Complementary construction of the World and of the Self

Richard Jung

Center for Systems Research
Kouřimská 24
CZ-284 01 Kutná Hora
Czech Republic
richardjung@post.harvard.edu

Complementary construction of the World and of the Self

Richard Jung
Center for Systems Research
Kouřimská 24
CZ-284 01 Kutná Hora
Czech Republic
richardjung@post.harvard.edu

Abstract

It is mentally comfortable to believe that our knowledge of ourselves and our situation is objective. It is daring to contemplate the possibility that it is a construction. However, most contemporary constructivists are timid. Although they accept the notion that existence and significance of attributes of the World are the result of a construction, they take the being and the meaning of a Self (or an Observer) for granted. The problem and the temptation to seek its avoidance in the acceptance of asymmetric dualism have been recognized since the early formulations of Indo-European critical philosophy in the Vedas. Psychologists such as Freud and Piaget and sociologists such as Vico, Marx, Holzner, Berger and Luckman concerned themselves with the interaction between the construction of the World and of the Self. Yet studies of the interplay between the continuing construction and reconstruction of the World(s) and the Self (Selves) are hard to find in recent literature. Recent psychological literature on mechanisms of defense and coping may alert to dangers of extreme subjective and one-sided constructivism of the World. My systematic approach to complementary construction of the Self and the World (the Situation of the Self) is briefly reviewed.

Introduction

"Determinism is dead in the social sciences." So the first immediate pronunciamiento in the advertisement for the next world marketplace for sociologists that is to take place in the summer of 2010. An immediate recollection of a title of a perhaps sixty year's old paper "The determinants of the belief that the will is free" filled me with glee. Determined by the expectation that there are gems to follow I plowed through the hundreds of empty phrases of the "come and display yourself" prospectus for "Sociology on the move". The almost pornographic exhibition of not understood terms by the advertisers confirmed what I often experience from some of my colleagues: terms, including such as cybernetics, phenomenology, postmodern or constructivism, are balls to be tossed around in the uninteresting occupational or ideological games they play.

I shall not react to "Constructivism on the move", but to the standstill of timid constructivism as constructivism is understood by most, other than members of esoteric sects. The understanding of constructivism by the exoteric public is influenced by a syndrome of opinions that the protagonists of the notion display for several decades in varying combinations. In it are rejections of what they call conventional, standard or positivist science and

their sympathies to voluntarism, autopoiesis, cybernetics, second order cybernetics, post-modernism, hidden creationism or the anthropic principle. Within this constellation there almost invariably appears the rejection of attempts at objectivity (Wertfreiheit) replaced by an obligation of religious or anti-religious, social or political engagement by each and every scientist or scholar. Vehemently imposed is the categorical imperative of taking a correct value stand.[2]

Critical ontology and epistemology

The initial fundamental Indo-European ontological presupposition is that ontologically all is non-dual. A plausible violation of non-duality in critical epistemology would require that considerations of Self and of Situation are both noetic and noematic. I do not wish to add here to the reviews by many others (and of mine elsewhere) of the perennial constructivisms that occur formulated in varieties of Indo-European philosophy from the time of the Vedas till today. On the whole they are constructivisms that are (to use a phenomenological term) noematic, i.e., epistemologically outer oriented. While Descartes takes the Ego in the Cogito as at least problematic, even Spinozian Natura Sive Eidolon is again outer oriented, and in general, so is Kant. The Eye of God which spies on us in many Catholic churches from the ceiling is in timid construtivisms ever present as a mythical Observer. From where she/he/it/multiune appears we are mostly not told[3] 📖 *74* [4]

A critical epistemology (or constructivism) would concern itself significantly with the Self. One such systematic effort is the exploration of the complementarity, correspondence or reduction of mentality and action to brain states, their deformities and injuries. Closely related is the literature on developmental stages and neural maturation. Much of cultural anthropology and personality psychology has as a key topic the emergence and transformation of the Self depending on its Situation. Among the original formulations of this relationship is of course Sigmund Freud, but also of more recent thinkers such as Erikson, Parsons and Bales, Garfinkel (his initial ideas about ethnomethodology), and the valiant attempt by Powers to reverse the relation normally assumed by cybernetitians between perception and action.

