

REFLECTION AND DEFLECTION

APPROACHES TO A DIALECTICAL CONCEPT OF REFLEXIVITY

An essay by Anil K. Jain

Reflection is the very mode of our being: being human means being reflective – in one or the other way. Throughout the history of thought, we depicted ourselves as the »zoon logikon«, the »rational animal« which is aware of itself and can express itself (logically). Also in modern science, »homo sapiens« defined itself by its advanced reflective (cognitive) capabilities. But what does it actually mean to be reflective? Is it sufficient for the reflective mind to »dare to discern« – as the Kantian motto of the Enlightenment demands (see Kant 1963 [1784])? Or must we go even further and develop a self-critical ethos which implies both a historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us *and* the desire to transcend them – as Foucault (1984) suggests? Either way, the most apparent question still stays unanswered: which is the mirror in that the flux of reflective thought is reflected? – However, since it is the supposed nature of reflexivity to raise questions and not to resolve them: it will neither be answered in the following.

1. THE DISCOURSE OF REFLEXIVITY: BREAKING THE MIRROR

The basic idea, the imagination – since an idea is, literally, nothing else than an image – behind the concept of »reflection« is a »videological« one: the image of an image-processing. In the reflection, an object is »visually« *represented*. Light-rays are »bent back«. The (reflected) object, however, is not the source of the light. The object's surface is »mirroring« the incoming rays and when they hit the eye of the beholder a projection of the object is created. And we can, indeed, take this term also in its psychoanalytical meaning: with the projection, the object is becoming our creation, it can no longer be separated from our apparatus of perception nor from our inner processes, our desires and our experiences.

The projected object is a transformed object, it is as well a representation of an external object as an expression of subjective structures. Our »postmodern« constructivism tends to deny the first element. The dominant reading of the metaphor of reflection, however, used to deny the second. Accurate representation was the goal, and any subjective element was considered a disturbance and distortion and had to be eliminated. Plato's (1941 [370 B.C.E.]) »allegory of the cave« may serve us as the paradigmatic case for this view: the shadow-world in the cave only allows for a schematic, blurred and distorted image of the real. Only if we tear our bondages, that keep us imprisoned in the dark of the cave, and move up on the ground where the bright light of the sun shines, we can get an impression of the true conditions, Plato believed.

The idealistic theory of representation, which is essentially rooted in Platonic thought and which was dominant for more than 2000 years, is paralleled in modern science and its principle of »objectivity«. Probably, it is not by chance that the history of modern science in fact begins with the Copernican turn: the systematic observation of the sky allowed Copernicus to challenge

the traditional cosmology which placed the earth and not the sun at the center of the planetary system (and even the universe). The astronomist's *projection* of the stars and planets and their movements seemed to have revealed the true cosmic order.

Today, long after even the catholic church coped with the heliocentric offence and accepted the new cosmic map, we are, however, facing a deep crisis of representation and »objectivistic« knowledge. In the age of virtuality, we do not trust the flattened (LED-)surfaces of the media-world any more. And scientific objectivity is not only questioned in the aftermath of ecological disasters. On a very general level, the voice of doubt is awake. As Lyotard (1984 [1979]) points out, the modern metanarratives have lost their totalizing power. The mirror is broken and, as a consequence, the traditional model of representation is more and more replaced by a model of (hyperreal) simulation (see Baudrillard 1994 [1981]), i.e. actual reality is not represented but created in an act of simulation – by the way, an argument quite similar to the concept of »maya« in ancient Indian thought.

Resulting from this deconstruction of the ideology of representation, the reference to reflection has become rather antiquated in the discourse of social science. However, along with the repudiation of reflection a new star was born: reflexivity. While system theorists like Luhman (1995 [1984]) simply (yet extensively) use the term synonymous with the self-referentiality of a process, for Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) reflexivity in the context of social science implies necessary the self-consciousness that the social position of the scientist determines the perception of the social field and that any research has an effect on the object of study (and vice versa). Bourdieu and Wacquant meet here with Giddens' (1984) concept of the »double hermeneutic« of social science. But also Giddens explicitly uses the term »reflexivity« in the context of his theory of action and, even more pronounced, in his modernization theory. He states: »The reflexivity of modern social life consists in the fact that social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those very practices, thus constitutively altering their character.« (Giddens 1990: p. 38) But also for Beck (1992 [1986]) modernity is reflexive, i.e. it makes itself of object of modernization – primarily, as a result of the (perceived) risk that is implied in modern technology.

