

THE TRAJECTORY OF THE MORPHOGENETIC APPROACH An account in the first-person

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As a philosophy of social science Critical Realism (Archer *et al.*, 1998) holds that reasons are causes for action and that is as true of writing books and developing a theory as it is for any other intentional human activity. Thus, following the lecture I was honoured to deliver at ISCTE (March 2007), I was very pleased to be invited to present this overview of the reasons that initially prompted the “morphogenetic approach” to be advanced, the rationale linking the six key books (and associated articles) through which it has been elaborated, and to explain what the next three works hope to accomplish in order to complete this project. However, for every social theorist the elaboration of a theoretical framework is always “work in progress” and never a *fait accompli*.

In this short piece, I have been given the rare licence to explain the trajectory taken, though still to be completed, by my own theoretical work. This is a license that some would withhold as part of their withdrawal of *authorial authority*. Although the respect due to one’s readers necessarily means that each book one publishes should be self-standing, that does not (and cannot) mean it is self-contained. Each should be self-standing, that is, worth reading by itself, because it would be futile arrogance to presume that readers already had a familiarity with one’s collected works or intended to become conversant with them.

However, in the last two decades of the twentieth century and most markedly in the Humanities, the balance shifted dramatically from assigning excessive authority to the author to according the reader exclusive interpretative authority. This can be epitomised as placing the author in the Derridian *hors texte* which, for all his later equivocations, never involved a restoration of authorial privileges. From this perspective, authors were seen as loosing texts on the public and, in so doing, their personal intentionality was transformed into a conduit for social forces. That is, authorial intentions were subordinated to expressions of their class position, symptomatic of their engendered standpoint, or subsumed into that ill-defined but capacious portmanteau, the hegemonic discourse. If what the writer intended could not be crammed into that suitcase, there was no baggage limit and such intentions could be packed in a smaller hold-all, labelled subversive discourses. With the author now “shut up” and “shut out”, the text itself supposedly became the property of the *demos* (let a thousand interpretations bloom without questions about their legitimacy arising because “fairness”, “accuracy” and “substantiation” were the tainted currency of Modernism/ity). Yet, as we well know, proceedings were far from being democratic, let alone approaching the Habermasian “ideal speech situation” or the Gadamerian “fusion of horizons”. Instead, rhetorical persuasion ruled where the rules of the game were Feyerabend’s “anything goes”. However, most goes — in a manner distinctly

non-postmodernist — to those best hierarchically placed to make their interpretations count.

Undoubtedly, in the past, excessive claims had been made for first-person epistemic authority, including that of the author — infallibility (Descartes), omniscience (Hume), indubitability (Hamilton) and incorrigibility (Ayer). Nevertheless, it is possible to defend authorial authority without making such claims and thus to prevent textual understanding from becoming an exercise conducted wholly in the third-person. The defence is a matter of ontology, which is prior to any epistemological question of sharing or of third-person interpretation.

Conscious states, such as those involved in an author developing a theory, can only exist from the point of view of the subject who is experiencing those thoughts. In other words, the intention to write a book has what John Searle (1999) terms a first-person ontology. This means intentions have a subjective mode of existence, which is also the case for desires, feelings, fantasies, and beliefs. That is, only as experienced by a particular subject does a particular thought exist. Just as there are no such things as disembodied pains, there are no such things as thoughts that are independent of subjectivity. Both pains and thoughts are first-person dependent for their existence.

However, you might object that whilst I cannot share my toothache with you, what am I currently doing (in writing) but sharing my thoughts with you? In fact I do not agree that it is possible to share my thoughts with you. Instead, what I am doing is sharing my *ideas* with you, as Popperian World Three objects (Popper, 1972), ones that will become even more permanently part of World Three once they are published. What I cannot share with you is something William James captured very well, the reflexive monitoring that is going on here and now as my thoughts are turned into the complete sentences that you will read several months hence. Internally, I am engaged in self-monitoring activities, which are an inextricable part of my thoughts, such as mundanely checking that a singular subject is accompanied by a singular verb or distilling an insight into words that seem to capture it adequately. This ontological point has far-reaching implications. Quite simply and very radically, it means that we cannot have a sociology exclusively in the third-person; one in which the subject's first-person subjectivity is ignored. That is as true for any author as it is for any respondent in a sociological inquiry.