Mechanisms of defense

An area of psychology that is not usually in the focus of attention of systems theorists and cybernetitians could be viewed as concerning itself implicitly with the construction of a Self even though ostensibly dealing with construction of the World. It describes coping mechanisms defined as the skills used to reduce stress (often characterized as consciously used skills) and defense mechanisms (regarded as their unconscious counterpart).

The fundamental mechanism, discussed even before Sigmund Freud, is repression. Currently, one can encounter the descriptions and analyses of some 40 defense mechanisms. Among them are acting out, affiliation, aim inhibition, altruism, avoidance, compensation, delusional projection, denial, devaluation, displacement, dissociation, distortion, fantasy, humor, idealization, identification, intellectualization, introjection, isolation, passive aggres-

---

[2] Occasionally a *bon mot* by Erving Goffman resonates: "Society is an insane asylum run by the inmates."

[3] In social sciences and especially in the so-called "second order cybernetics" the key significance of an "observer" is implicitly and often explicitly based on an understanding of the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum theory, specifically the so called "collapse of the wave function" and the Hamiltonian operator. There are interpretations (e.g. S. Y. Auyang's) according to which the presence of an observer (and especially of consciousness) for the transition from micro (quantum) to macro is not needed.

[4] Original page number in R. Trappl (ed.): *Cybernetics and Systems 2010*. Proceedings of the 20th European Meeting on Cybernetics and Systems Research (EMCSR 20100) organized by the Austrian Society for Cybernetic Studies, held at the University of Vienna, Austria, Tuesday 6 - 8 April 2010, pp. 73-75. ISBN 978 3 85206 178 8

sion, projection, projective identification, rationalization, reaction formation, repression, somatization, splitting, sublimation, suppression, undoing. All these, although not necessary discussed as such, describe instances of maintenance or modifications of a Self in relation to its Situation. The relevant literature is voluminous. Representative is Sigmund Freud, Wilhelm Reich, Anna Freud, Paul Wachtel and Phebe Cramer. In the recent literature there is a continuous discussion whether any or all of the mechanisms are innate or learned.

Constructing a Self and its Situation

Two assumptions are basic to an adequate construction of a Self as a system. One is the ontological inaccessibility of any Self, as it is already articulated in the ancient Hindu doctrine of anatta (no unique, definite and knowable Self). Buddha allegedly taught it and the various schools of his followers made it famous. The second is that a Self is constructed as one Janus face of a relation in a field of meaning. The other face of the relation is constructed as a World (or a Situation).

The definitions of the Self and of the World can be constructed by a specified set of strictly complementary processes, categories and terms. My detailed proposal formulated as "Systems of Orientation" may be hard to read and study (especially since much of it is presented in tabular form)[5], but is essential to my approach.

Biology and sociology generally acknowledges the complementarity of relations such as solidary and agonistic, sexual, dominance, age, or geographic and cultural territoriality. A thorough analysis of the mutual interaction of a Self with an Other is Parson's discussion of the relationship between the physician and the patient and of the sick role.[6] Full sociological treatment of the complementarity of a Self and its Situation within social studies is Goffman's (1961) description of 'total institutions'. A particular cybernetic and developmental model of an interaction between a Self and a Situation I formulated as an "Ejective Channel".[7] There are innumerable conceptualizations of it as kinds of reproduction, socialization and manufacturing.

A construction (or topo- and choro-graphy) of the subject, ghost, image or eidolon called the Self involves defining in a field of meaning a focal region that has a boundary. This boundary has a hull, the external face of the boundary (persona) and a shell, the internal face of a boundary (anima[8]). A Self is heterogeneous and anisotropic. Its boundaries are susceptible to deformation, to which it often responds by hyper-elasticity, hyper-plasticity and hyper-fragility. These types of responses receive various interpretations in the behavioral sciences, among which may be mentioned the ideas of internalization of external forces (delayed learning) and neuroses. The Self is dynamic and historical (i.e. subject to hysteresis), heterarchic, itinerant, modal and anabolic (in that it devours various images and types of the future and having digested them, excretes them into the past as various gradually dissolving narratives. of the past).