It seems that reflexivity has become one of the core concepts in current social theory (see also Beck/Giddens/Lash 1994), and, from a meta-perspective, Barry Sandywell (1996: p. xiv) well expresses the paradigm shift from reflection to reflexivity: »Reflection posits a neutral world of entities«, he claims. Whereas »reflexivity reminds reflection of the sociality of all world reference«. And in regard of the self Sandywell notes: »unlike the closed circle of disinterested reflection, reflexive action changes the form of the self: a reflexive practice never returns the self to the point of origin« (idib.). He thus may praise »reflexivity as the return of the repressed Other« (ibid.: p. xxi). But is it in fact necessary to depart from reflection in order to achieve at reflexivity? Do we really need to separate the two in such a way?

2. A DIFFERENT UNDERSTANDING OF REALITY, OR, THE EFFECTIVENESS OF DIFFERENCE

The underlying problems of the model of representation which is generally associated with the act of reflection appear, from a post-structuralist perspective, obvious. Reflection in the sense of representation is simplifying, since a one to one projection (which is its ideal) is a mere fiction. It is objectivistic, since it ignores the »subjectivity« and »relativity« of perception. It is ahistorical, since it disregards social dynamics and social framings. And it is a reifying act, since it dismisses the contingency of every »imagination«. Thus, reflection in the mode of representation creates identity (or »sameness«) and is hardly suited for giving the »repressed Other« – with whom Sandywell (1996) sympathized – a voice.

Yet, the discomfort with reflection is apparently simply grounded in a discomfort with a certain image – or theory – of (social) reality. Therefore, not reflection but the ontological background of conventional theories of representation should be taken under critical review. And if we have a look at it we may easily realize: this ontological background is still filled with ideas from classical philosophy. Plato (1941 [370 B.C.E.]) imagined the ideas, which serve as a kind of »blue print« or form for all knowledge and being, as eternal and true, while the ever-changing world of things, as it appears, is nothing but illusory. Also for Aristotle, who denied Plato's theory of forms, the material appearance of things is characterized by accidental properties whereas the (unchangeable) essence represents a potential which only in reality never fully shows. Both however agree: the more we approach truth, the closer we reach to the essence, the more definite and clear things will become. True being is essentially stable, just appearance varies.

But if we are – and we are! – increasingly uncomfortable with this traditional ontology: why not conceptualize reality in another direction? Why not declare constancy illusory? Why not postulate that the character of all being is dynamic? Why not assert that there is no essence but just appearance? If we imagine reality in such a »weakened« way, we do not need to trap ourselves in an »ontic amnesia« or »Seinsvergessenheit« (see Heidegger 1927) which neglects the relevance of being (in the world). But at the same time we take into account that being (in the world) is always an act of interpretation and understanding.

I thus want to suggest to start the further reflection on reflection from a different image and interpretation of the character of reality. In this image, reality is not a material, »objective« entity, but the totality of all »effective« appearance, which means: all that has an effect on us, which is accessible to our experience and which we (inter-actively) also shape and create. And in this image, reality is a reality of difference, since all major aspects of this reality represent specific dimensions of difference. Hence, I want to understand this reality as *contingent*: there is a difference between actuality and potentiality. This reality is also *indeterminate and positional*: there is an interpretative scope and a true difference of view between the various socio-spatial positions. Furthermore, this reality is *dynamic*: there is a difference between temporal states. And finally, this reality is *complex*: there is a qualitative difference between local and global effects caused by interdependence. Let us take this image of reality as a starting point. We

will see in the following that a different understanding of reality along these lines can have an important influence on the way in which we imagine and evaluate reflection.

3. THE LAYERS OF THE MIRROR: REFLECTION, REFLECTION, REFLEXIVITY

The classic »material« metaphor for reflection is the mirror. In the mirror, »reality« is reflected. But what happens to reality when it is »mirrored«? And which effect does reality have on the mirrored image, i.e. can it be reduced to reality? Finally: is the mirror still an adequate metaphor? We can hardly answer the first two questions, since that would imply to have access to an »unreflected«, »pure« reality. And, in the midst of the crisis of representation, we may deny the last question. However, I believe that we can still gain some important »insights« when exploring the mirror-image in fact metaphorically – that means: when we are aware of its imaginary character and use it creatively (see Jain 2002). Then only we can try and see how this affects the »nature« of (mirrored) reflection. So let us start and explore the metaphorical field of the mirror.