The subjective ontology of thought(s) has epistemological consequences, one of which concerns the nature of epistemic sharing possible between an author and his or her readers. Without making any of the excessive claims mentioned above, I can still claim self-warranted authority in the first-person because my thoughts are known directly to me and only indirectly, through fallible interpretation, to a third-person commentator. Following Patrick Alston (1971: 235-6), "I enjoy self-warrant whenever I truly believe I am thinking *x*; *ipso facto*, I am justified in claiming to know my state of belief, even if that state of belief turns out to be untrue." Thus, I may be wrong *in* my beliefs concerning my authorial intentions but not *about* them. Moreover, those are the beliefs upon which I acted in conceiving of the theory (Morphogenetic Approach), reflectively deliberating on how best to explore it, and determining the form and sequence of books in which to present it.

Being human — and therefore fallible — I admit to irritation when reviewers exercise a dictatorship of the third-person. In the first-person I have warrant to know and say what I was trying to do in proceeding from (a) to (b) to (c) and only I can know that I still have (d) in mind. Of course, that trajectory (sequence of books) may be ill-conceived or misguided, as each and every reader has the right to judge it, but that is not the same thing as claiming to know my thoughts better than I do or substituting their interpretations for my intentions. Since self-warrant is something I claim and defend for every (normal) human subject in his or her intentional acts, it is “only human” that I do object when a reviewer asserts that I have “been blind to the interpersonal” (in early works), have “forgotten about structure and culture” (in later works), or have now “become absorbed in the intrapersonal” (as if this will be the case in future works).

None of the above deprives (third-person) critics and commentators of a generous role *within* the context of discovery and not merely one confined to the context of justification. For example, they *may* know more about the formation of my intentions (and particularly their context) than I was aware of myself, they might accurately fault the (sociological) beliefs that grounded my project, and it is highly probable that they would be able to design a more economical trajectory for its development. That is one of the points and benefits of third-person critique. All I am seeking is acceptance of my self-warrant to explain the “how” and the “why” of the actual trajectory taken. This, the author alone can give because the development of an explanatory programme is not pre-defined from the start. Rather, each book sets the problems to be tackled in its successor and thus defines the next section of the pathway, without one having any clear idea about how many more sections will be required before reaching that rather indefinite goal, the “finished project”. Of course, the account furnished is a reflexive personal judgement, which is necessarily fallible.

All social theorising takes off from a springboard that is itself theoretical. That springboard is akin to what Gouldner called the “domain assumptions” we make and to Merton’s image of our clambering on the shoulders of giants. Rather than labouring all of this in personal terms, I think it suffices to say that the philosophical under-labouring supplied by Critical Realism provides the backcloth for all my works, except for the first — whose aporias the Realist philosophy of social science filled-in. These commonalities between Critical Realism and the Morphogenetic Approach can be summarised as, (i) promoting *relationality* (namely that sociology’s very claim to existence derives from the fact that its key concepts are relational in kind, often referring to emergent yet irreducible properties capable of exercising causal powers); (ii) that the historical configurations and courses taken by social structures are *morphogenetic* in nature (conforming to none of the traditional analogies — mechanical, organic, or cybernetic — but being shaped and re-shaped by the interplay between their constituents, parts and persons. This means that society is open-ended and not “finalistic” in its elaboration); (iii) that the *Wertrationalität* is crucial to the sociological enterprise if it is to serve a humanising “mission”. This exceeds an abstracted defence of *humanism* (which reduces to ideology) and advances a “vision” of the social commensurate with human thriving. It is central

to society's members, who should never be seen as mere exponents of instrumental rationality, as is the case for *homo oeconomicus* and his siblings; to social institutions, which are both sources and bearers of value orientations; and to social theorists themselves who, far from celebrating the death of man, the de-centring of the subject, or the dissolution of the human person into uncommitted and socially non-committal acts of playful self re-invention, should uphold the needs and potentials of human beings. Indeed, such human concerns define value relevance for sociology itself.