A Self is generated and regenerated. Its history is the metabolism of meaninglessness into meaning and of catabolism of meaning into meaninglessness through a sequence of mod-

---

[5] Revisions presented since 1962. Published as Ch. 13 'Systems of Orientation' in Jung (2007) *Experience and Action.*

[6] In 1951 in his *The Social System*, Ch X, Social structure and dynamic process: The case of modern medical practice, pp. 428-47 and the latest version in his "Sick role and the role of the physician" article of 1975.

[7] First presented at the APA annual meeting in San Francisco (as coauthored by Mervin Freedman: "Some aspects of education in contemporary society") and in 1962 at the annual meeting of the Ohio Valley Sociological Society, East Lansing MI as "Socializing organizations as ejective channels.". It is included in my PhD thesis and is published in Jung (2007) as sections 1.5, 1.6 and 1.7 on pp.41-48.

[8] The terms *persona* and *anima* are used as by C. K. Jung.

al transformations. A Self and its Situa 📖 *75* tion may be imagined as a swath of meaning and of local turbulence in meaninglessness.[9]

System theory of Self and its Situation

The relation between the Self and its Situation (the World) I postulate to be governed by a principle of maximum possible reduction of any discrepancy between one's definition of a Self and the Situation of that Self. There are two complementary ways to reduce a discrepancy: to change one's definition of the Situation to correspond to one's definition of the Self or to change one's definition of the Self to correspond to the definition of the Situation.

A symmetrical or complemetary costructivism seems to me to be possible to develop naturaly within a postmodern system of orientation that already incorporates the two key ideas of noetic-noematic complemetarity and of covariance of meaning under transformations of Self and/or of Situation. I have described elsewhere[10] the essential features of a such sober postmondern systems theory.

References

Auyang, S. Y. (1995). *How is Quantum Field Theory Possible?* US: Oxford University Press.

Auyang, S. Y. (1998). *Foundations of Complex-System Theories in Economics, Evolutionary Biology, and Statistical Physics.* UK: Cambridge University Press.

Cramer, P. (2006). *Protecting the Self: Defense Mechanisms in Action.* New York NY: Guilford Press.

Erikson, E. H. (1950). *Childhood and Society.* New York NY: Norton.

Freud, A. (1936).*The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense*. In: The Writings of Anna Freud: 8 Volumes. New York NY: IUP. Or in: (1937). (Cecil Baines, Trans.). London UK: Hogarth.

Goffman, E. (1961) *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*. New York, Doubleday.

Jung, R. (2007). *Experience and action: Selected items in systems theory.* Vienna, A: Edition echoraum.

Parsons, T. (1951) *The Social System.* Glencoe IL: The Free Press.

Parsons, T. (1975) "The Sick Role and the Role of the Physician Reconsidered." *Millbank Memorial Fund Quarterly* vol.53.no.3, pp.257-278.

Parsons, T. w. R. F. Bales & E. A. Shils. (1953). *Working Papers in the Theory of Action*. Glencoe IL: The Free Press.

Powers, W. T. (1970). *Behavior: The Control of Perception.* Chicago IL: Aldine.

Reich, W. (1933). *Charakteranalyse.* Reproduced in: *Character Analysis*, 3rd enl. ed., NY: Noonday Press 1990.

Wachtel, P. L. (1987) *Action and Insight.* New York NY: Guilford Press.

---

[9] See final part of Communication and Control in Time in *Journal of Communication and Cognition,* 28, 1995, Special issue nr. 2/3, or Section 5.3 'Being in Time', pp. 135-138 in Jung (2007) *Experience and Action*.

[10] It has been republished recently as Chapter 7 in my *Experience and Action*.