An informative use of the mirror-metaphor can be found in the work of Lacan. Indeed, what he calls the »mirror-stage« represents a most important topic in his work on the building of identity. Interestingly, Lacan (2001 [1949]) explicitly opposes his view to »any philosophy directly issuing from the *Cogito*« (p. 1). He speaks to us as a psychoanalyst and is thus drawing his conclusions in regard of the practical consequences of a specific »imaginary« relation in which the mirror plays a formative role. Lacan (ibid.: p. 1f.) explains: »We have only to understand the mirror stage as an *identification*, in the full sense that analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image«. The small child, when it recognizes itself in the mirror for the first time, creates an image or imago of itself. A fragmented self-perception is thus transformed into a (fictional) unity. Therefore, Lacan (ibid.: p. 2) puts clear: »This form would have to be called the *Ideal-I* [...] the important point is that this form situates the instance of the ego [...] in a fictional direction, which will always remain irreducible for the individual alone, or rather, which will rejoin the development of the subject only asymptotically«. Consequently, the mirror-stage initiates an endless »drama« for the subject, since it will never be possible to reach the fictional unity of identity created by the mirror-imago and the »I« is trapped in an illusion about its autonomy. In the end, this creates an alienation from oneself, or, as Rimbaud has put it: »I is another«.

Lacan's mirror thus triggers a dialectic: the (self-)recognition which it creates leads at the same time to a mis-recognition (see ibid.: p. 4f.). And, of course, we have to regard the mirror metaphorically. What Lacan, at least as I read him, wants to illustrate is the conception that it is the environment which creates our unity through our »reflections« in this environment. With this understanding of the mirror, Lacan clearly reveals the imaginary as well as the creative aspect of mirrored reflection (with all its problematic aspects), and Lacan's mirror is for sure not the media of a simple representation or identification, but of an imaginary production. This is what we can borrow from Lacan's concept of the mirror-stage.

However, let us go beyond that and assume a different kind of mirror: a torn and broken mirror, splintered into hundreds of parts which are spread all over the floor. In this kind of mirror, the world shows fragmented, we do not get a coherent image, but many different pieces which will never show a plain picture even when puzzled together. Such an image of the mirror and the reflection that it creates would probably come closer to the image of a contingent, indeterminate, dynamic and complex reality which was drawn above.

But we do not necessarily have to break the mirror to achieve there. We can keep the mirror undamaged and simply change our image of what is mirrored and how it is perceived. Lacan assumed that the impression which the mirrored self-image creates is that of unity. This is, however, just one possibility – a possibility which might, in fact, be central to the formation of the »I« in childhood, but which can be called »naive« in the sense of a »reflected« perception. For if we look at the mirror image, there might be a point when we realize that we are not looking at our self, but at a mirror. And if we keep looking at the mirror, we could begin to see the changes in the face that we consider to be ours – or we could even start to question that this is still the same person and that that person is us. The »reality« of the mirror – as a mirror: i.e. a thing outside our self – can thus also create the consciousness of the imaginary character of identity and of the contingent and dynamic character of being.

Accordingly, reflecting the world – if we »really« consider reality to be non-identical – means mirroring its difference and not representing its sameness. And this may, for sure, have practical consequences. »Realizing« the contingent, indeterminate, dynamic and complex character of being can lead to the imagination of a different world and, as a consequence, to the production of difference. This, however, means a completely new concept of reflection: *reflection* as the cognitive-symbolic (and emotional) mirroring of the reality of contingency, indeterminacy, dynamics and complexity. And fully unfold, this form of reflection implies even more: the appreciation and the active creation of the dimension of difference which is »essentially« entailed in contingency, indeterminacy, dynamics and complexity. I suggest to call this practical aspect of reflection »*reflaction*« (which is the short for reflexive action). Both, reflection and reflaction, can finally crystalize in structures, and it is this coagulation of reflexive elements which I want to call *reflexivity*. Reflexivity, as I conceptualize it, is thus not opposed to or transcending reflection, but it is merely its structural correspondence. Reflexivity according to this understanding means the structural opening and reinforcement of spaces of contingency, of ambivalence and of dynamics, and it hence also results in an increase of complexity. A reflexive structure is enabling and sustains reflection as well as reflexive action.