In the *Social Origins of Educational Systems*, published in 1979, the morphogenetic approach can be found — by anyone willing to tackle its 815 pages — not only outlined but already put to work, the work of disengaging where state educational systems came from and what new causal powers they exerted after their elaboration. These powers work as underlying generative mechanisms, producing empirical tendencies in relation to *who* gained access to education, *what* constituted the definition of instruction, *which* processes became responsible for subsequent educational change, and *how* those ensuing changes were patterned. Crucially, the answers to all of these questions differed according to the *centralised or decentralised* structuring of the new educational systems. This raised a major philosophical problem. It was being claimed that educational systems possessed properties emergent from the relations between their parts — summarised as centralization and decentralisation — that exercised causal powers. However, these two properties could not be attributes of people, who cannot be centralised or decentralised, just as no system can possess the reflexivity, intentionality and commitment of the agents whose actions first produced and then continuously sustained these forms of state education.

The issue can be re-stated as “the problem of structure and agency”, although this is only part of a broader problem about whether or not sociology needs to endorse a stratified social ontology. This kind of ontology entails that the properties and powers pertaining to a “higher” stratum are dependent upon relations at a “lower” stratum, whilst the former are irreducible to the latter. Its direct implication is that the “problem of structure and agency” cannot be solved (or, as some put it, “be transcended”) by eliding the two into an amalgam, through holding them to be mutually constitutive. It is also why the “problem of structure and agency”, *as part* of a broader ontological issue, cannot be dismissed as “tiresome” or “old fashioned”. This problem consists in what Dahrendorf rightly called “the vexatious fact of society”: we the people shape it, whilst it re-shapes us as we go about changing it or maintaining it, individually and collectively. The problem does not vanish because we become vexed by it, tire of it, or try to turn our backs upon it. Yet, its intransigence does explain why many social theorists were indeed experiencing vexation, at the end of the 1970s. They did so precisely because existing philosophies of social science *could not articulate a stratified ontology* of society. Instead, they proffered only reductionist approaches — methodological individualism and methodological holism/collectivism — as unsatisfactory in principle as they were unhelpful in practice.

Hence my next pair of books, on culture and structure respectively (*Culture and Agency* (1988) and *Realist Social Theory* (1995)), which had two aims: to develop

a stratified social ontology along the lines of transcendental realism (ironically, Bhaskar's seminal *Possibility of Naturalism* had also been published in 1979) and then to advance this in the form of a framework that was of practical use to those working on substantive sociological problems. Hence, the morphogenetic approach acquired its full philosophical underpinnings. These account for the mature morphogenetic framework standing in *contradistinction* to any form of social theory that endorsed the conflation of structure and agency: "upward conflation" (methodological individualism), "downward conflation" (methodological holism, whether Marxist or functionalist in orientation), and "central conflation" (the then fashionable Structuration theory).

