of Bourdieu's most important concepts and it illustrates his concern to find a solution to the structure and agency debate. Habitus refers to socially acquired and culturally embodied 'systems of durable, *transposable* dispositions' (1977: p.72). These are 'deep structural' propensities, involving both classification and assessment and they are embodied in all aspects of our life – including the way we walk, talk, sit and eat (1977: p.87). Habitus doesn't determine actions and an agent is in Bourdieu's terms: 'the practical operator of the construction of objects' (1990b: p. 13). However, to Bourdieu, the social construction of reality is structured because all our cognitive structures have social origins which are inscribed in the habitus. Bourdieu presents habitus as a conceptual mechanism to explain the way in which social norms become embedded in agents as 'durable dispositions' (1977: p.72). An individual's habitus develops in response to the social sphere in which s/he lives and acts: a space that Bourdieu (1977) terms a 'field'. The habitus is both a 'structured structure,' as it is affected by external structures, and a 'structuring structure,' given that it impacts directly on agents. This leads Bourdieu to suggest that: 'habitus is generative' (1977, p. 73).

Bourdieu does not explicitly state his position on the unconscious in any detail, nor does he discuss his understanding of the relationship between the conscious and the unconscious in agents. What is abundantly clear in his work, though, is that the concept of habitus is premised on an understanding that there is a complex relationship between consciousness and unconsciousness. As such, the existence of the unconscious in habitus should not be disputed (insert quotes to support this). Bourdieu's concept of habitus, based on a dialectical understanding of structure and agency, quite clearly contains an unconscious aspect. Moreover, a notion of the unconscious is central to understanding how habitus operates. This is an important point, as other proponents of a dialectical approach to structure and agency, such as Archer (1995, 2000a, 2003) and Hay (2002a), claim support for a dialectical position, but fail to include a notion of the unconscious within their concepts of agency.

In Conclusion

In this paper, I have reconsidered conceptions of structure and agency in the social sciences and argued that Archer and Hay privilege agency. Archer's morphogenetic approach focuses on the dialectical relationship between structure and agency, but her more recent work in effect 'brackets off' structure and operates with a conception of agency, as conscious and reflexive, which shares something in common with recent rational choice theory. In contrast, Hay argues against the ontological separation of structure and agency and, while he is heavily critical of RCT, inevitably ends up privileging agency and ideas. Both authors fail to acknowledge the role of the unconscious, and pre-reflexive, aspects of agency, which, in my view, is the great strength of Giddens; although he also denies the independent causal powers of structure. To deal with these two issues, the independent causal powers of structure and the unconscious aspect of agency and the way in which this helps explain the interaction between structure and agency, I invoke the work of Bourdieu and his central concept of habitus. I would argue that Bourdieu provides a more adequate conceptualisation of structure and his concept of habitus enables a role for the pre-reflexive and unconscious aspect of agency as a means by which structure affects agents.