4. THE CHALLENGE OF THE MIRROR: DEFLEXIVE RESPONSES

A reflexive reference to being and reflexive structures are, however, not unproblematic. They may trigger dialectic counter-movements in the shape of defensive reactions, or, as I suggest to call them, *deflexive responses* (see also Jain 2000). The reason for these deflexive responses

exactly lies in the challenge caused by reflexive impulses: Reflection cannot stop, it implies a never ending questioning and it potentially produces dissolution and fragmentation. Refraction, on the other hand, encounters resistance, since the dynamics it creates endangers the power of the beneficiaries of the status quo and triggers fear of the unknown and the loss of control which lurk behind any change. Finally, the reflexive structures of reflexivity open up spaces of contingency which likewise implies the possibility of a structural hardening (which deflects reflexive impulses), and their complexity makes understanding and control more difficult. On a more general level, we can thus identify the root of deflexive responses in the perceived threat created by a (social) reality which is precisely not clearly defined, simple, constant and final, but again and again bears possibilities for (radical) change and, as a consequence, also failure and loss (of control).

Erich Fromm (1984 [1941]) impressively described a part of this reflexive dilemma in his book »*The Fear of Freedom*«. In analogy to the basic arguments of Marx and Engels (1888 [1848]) in their »Communist Manifesto«, he emphasizes the enormous gains in positive freedom which modern capitalism made possible: »In contrast with the feudal system of the Middle Ages under which everybody had fixed place in an ordered and transparent social system, capitalistic economy put the individual entirely on his own feet.« (Fromm 1984 [1941]: p. 93) But Fromm also shows the dialectics of this process of »individualization« when he remarks: »in furthering ›freedom from‹, this principle [of individual freedom] helped to sever all ties between one individual and the other and thereby isolated and separated the individual from his fellow man.« (Ibid.) In order to escape this threat of a loss of social ties we tend to flee into authoritarian structures, destructive practices and conformism, as Fromm states (see *ibid.*: pp. 117ff.).

Another important aspect of the dialectics of reflexivity is addressed in the work of Zygmunt Bauman (1991) on »*Modernity and Ambivalence*«. For him the movement of modernity was nothing but a never-ending war against ambivalence provoked by the desire to sustain order in a world of drastic change. Whenever ambivalence appears, new efforts of ordering and classification are made which, as a consequence, create new possibilities for ambivalence. Paradoxically, according to Bauman, the movement of modernity thus produces exactly by its ordering inclusions and exclusion ambivalences which have to be fought more and more rigidly. In its efforts of classification and separation modernity is as impotent as violent.

Both the flight mechanism described by Fromm and the war against ambivalence pictured by Bauman can be interpreted as defensive reactions to reflexive processes. The »effective« reality of contingency, indeterminacy, dynamics and complexity and its reflexive mirroring is perceived as a chance and as a threat and thus always triggers deflexive responses, too. In analogy to the three reflexive dimensions (reflection, refraction and reflexivity) I, therefore, also want to distinguish three dimensions in the field of deflexive responses: *deflection* means the diversion of reflexive impulses through the cognitive-symbolic negation and/or routine-driven suppression of reflection, reflexive action and reflexivity. Unconscious and unintentional deflexion is an expression of the desire for unambiguity and the belief that the current state of affairs is inevitable, without a true alternative. Conscious and intentional deflection or *deflaction* goes beyond that and seeks

to *actively* block reflexive impulses and the development of reflexive structures, while deflexivity denotes the established material and structural covering and locking of spaces of contingency, ambivalence, change and interconnection. Thus, deflexivity basically means the production of identity by means of structural momentum and structural violence.

