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*Luca Martignani**

Author information

* Luca Martignani, Department of Political and Social Sciences, University of Bologna, Italy. Email: luca.martignani@unibo.it

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[Review of the book: Deep Change and Emergent Structures in Global Society. Explorations in Social Morphogenesis by A. M. Maccarini, Springer Nature Switzerland, 2019. ISBN: 978-3-030-13623-9]

Andrea M. Maccarini is an Italian sociologist of education, author of several textbooks and research reports on general and specialized topics on education and social service systems, whose international renown finds in this volume an opportune accountability. The book offers an interesting contribution both on sociological theory and research setting, focusing on different dimensions of the society transformation. According to the epistemological position of the author, critical realism, the directions showed by this complex transformation should be understood as morphogenesis of the societal structures, that is, “the structural and cultural processes producing social novelty (which) are increasingly detached from morphostatic constraints” (p. 2). The essay pays attention in particular on the emergent structures in a global society due to important changes in a variety of emerging cultural phenomena: the social norms application, the spread of war and violence; secularism and transcendence, education and character formation, happiness and quality of life definition.

The table of contents includes three parts after an introduction: the first part (chapters 2-3) is dedicated to the morphogenetic approach and argues that a correct social ontology must be historical, processual and relational (p. 32). In this perspective, social phenomena should be understood not as individual units or social wholes but social relations: complex entities with their own mechanisms and emergent interrelations. The author pays attention to the necessity to avoid any form of reductionism to show the crucial point of this social ontology in orienting social explanation. In particular, the

text shows an interesting critics to the problem represented by processual models of social explanation, characterized by a flat ontology, «in which there is no distinction between structure, culture and agency» (p. 36). In opposition to this model, the author prefers a morphogenetic and relational (M/M-relational) approach, characterized by a stratified ontology that takes into account the relation among culture, social structures, agency and their emergent properties.

The second part (chapters 4-7) offers an outline of the morphogenetic society and offers in particular an analysis of some social mechanisms (considered as something intermediate between laws and description, such as a set of emergent properties) in late modern society.

The third section (chapters 8-10) reflects on the anthropological consequences of an unbound morphogenesis considered as a process of transformation that doesn't take into account the human dimension of globalization in complex societies. Each chapter takes into account ideas and materials coming from the long-lasting research activity conducted by the author (in collaboration with other colleagues) in the annual workshops organized since 2012 by the Centre of Social Ontology led by the British sociologist Margaret Archer and supported by the Independent Social Research Foundation.

After considering that society is now in the paradoxical condition derived from living in a world *closed* (both on physical and symbolic level) but characterized by an *unbound* morphogenesis, the general message that the reader can understand from the first part is the necessity to rethink sociological theory in complex societies (as the author state since p. 11) where risks and challenges are assuming new forms and representations. In the late modern societies, where contingency is the rule, according to which even the order suggested by functionalist theory is an event, we need to think about some others distinctions, even focusing on specific social problems and key issues. After a reflexion on the ontological problem to keep together effects of history and relational patterns (p. 33), the attention goes to new epistemological assumptions in order to assume how structures and agency could be combined to realize a powerful late-modernization theory. According to the notion of emergence (typical of the morphogenetic approach), these steps are sketched: «(i) identifying a general generative logic, (ii) tracing social mechanisms and social features to such a generator of change, and then (iii) establishing their mutual connections and further emergent outcomes, which could finally lead to conclude whether a new type of society is being born or not» (p. 77).

Thus following this methodological framework, the author analyses a number of “societal mechanisms”, such as war and transcendence in a closed world, dealing with previews studies on critical realism and the representa-

tion of God. In particular, the attempt to use *axiality* (Jaspers) as a tool for the analysis (p. 187) of social complexity allows the author to present the emergence of the modernity of transcendence and religious experience in the discourse of pluralist society. In particular, in chapter seven, Maccarini tries to show that the distinction (in a relational sense) immanence/transcendence reveals her importance on major problems on sociology of religion. In highlighting the main tensions on this topic (dialogical transcendence tension, individualization, creative self-production) the author considers post-modern forms of religiosity as catastrophic forms of axiality if understood as the loss of the vertical tension without transcendence (Sloterdijk 2013; see p. 212).