However, even very generous philosophical "under-labouring", as Bhaskar called his realist philosophy of social science, cannot provide an instant fix for all the problems besetting social theory. Realism and its three pillars — ontological stratification, epistemological relativism (better, "relationalism") and judgemental rationality — made an effective case for distinguishing between structures and agents in terms of their distinctive and irreducible properties and powers (as it did for mind in relation to matter). Nevertheless, it was better at conceptualising "structure" than "agency". In short, realism concentrated upon "agency" only as responsible for introducing social transformation or perpetuating social reproduction — all structures being continuously activity-dependent. Realism had too little to say about "persons": about who they were, in their rich but concrete singularity, and about what moved them to act, be this individual or collective action. This aporia in realism proved particularly dangerous at a time when social theory welcomed that vacuum. Sociological imperialism had gathered strength and, especially in the form of social constructionism, presented the "person" exclusively as society's gift. In Rom Harré's words, persons were "cultural artefacts" (1982: 20). Hence *Being Human* (2000) was not a turn away from structure and culture. It was a turn towards the re-conceptualisation of human beings, people who were inescapably born into a social context "not of their making or choosing" and who ineluctably confronted social and cultural structures in most of their doings — two different kinds of structures that *Culture and Agency* argued should not be taken to be homologous, much less homogeneous, throughout the course of history.

Being Human could fairly be called a polemical book. It seeks to resist sociological imperialism and its representation of persons as remorselessly and exhaustively social. Instead, it begins by emphasising that constituted as human beings are, the world being the way it is, interaction between the two is a matter of necessity. This means that each and every one of us has to develop a (working) relationship with every order of natural reality: nature, practice and the social. Distinctions between the natural, practical and social orders are real, although it is usually the case that they can only be grasped analytically because they are subject to considerable empirical superimposition. Nevertheless, that does not preclude the fact that human subjects confront dilemmas, which are different in kind, when encountering each of the three orders. Neither does it diminish the fact that it is imperative for human survival to establish sustainable and sustaining relations with each. Nor is it incompatible with the fact that human beings, characterised by what Charles

Taylor (1982: 50) calls the “significance feature”, invest more of themselves in one order than others — even though this must mean the subordination rather than the exclusion of the remaining orders.

In other words, we all have concerns in every sphere of natural reality *but* we prioritise our concerns — loving “in due order”, to use St. Augustine’s words. Indeed, it is precisely our particular constellation of concerns that defines each of us as a particular person, with strict personal identity. In short, who we are is what we care about (Frankfurt, 1988). And the greatest of these concerns in relation to our personal thriving and for explaining the social roles in which we invest ourselves — thus acquiring social identities — are our “ultimate concerns”.

However, even our “ultimate concerns”, which we care about most, do not automatically define courses of action for us. Each person has to deliberate about “what is to be done to achieve the good,” in order that his or her life promotes their “ultimate concern” but also accommodates their other concerns, which cannot be repudiated. In short, they have to work out a *modus vivendi*, commensurate with their values but also sustainable as a lived reality. As social beings we have to try to find a place for ourselves in society — one which is expressive of who we are by virtue of the roles we actively personify (Hollis, 1977), rather than executing their requirements robotically. In trying to find such a place, persons necessarily confront structural (and cultural) properties as constraints and enablements, as vested or objective interests, as motivating or discouraging influences — “thrown” as they are into their natal contexts and venturing as they do (and have to) into further contexts beyond family bounds.

That is the link between *Being Human* and the next book, *Structure, Agency and the Internal Conversation* (2003). *Being Human* is the pivotal work. It “descends” to the personal level in order to conceptualise unique human persons — the ultimate moving agents of all that is social, though not the only constituents of society. Thereafter, the theoretical trajectory begins its “re-ascent” into the social world of positions, roles, organisations, institutions, and, eventually, the global social system. But, as in mountaineering, one proceeds in short pitches and, in fact, by securing even smaller handholds and footholds.

Society is different in kind from its component members. On that we can all agree, even if it is conceptualised as being no more than the aggregate effect of people’s conceptions and doings. The crucial difference is that no society or social organisation truly possesses self-awareness, whereas every single (normal) member of society is a self-conscious being. Thus, however differently the social maybe be conceptualised in various schools of thought — from an objective and emergent stratum of reality to a negotiated and objectified social construct — the social remains different from its component members in this crucial respect of lacking self-consciousness. It follows that a central problem for social theorists must be to provide an answer to the question: “What difference does the self-awareness of its members make to the nature of the social?”