5. IDENTITY AND DEATH: THE DESTRUCTIVE SIDE OF REFLEXIVITY AND THE PRODUCTIVE FORCES OF DEFLEXIVITY

The dialectic concept of reflection and reflexivity (as »mirror« of reality) is a more radical approach than it might seem at first sight. Especially deflection and deflexivity, as the other side of this dialectics, are »critical« terms and the underlying »metaphorical« concept potentially allows for social analysis on a very general level but with regard to the specific »material« circumstances of the particular field of interest, so that deflection/deflexivity can be a most relevant category for research on the level of the individual, of groups and organizations and of society as a whole. What is more, it represents a kind of grip for various other critical concepts – such as »ideology«, »mauvaise foi«, »false necessity«, »symbolic politics« etc. – since it systematically links discourse, practice and structure and establishes a dialectic relation between (»effective«) reality and its (social) reflections.

However, a truly critical approach cannot stop here. There is not only a reflexive-deflexive dialectics at work but reflection and deflection (and, respectively, reflexivity and deflexivity) each bear a dialectical dynamic. Thus, although we usually tend to favor the reflexive mode: neither is reflection/reflexivity merely »positive« nor is deflection/deflexivity fully »negative«. Both carry »productive« and »destructive« elements. Therefore, a critical theory of reflexivity has to consider the deflexive side and the dialectics of both reflexivity and deflexivity.

As I already pointed out: reflection is a never ending cycle and its »rootedness« in the mirroring of (the »effective«) difference (of reality) potentially leads to a loss of identity and fragmentation. So let us first look a bit closer at this de(con)structive side of reflection/reflexivity: it appears to me that this de(con)structive component can be traced in what Freudian psychoanalysis would call a (latent) »death drive« (see Freud 1961 [1920]), since reflection/reflexivity exactly works in the direction of »analysis«, of dissolution and therefore endangers cohesion, unity and »productivity«, the basic characteristics of the pleasure principle or »Eros«. And, in fact, a specific kind of dissolution – the constitution of a difference to oneself – is even traditionally considered to be an essential element of philosophical thought. Hence, Montaigne (1877 [1575]) points out (with reference to Cicero): »to study philosophy is to learn to die«. And he further explains: »The reason of which is, because study and contemplation do in some sort withdraw from us our soul, and employ it separately from the body, which is a kind of apprenticeship and a resemblance of death; or else, because all the wisdom and reasoning in the world do in the end conclude in this point, to teach us not to fear to die.« (Ibid.: p. 74)

In my opinion, this absence of fear, which Montaigne mentions, is indeed a crucial element for the reflexive mode, and it derives exactly from a disinterest in conservation or survival. Here lies, however, the productive component of the reflexive disinterest in conservative survival. It gives space to the creation of the new. Becoming and dissolution are united in the metaphor of death. But the reflexive fearlessness not only implies a courageous approach to possibility, but its dissolving element also represents a relieve on the arduous creation of identity and thus opens up room for difference. On the other hand: the reflexive mode cannot use the strength that identity may give, and its sympathy for otherness and its »negativity« denies unification, growth and »positive« knowledge.

The deflexive mode can be imagined exactly reverse. It is »driven« by the fear of a loss of control and – finally – life, which leads to a general fear of change and an interest in conservation. This primary orientation initially appears to be unproductive, but it in fact serves an important purpose. I want to explain that purpose in analogy to the model of repression as developed by Freud. It is one of the great achievements of Freud that he formulated models for a deeper understanding of those only seemingly dark and irrational psychic processes, and that also applies for repression: As Freud (1977 [1915–17]: ch. 19) points out, repression is an (expensive) effort to fulfill the strong demands of the superego by keeping disturbing elements (which do not comply with the ideal-I) at a subconscious level. However, this may cause counterproductive, »pathological« symptoms so that it is the task of psychoanalysis to bring all the repressed elements into light (see also *ibid.*: ch. 17 and 18). In the end, Freud thus rather stresses the negative aspects of repression, while I want to exhibit its productive sides here: Repression keeps the psychic system working even in cases of trauma. It is a defensive and thus also a protective mechanism. In the psychic economy repression is a win situation as long as the necessary effort to repress (and to deal with the symptoms which it causes) not exceeds the gains in the ability to sustain the self and to act. Much in the same manner, deflection may be an efficient protection against the excessive requests of reflexivity: the demanding choir of the voices of otherness, the uncertainty of change, the challenge of possibility, the overtaxing imposition of complexity. While reflection perpetuates questioning and thus obstructs purposeful intervention, deflection allows pragmatic, preservative action. Therefore, we should not underestimate the supportive and productive effect of deflexive mechanisms. As it is the primary task of the apparatus of perception to filter out information, deflection can serve as a protective umbrella for the individual and for society. But in order to work beneficial, reflexive and deflexive elements must be in a balanced relation.