It is maybe on the basis of such a reflexion that the author calls the third part *Humanity Counts*. Here he provides an overview on the issue of education (chapter 8), considered as a pressure on the human (being?) dimension in society, one can observe that we are specifically speaking about a «*relation of concern, or of resonance*» (p. 247) able to redefine in complex societies the role and meaning of other practices. The originality of the analysis on this issue is represented by the emphasis that the morphogenetic approach gives to the whole human subject in the life course «as medium and form of educational processes» (p. 219).

Here the book offers an opportunity for the analysis on education – and for the sociology of education too – to reflect on the consequences of the crisis of educational cultures and institutions. After a brief presentation of the features of morphogenetic society and their impact on education and the discussion of some strategies and mechanisms to increase the role of education in complex societies, the author introduces the concept of character, considered as «a set of morally qualified personal properties that allow people to shape a consistent life course and develop a meaningful *modus vivendi*, while also finally expressing what they become through that very process» (p. 230). This concept is very interesting, in particular if read in relation with the terms of *concern* (“a meaningful connection of subjects with the world”, or “what we care about,” as in the former expression of Margaret Archer, 2000) and *social and emotional skills* (SES). This framework entails three main considerations. (1) The idea of education as a relation of concern could be a starting point to redefine the role and the meaning of educational practices, without forgetting the importance of the approaches focused on the equality of opportunities. (2) As a consequence of this redefinition, the role of teachers changes, going beyond the rhetoric of facilitator and it starts to inspire (Rosa 2016) students and to respond to their interests and needs in the direction of the cultivation of them as well-made people. (3) The new importance of education allows Maccarini to affirm a new role for teachers and the emergence of talent as a strong flourishing relationship between

students and teachers themselves. I don't perfectly understand which is the role given to technology in this really interesting ambition, but I can suppose that the theoretical framework deals with the reflection on new instruments (i.e. means and resources) that can provide energy to a system progressively consumed by modernity and relaunch some good intention starting from the dialogue with the tradition represented by pragmatism in education (learning by doing).

The message towards a new good life (chapter 9) is an example of what the author calls a "glimpse on morphogenetic futures" (chapter 10), that is a starting point to imagine what remains to be done in future that is not a dystopian scenario. Properly, the author dialogues with John Urry (2016) in imagining the necessity of a mainstreaming of future in social sciences. In the author's words: «At the end of this journey, I have no single answer to such a question. Through the chapters of this book, I have tried to highlight some long-term trends and processes that are likely to structure multiple, interesting futures: the future of war, of education, of social norms and so forth. The emerging phenomena in all this domains do not amount to a unified set of convergent tendencies. Social life is more complex than this. The deep change I mention in the book title refers to the multiple processes and mechanisms which are not always observable, whose interactions may result in visible changes» (p. 283).

In this perspective a really stimulating notion of *social mechanism* emerges (pp. 81-85), much wider than the definition given by the analytical sociology which starts from an (ontological and methodological) individualistic point of view. For the author, the social mechanisms: (i) don't entail methodological individualism, but they (ii) can involve an "anti-empiricist epistemology", (iii) are not synonymous with causal powers of a single entity, and (iv) are connected to different levels of reality.

Maybe in this direction is war understood as a mystery? (p. 157). Maybe. For sure the book offers an interesting point of view on this topic, stating that the morphogenetic approach offers some analytical advantages, such as a non-deterministic framework which allows to keep theory and contingency together; the possibility to be applied to the study of internal dynamics within societies, of relationships between collective subjects and of their respective properties (p. 166).

Quite a lot of things should be included in this wide horizon of study and research, in order to reflect on the power of *agency* and the construction of social meaning in "unbound" societies, understanding these processes (after Berger and Luckmann since the sixties but also after Searle in 1995) in a critical realist point of view. The author reminds us the key issue of citizenship (p. 285); I personally agree with the importance of new phenomenology of terrorism to understand why and how it is focused on new forms of tran-

scendence: from nationalist to fundamentalist and religious organizations. But it is a suggestion, at the moment.

With the general message of this text I understand that we could imagine a good society without the necessity to perform a militant sociology (or public, in the sense offered by Burawoy in 2005). There's the necessity to build an idea of engagement beyond ideology and this book can represent a brick in this (both ontological and epistemological) architecture.

Quite a lot of things to work on, I wrote. But it could be worth doing. And probably it could be a pleasure to read them.

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