Historically, the answers given have varied from “all the difference”, as the response shared by idealists, to “no difference at all”, as the reply of hard-line materialists. Today, the variety of answers has increased but the question remains

because it cannot be evaded. For example, social constructionists cannot dodge the issue by regarding all societal features as products of “objectification” by its members. This is because each and every individual can mentally deliberate about what is currently objectified in relation to himself or herself (in principle they can ask the reflexive question: “Should I take this for granted?”) Conversely, no objectified “entity” can be reflexive about itself in relation to individuals (it can never, as it were, ask: “Could this construct be presented more convincingly?”). The unavoidability of this issue means that the argument about “objectivity and subjectivity” is as fundamental as the argument about “collectivism and individualism”. Not only are these two issues of equal importance but they are also closely intertwined.

The “problem of structure and agency” has a great deal in common with the “problem of objectivity and subjectivity”. Both raise the same issue about the relationship between their component terms, which entails questioning their respective causal powers. Once we have started talking about causal powers, it is impossible to avoid talking about the ontological status of those things to which causal powers are attributed or from which they are withheld.

However, a popular response to these two recalcitrant problems is the suggestion that we should *transcend* both of them by the simple manoeuvre of treating them as the two faces of a single coin. Transcending the divide rests upon conceptualising “structures” and “agents” as ontologically inseparable because each enters into the other’s constitution. Therefore, they should be conceptualised as one mutually constitutive amalgam. In a single leap-frog move, all the previous difficulties can be left behind. This manoeuvre has direct implications for the question of “objectivity and subjectivity”. If “structure” and “agency” are conceptualised as being inseparable, because they are held to be mutually constitutive, then this blurring of subject and object necessarily challenges the very possibility of reflexivity itself. If the two are an amalgam, it is difficult to see how a person or a group is able to reflect critically or creatively upon their social conditions or context.

Conversely, by upholding the distinction between objectivism and subjectivism we can acknowledge that agents do indeed reflexively examine their personal concerns in the light of their social circumstances and evaluate their circumstances in the light of their concerns. Only if agents are sufficiently distinct from their social contexts can they reflect upon them as subject to object. As Mouzelis puts it: “It is only when the objective-subjective distinction is maintained that it is possible to deal in a theoretically congruent manner with cases where situated actors distance themselves from social structures relatively external to them in order to assess, more or less rationally, the degree of constraint and enablement these structures offer, the pros and cons, the chances of success or failure of different strategies etc.” They do so by deliberating subjectively, under their own descriptions, about what courses of action to take in the face of constraints and enablements; about the value to them of defending or promoting vested interests; about their willingness to pay the opportunity costs entailed in aspiring to various goals; and about whether or not circumstances allow them to become more ambitious in their life-politics, or induce them to be more circumspect.

This is what *Structure, Agency and the Internal Conversation* is about, namely conceptualising the *interplay* between subjective personal properties and powers and objective social properties and powers. Specifically, it is argued that personal reflexivity mediates the effects of objective social forms upon us. It gives an answer to the question: “How does structure influence agency?” Reflexivity performs this mediatory role by virtue of the fact that we deliberate about ourselves in relation to the social situations that we confront, certainly fallibly, certainly incompletely and necessarily under our own descriptions, because that is the only way we can know anything. To consider human reflexivity playing that role of mediation also means entertaining the fact that we are dealing with two ontologies: the objective pertaining to social emergent properties and the subjective pertaining to agential emergent properties. What is entailed by the above is that subjectivity is not only (a) real, but also (b) irreducible, and (c) that it possesses causal efficacy (Archer, 2007a).

It is probably helpful to specify what kinds of subjective properties and powers are presented as constitutive of this mediatory process. I have termed it the Internal Conversation, which designates the manner in which we reflexively make our way through the world. This inner dialogue about ourselves in relation to society and vice versa is what makes (most of us) “active agents”, people who can exercise some governance in their own lives, as opposed to “passive agents” to whom things merely happen.