6. THE CASE OF THE »CONSTRUCTION SET«-TEAM: FIRST EXPLORATIONS INTO A DIALECTIC ORGANOLYSIS

Finally, let me illustrate this dialectic concept with an empirical example in the field of organizations. An organization can be viewed as structurally located right in the middle between

the individual level and society as a whole, and, therefore, it has to deal with both individual and socio-political demands. If we think of an organization in analogy with the psychic apparatus (see Freud 1989 [1938]) we would thus put it in the place of the intermediate category of the ego, while the individual level could be paralleled with the id and society may represent the super-ego. This is, of course, a very rough and probably a wrong image. But it may nevertheless be instructive, since this way we can »realize« that an organization is very much in the same dilemmatic situation as the ego which has to balance the opposing impulses of the id and the super-ego.

Also another »metaphor« may serve us to sharpen our understanding of organizations: the metaphor of the »organ« which is suggested by the term itself. Originally, the Greek term »organon« (from which »organ« is derived) refers to a (mechanical) tool. Only later »organic« acquired the connotations of »natural« and »living« – like the bodily organs. Again, the organs of the body are the result of a cell differentiation and the specialized cells of the organ build a functional unit. Accordingly, the bodily organs are defined by a difference to their environment and form an inner functional unity – almost the classical definition of an organization. However, when we try to combine the two metaphors – the ego and the organ – a tension becomes immediately apparent: internal unity is endangered by the conflicting demands of the individuals forming the organization and to maintain the sharp difference to the (social) environment is a continuous fight against its absorbing super-structures. Thus, the balance of the organization is always fragile and endangered. Any study of organizations must be aware of this special constellation. The dialectical concept of reflexivity may be informative in this regard since it draws our attention to the deflexive elements which, in the case of organizations, are also manifestations of the contradictory demands any organization has to satisfy. I suggest to call such an approach in the study of organizations – in imitation of the term »psychoanalysis« – *organolysis*, which implies not only to make those hidden »irrational« elements in the practices and routines of organization visible but to be able to »make sense« of them (in order to transcend them).

Now, that we have a more pronounced idea of the task to perform, I want to present you a very brief example of organolysis which is part of my current research (as member of a research group of the TU Chemnitz) in the field of innovation and institutional reflexivity in large firms (see also Moldaschl 2007). The study (which is mainly carried out by means of qualitative research in the form of interviews and participant observation) is not yet finished and, naturally, the results are preliminary yet, at least I hope so, instructive. The actual case I am presenting explores an (all men) project team which was set up by a big and very successful German automotive company in order to develop a new, improved car »construction set« which is meant to build the basis of production for the next 15 years. The team had little guidelines and was virtually free to self-organize. In fact, the only clear target was to reduce the cost of development and production by means of synergy. We thus expected to meet people passionately working on the future of the company. What we found was, however, lethargy and disinterest, at best a kind of limited commitment. Only the very core team whose job exclusively focused on

the »construction set« showed more enthusiasm, but also frustration due to the blocking of their colleagues.

There is one team-member who acts as the »enfant terrible« and makes himself the voice of latent frustration. He is, in fact, in a special position within the team, which is mainly composed of people from the development department, whereas his part is to represent the demands of production. However, he himself also used to be in the development department and his colleagues from the production department do not clearly consider him to be one of them. He is thus in a precarious position »between two stools« – as he put it in an interview. In a supervised group meeting, a so-called »pit stop«, he openly expressed his annoyance: »Where is the vision? Why do I sit here every Monday [when the regular meetings take place] for four hours [...] I do not know why I am here [...] I got a feeling of pressure – like from flatulence«.

The rather distanced and ambivalent view towards the project was also revealed in a more latent form, through metaphors which we asked our interviewees to give. The given metaphors range from images which suggest an (unrealized) potential in the project – like »a super-tanker which is maneuvered by tugs, which is sluggish and needs direction, but has a high capacity« or »it could become a cheetah: light, fast, agile« – to more skeptical ones (such as »a stuttering motor of four cylinders where three cylinders move and the forth just once in a while« or »a flock of chickens where all move in different directions and just come together when somebody throws in a shovel of corn«).