Being an “active agent” hinges on the fact that individuals develop and define their ultimate concerns, those internal goods that they care about most and whose precise constellation makes for their concrete singularity as persons. No one can have an ultimate concern and fail to do something about it. Instead, each seeks to develop a course(s) of action to realise that concern by elaborating a project, in the (fallible) belief that to accomplish the project is to realise one’s concern. If such courses of action are successful, which can never be taken for granted, each person’s constellation of concerns, when dovetailed together, becomes translated into a set of established practices. This constitutes their personal *modus vivendi*. Through this *modus vivendi*, subjects live out their personal concerns within society as best they can. In shorthand, these components can be summarized in the formula <Concerns → Projects → Practices>. There is nothing idealistic here, because “concerns” can be ignoble, “projects” illegal and “practices” illegitimate.

These are the kinds of mental activity that make up the strange reality of reflexivity, as part of broader human subjectivity. To accept reflexive activities as real and influential entails the endorsement of plural ontologies. This should not in principle be a problem. The reality of what I have called the “Internal Conversation” (also known as “self talk”, “rumination”, “musement”, “inner dialogue”, “internal speech”, “intra-personal communication” etc.) does not mean that when we deliberate, when we formulate our intentions, when we design our courses of action or when we dedicate ourselves to concerns, that such mental activities are like stones or trees — they are not. Yet, this has nothing to do with whether or not they are real because reality itself is not homogeneous. The whole of reality cannot be confined to and defined in terms of the Enlightenment notion

of “matter in motion”. Indeed, in post-positivistic science, physical reality is made up as much by quarks and genomes as it is by magnetism and gravity or by rocks and plants.

Abandonment of that Enlightenment assumption paves the way to the acceptance of plural ontologies. It is now more than thirty years since Popper (1972) distinguished his Three Worlds, as ontologically distinct sub-worlds: the world of physical states, the world of mental states and the world of objective ideas. What is important about this for the present argument is that Popper had put his finger on the genuine oddity about World Two, the world of mental states, namely that it is both objectively real and yet it has a subjective ontology.

What the *Internal Conversation* describes is how and why each and every person deliberates reflexively, in their own fallible terms, about their personal concerns in relation to their social context and about their contexts in the light of their concerns. In the process, they are shaping themselves and contributing to (re)shaping the social world. The process of reflexivity is not seen as one homogeneous mode of inner deliberation but as exercised through different modalities — “Communicative”, “Autonomous” and “Meta-Reflexivity” — whose dominance for particular persons derives from their relationship to their natal context in conjunction with their personal concerns.

This is traced in the following volume, *Making Our Way Through the World: Human Reflexivity and Social Mobility* (2007b). As generative mechanisms, different dominant modes of reflexivity have internal consequences for their practitioners and distinctive external consequences for society. Internally, the connections are tracked between practice of these different modalities and individual patterns of social mobility by interviewing subjects about their life histories: Communicative reflexivity is associated with social immobility, Autonomous reflexivity with upward social mobility, and Meta-Reflexivity with social volatility.

Externally, the effects are that the communicatives make a huge contribution to social stability and integration through their *evasion* of constraints and enablements, through endorsing their natal contexts, and through actively forging a dense micro-world, which re-constitutes their “contextual continuity” and projects it forward in time. Conversely, Autonomous subjects act *strategically*, seeking to avoid society’s “snakes” and to ride up its “ladders”, thus augmenting the “contextual discontinuity” which went into their own making and increasing social productivity through their energetic exertions. Meta-reflexives are society’s *subversive* agents, immune to both the bonuses associated with enablements and the penalties linked to constraints, thus resisting the main engines of social guidance/control through their willingness to pay the price of subversion themselves. In turn, their consistent pursuit of value rationality in living out the “contextual incongruity” that formed them, as they endorsed a “vocation” (in Max Weber’s terms) means that their main contribution is to ensure that the *Wertrationalität* retains its salience in society. It represents a source of counter-cultural values challenging the commodification of human relations, which stems from the market, and their bureaucratisation, which emanates from the state.

The Reflexive Imperative (currently in progress) goes further to maintain that millennial changes are increasingly re-shaping and distancing the social from the parameters of Modernity. The creation and geographical re-distribution of new *opportunities* at the global level (almost occluded by the current unilateral preoccupation with risk), coupled with migration, increasing education, and the proliferation of novel skills re-bound upon the nature of reflexivity itself. They prompt a shift away from the “communicative” mode, which used to buttress traditionalism, because social reproduction becomes just as reflexive an enterprise as those that promote yet further transformations. These changes swell the ranks of those practising the “autonomous” mode, propitious to the new global Leviathans: transnational bureaucracy and multinational enterprises. Most important of all, “meta-reflexivity” increases disproportionately during nascent globalisation and its practitioners can be seen as patrons of a new civil society expressive of humanistic values.

However, the shift towards the “socio-logic of opportunity”, which prompts this intensification of reflexivity and shift in its dominant modalities, also claims an increased proportion of victims — those experiencing the distress and disorientation of “fractured” reflexivity. This is because the new logic of opportunity demands the continuous revision of personal projects, involving the successful monitoring of self, society and relations between them, and denies the establishment of an unchanging *modus vivendi*. In other words, the imperative *to be reflexive* intensifies with the demise of routine action — a decline that becomes precipitous once (partial) morphostasis gives way to the unremitting morphogenesis which underlies the shift towards one global system in the new millennium. Or so it will be argued in *The Reflexive Imperative* (forthcoming).

However, this trio of books on intrapersonal deliberations about society will still leave the morphogenetic project unfinished. They will have dealt with the *aggregate effects* alone of the dialectic between changing human subjectivity and the objective transformation of society — as modernity gives way to untrammelled morphogenesis and its generative tendency for variety to produce yet more variety. *Pace* those who think I have “forgotten interpersonal relations”, have “privileged the internal conversation at the expense of the external conversation” or, above all, have given “primacy to the primary agency of persons over the collective action of groups”. I have not.

All of the above need to be linked together precisely because, unlike Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002: xxi), I do not consider that the social structure of the future diminishes to “institutionalised individualism”. Neither do I accept, unlike Zygmunt Bauman, that “liquidity” is displacing structuring, much less can pretend to represent the form of trans-modern society. There never is an unstructured social world and there never is a (normal) human person without reflexively defined projects. Nevertheless, it is equally true that there is never a hope of explaining the “vexatious fact of society” by addressing its two poles without examining the conduit between them — how subjective reflexivity promotes new objective structures. This means that the examination of social movements, of communal experiments, and of new forms of collective reciprocity is needed to complete the morphogenetic framework. As Frédéric Vandenberghe

(2005) noted, in the most perspicacious review of the corpus of books published to date, a further instalment is required to link-up with collective agency and to incorporate the intriguing potential for collective subjectivities and representations in the new world order, now coming into being.

Yet, even that is not quite “The End”. Globalisation is undoubtedly part and parcel of the millennial transformation of the social, but it is not its generative mechanism. It is the effect rather than the cause. The *leitmotif* of contemporary commentators is to accentuate that “flows” have replaced “structures”. In so doing, Critical Realists would regard this as an observation (and extrapolation) confined to the empirical level. What it crucially omits are the new structures that generate these detectable flows at a deeper ontological level. If the new millennium has truly begun to sever its links with Modernity, including all those adjectives (post-, late-, high-, second-wave as well as the ubiquitous “beyond”) that merely signal adherence to it, then we need to identify what is generating a true disjunction. This I will examine in *Morphogenesis Unbound*, as a new and unique époque in which morphostatic and morphogenetic cycles no longer circulate simultaneously, with the former restraining the latter and protracting variants upon the themes of Modernity. Perhaps that will indeed be the end of the trajectory whose course I have described and have been describing here.