The reasons for this ambivalence are manifold. As it appears, one important point is that the work in the team is for most members an additional task which they have to perform but where the benefit for the individual and the division he represents is unclear. What is more, there is a (probably justified) suspicion that existing internal power relations will finally lead to a specific range of models defining the process according to its needs since this model range represents the cash-cow of the company. That adds to another problem in regard of the »team spirit«: most team members do not seem to believe in the chance of creatively shaping the process. In spite of the fact that it is generally criticized that the targets are not communicated well, that they are unclear and/or keep changing, it is unquestioned that cost reduction is the primary task (and the team also acts accordingly). Further complaints are: diffuse structures of decision making, extensive requirements of coordination and slow advancement. And although the project is considered to be most relevant for the future development of the company, the top management does not show visible commitment with the team's work.

In the face of the reported problems and deficiencies we asked ourselves if the spaces of possibility are really that limited within the project. We then started imagining a »construction set«-revolution which would change the whole way of building and marketing cars, having highly customizable products and abandoning artificial limitations imposed by today's product lines. To us, a radicalized idea of a construction set seemed to make all this possible. And we additionally envisioned a future of electrified vehicles without producing any pollution in the cities. Of course, we also asked the interviewees about their visions. It was very striking to hear that – in spite of the latest developments in the field of electrification – all but one of the interviewees

were convinced that the future would look more or less the same as today (with the well-known big players producing slightly improved fuel driven cars). The reason for this conservative estimation is in my opinion to be seen in a deflexive response to possible change: the expertise of the interviewees as well as of the whole company completely lies in building conventional cars so that any change in another direction would devalue their knowledge and competencies. That is why the possibility of change is neglected and the implied chances are ignored. What is more, all the interviewees showed a very high identification with their employer. Not only did they completely internalize the business principles of cost efficiency and the brand image of high quality and innovative technology, but this even stooled them from developing alternative visions of their field of work. The original heterogeneity of the team – in terms of a representation of all relevant divisions – thus resolved in homogeneity.

The identification with the company caused yet another strange phenomenon: none of the interviewees seemed to even consider that they might fail with the project, although each of them virtually pointed us to an armada of problems and potential risk. Just to name a few: There is lack of understanding of what a construction set actually means, while the old thinking in terms of production lines is still prevalent. The representatives of the single division are unable to apply a general view. The time of fixation imposed by the construction set is extremely long considering the speed of innovation. Finally, the cycles of innovation of the different set-modules are asynchronous. All these problems and elements of risk were deflected by the reference to a heroic discourse which is widespread in the company: after more than a decade of fast growth and perfect success an »we always did it«-attitude is dominant.

However, as pointed out above, there are also reflexive potentials. But in order to be able to practically access them, the team in our opinion needs to reflect more on the deflexive elements. We have discussed our results with the team (with an ambivalent, both reflexive and deflexive feedback) and we are eager to watch how the project will develop and if a reflexive dynamic can be unfold.

Although this was just a very superficial impression of the case, I hope it has now become clearer that the dialectical view on reflexivity (and deflexivity) is useful in order to develop a critical understanding of several seemingly »irrational« phenomena which are quite common in many organizations and how this could in turn allow for reflexive intervention (see also Moldaschl/Bröder 2002).