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Resumo/ abstract/ résumé/ resumen

A trajectória da abordagem morfogenética: uma narrativa na primeira pessoa

Este artigo apresenta a explicação reflexiva da autora sobre a trajectória seguida desde 1979 no desenvolvimento da “abordagem morfogenética”. A intencionalidade autoral é defendida como sendo possuidora de uma “autojustificação”, isto é, de um conhecimento em primeira-mão cuja autoridade não pode ser substituída por interpretações na terceira pessoa. O resto do artigo reconstitui, livro a livro, o modo como tentei (i) captar a interacção entre “estrutura e acção”, (ii) propus depois a reflexividade humana como o processo que faz a mediação entre o social e os membros que o compõem, e por último, (iii) descreve a forma como esta preocupação com a “objectividade e a subjectividade” ao nível das pessoas singulares será, seguidamente, ligada à transição macroscópica para uma configuração social nova (transmoderna) gerada pela morfogénese sem entraves da morfoestase.

Palavras-chave morfogénese, estrutura, acção, objectivismo, subjectivismo, reflexividade.

The trajectory of the morphogenetic approach: an account in the first-person

This paper gives the author’s reflexive account of the trajectory taken since 1979 in developing the “morphogenetic approach”. Authorial intentionality is defended as possessing “self-warrant”, that is as first-person knowledge whose authority cannot be replaced by interpretations in the third person. The rest of the article traces book-by-book how I attempted (i) to capture the interplay between “structure and agency”, (ii) then advanced human reflexivity as the process mediating between the social and its component members, and, finally (iii) sketches how this concern with “objectivity and subjectivity” at the level of singular persons will then be connected up to the macroscopic transition to a novel (trans-modern) social configuration generated by morphogenesis untrammelled by morphostasis.

Key-words morphogenesis, structure, agency, objectivism, subjectivism, reflexivity.

La trajectoire de l’approche morphogénétique: un récit a la première personne

Cet article présente l’explication réflexive de l’auteur sur la trajectoire prise depuis 1979 dans le développement de “l’approche morphogénétique”. L’intentionnalité de

L'auteur est défendue comme étant porteuse d'une "auto-justification", c'est-à-dire d'une connaissance personnelle dont l'autorité ne saurait être remplacée par des interprétations à la troisième personne. Le reste de l'article retrace, livre à livre, la manière dont (i) j'ai essayé de capter l'interaction entre "structure et action", (ii) j'ai ensuite proposé la réflexivité humaine en tant que processus qui fait la médiation entre le social et les membres qui le composent, et enfin, (iii) je décris comment ce souci de "l'objectivité et de la subjectivité" au niveau des personnes singulières sera ensuite lié à la transition macroscopique vers une configuration sociale nouvelle (transmoderne) générée par la morphogenèse sans entraves de la morphostase.

Mots-clés morphogenèse, structure, action, objectivisme, subjectivisme, réflexivité.

El trayecto de la perspectiva morfogenética: un relato en primera persona

Este artículo presenta la explicación reflexiva de la autora sobre el trayecto tomado desde 1979 en el desarrollo de la "perspectiva morfogenética". La intención de la autora, es defendida como poseedora de una "auto-justificación", es decir, del conocimiento en primera mano cuya autoridad no puede ser substituida por interpretaciones en tercera persona. El resto el artículo reconstituye, libro a libro, el modo como intenté (i) captar la interacción entre "estructura y acción", (ii) propuse después la reflexividad humana como el proceso que media entre lo social y los miembros que lo componen, y por último, (iii) describe la forma como esta preocupación con la "objetividad y la subjetividad" a nivel de las personas singulares será, seguidamente, ligada a la transición macroscópica para una configuración social nueva (transmoderna) generada por la morfogénesis sin interferencia de la morfoestasis.

Palabras-llave morfogénesis, estructura, acción, objetivismo, subjetivismo, reflexividad.