Literature

- Aristotle (1998 [ca. 350 B.C.E.]): *Metaphysics*. London: Penguin Books.
- Bauman, Zygmunt (1991): *Modernity and Ambivalence*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Baudrillard, Jean (1994 [1981]): *Simulacra and Simulation*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Beck, Ulrich (1992 [1986]): *Risk Society – Towards a New Modernity*. London: Sage
- Beck, Ulrich/Giddens, Anthony/Lash, Scott (1994): *Reflexive Modernization – Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre/Wacquant, Loïc J. D. (1992): *Invitation to a Reflexive Sociology*. Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press.
- Foucault, Michel (1984): *What is Enlightenment?* In: Rabinow, Paul (ed.) (1984): *The Foucault Reader*. New York: Pantheon Books, pp. 32–50.
- Fromm, Erich (1984 [1941]): *The Fear of Freedom*. London: Ark Paperbacks.
- Freud, Sigmund (1961 [1920]): *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. New York/London: W. W. Norton.
- Freud, Sigmund (1977 [1915–17]): *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*. New York/London: W. W. Norton.
- Freud, Sigmund (1989 [1938]): *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*. New York/London: W. W. Norton.
- Giddens, Anthony (1984): *The Constitution of Society – Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Giddens, Anthony (1990): *The Consequences of Modernity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Heidegger, Martin (1927): *Sein und Zeit*. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer.
- Jain, Anil K. (2000): *Politik in der (Post-)Moderne – Reflexiv-deflexive modernisierung und die Diffusion des Politischen*. München: edition fatal.
- Jain, Anil K. (2002): *Medien der Anschauung – Theorie und Praxis der Metapher*. München: edition fatal.
- Kant, Immanuel (1963 [1784]): *An Answer to the Question: »What Is Enlightenment?«* In: White Beck, Lewis (ed.) (1963): *Kant – On History*. Indianapolis/New York: Bobbs-Merrill, pp. 11–26.
- Lacan, Jacques (2001 [1949]): *The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I*. In: Lacan, Jacques: *Écrits – A Selection*. London: Routledge, pp. 1–6.
- Lyotard, Jean-François (1984 [1979]): *The Postmodern Condition – A Report on Knowledge*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Luhmann, Niklas (1995 [1984]): *Social Systems*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Marx, Karl/Engels, Friedrich (1888 [1848]): *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. London: William Reeves.

-
- Moldaschl, Manfred (2007): *Institutional Reflexivity – An Institutional Approach to Measure Innovativeness of Firms*. Papers and Reprints of the Department of Innovation Research and Sustainable Resource Management (BWL IX), TU Chemnitz. Online resource: http://www.tu-chemnitz.de/wirtschaft/bwl9/forschung/fprojekte/reflex/ergebnisse/download/Institutional_Reflexivity_07.pdf
 - Moldaschl, Manfred/Brödner, Peter (2002): *A Reflexive Methodology of Intervention*. In: Docherty, Peter/Forslin, Jan/Shani, Rami (eds.) (2002): *Creating Sustainable Work Systems – Emerging Perspectives and Practice*. London/New York: Routledge, pp. 179–189.
 - Montaigne, Michel de (1877 [1575]): *That to Study Philosophy Is to Learn to Die*. In: Hazlitt, William c. (ed.) (1877): *The Essays of Montaigne*. London: Reeves and Turner, Vol. 1, pp. 74–96.
 - Plato (1941 [370 B.C.E.]): *The Republic*. New York: The Modern Library.
 - Sandywell, Barry (1996): *Reflexivity and the Crisis of Western Reason – Logological Investigations [Vol. 1]*. London/Yew York: Routledge.

INFORMATION SHEET

Author(s): Anil K. Jain
Title: Reflection and Deflection
Subtitle: Approaches to a Dialectical Concept of Reflexivity
Year of Origin: 2010
Version/Last Updated: 14/04/2010
Original Download-Link: http://www.power-xs.net/jain/pubs/reflection_deflection.pdf
First Print Publishing in: —

In case that you want to cite passages of this text, it is preferred that you quote the PDF-version (indicating the version number/update date) – even if a print-version is available – since the PDF-version may be more profound and/or corrected and updated.

Find other texts of Anil K. Jain and further information at: <http://www.power-xs.net/jain/>
E-Mail contact: jain@power-xs.net

Feedback is welcome! (However, there is no guarantee of a reply.)

TERMS OF USE:

Knowledge is (to be) free! Thus, for non-commercial academic and private use, please, feel free to copy and redistribute this text in any form. However, instead of offering this text for download on other sites rather link to the original download location (see above) – as long as it exists – in order to be able to get information about the number of total downloads. If you do a non-commercial print-redistribution you are asked to report the publishing details to the author(s).

Commercial use is strictly prohibited without the explicit prior permission of the author(s). Any kind of publication and redistribution which involves the charging of money (or money equivalents) or fees and/or which is meant for advertisement purposes is considered to be commercial.

In any case, the text may not be modified in any way without permission. Information about the authorship and, if applicable, print publication may not be removed or changed.