

# **“Stability” or “Stabilization” - On Which Would Morphogenic Society Depend?**

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In the last two decades, Sociological reactions to ‘the current crisis’ and its repercussions have prompted two main responses amongst social theorists. [1] On the one hand, some have simply embraced the overt – meaning empirically observable – contributory factors and consequential outcomes as the concatenation of contingency. In short, they have advanced a multi-factorial account without any attempt to specify the principal factors involved, let alone the relations between them. This was presaged 20 years ago in Beck’s portrayal of de-structuration in the *Risk Society* (Beck 1992 [1986]) and in Giddens’ imagery of a ‘runaway’ or ‘juggernaut’ society reeking (dis)order (1990). Their common denominator was that late modernity was uncontrollable and quintessentially kaleidoscopic in form. This latter notion of ephemeral patterns projected *seriatim* onto the social canvas prompted some who hung on to the notion of theorizing late modernity to reach out to the natural sciences for a helping hand in the guise of ‘complexity theory’ (e.g. Urry 2003; Walby 2009). In our last volume this was viewed as grasping at another misleading metaphor, such as the ‘mechanical’, ‘organic’ and ‘cybernetic’ analogies had been in the past (Archer 2013).

A more common reaction was to rename this tangle of contingencies ‘Liquid Modernity’, where labile ‘flows’ comprehensively displaced and replaced the determinate (not deterministic) influences of social structure and cultural systems on tendential change or stability (Bauman 2000). As structure and culture were pulverised under the tidal bore of liquidity, so was agency condemned to serial self-reinvention. This spelt the thin end of the wedge for ‘humanity’ (Sayer 2011); our liabilities to suffering and capacities for fulfilment ceased to provide a bottom line [2] or a boundary and the human agent could be assimilated to the sentient actant (Latour 2007).

On the other hand, new uni-factoral theories were advanced, largely on an empiricist basis, as reviewed in the previous volume (Archer 2013, p. 3). However, there is a popular newcomer

(theoretically compatible with 'liquidity'), which gains its appeal epistemologically, rather than ontologically. This is 'acceleration theory'. In it, the speed of change in late modernity, the faster pace of life, the impossibility of sampling all the options on offer within a single lifetime are held to spread a generalized anxiety, perplexity and disorientation among ordinary people recently robbed of the stability needed for planning their lives. This malaise, felt by the many, is held to merit examination even by those in this volume who personally do not share it (Lawson, Chap. 2; Maccarini, Chap. 3; Archer, Chap. 5). However, as will be seen, none of our contributors commit the epistemic fallacy of taking how matters are felt to be for how they are. Instead, Lawson's response is to move properly from epistemology to ontology: 'Because many commentators clearly do *feel* that the rate of societal change itself is somehow speeding up, I focus here on factors that could give rise to such feelings : : : what kinds of changes must be underway such that feelings of the speeding up of the rate of social change are a commonplace result' (Lawson, Chap. 2, p. 22).

Both the celebration of contingency and the importance attached to acceleration are hostile to the morphogenetic approach, as a framework for explanation that generically examines the sequence. This entails examining the specific 'what', 'why', 'whom' and 'how' of particular changes or instances of morphogenesis/morphostasis. Instead, both 'liquidity' and 'acceleration' theorists eschew such specification and the ultimate aim of detecting underlying 'generative mechanisms' in favour of talking metaphorically about 'flows' and 'speed'. Thus, both ignore the growing predominance of positive feedback over negative feedback (morphogenesis over morphostasis) as the rock-bottom mechanism that makes considering the advent of Morphogenic society (in multiple forms) worthy of being entertained – the agnostic aim of this series of books.

## **1.1 A Brief Critical Excursion on Liquidity and Acceleration**

What does the metaphor of 'liquid society' presume? In answering, it is helpful to note that its antithesis would be full-blown social determinism in a context of 'eternal morphostasis'. The social order would move to the rhythm of its determinants. Since no-one would argue that determinism, morphostasis or perfect adaptation characterize late modernity, liquidity must be defined against something other. That other has been a portmanteau term labelled 'traditionalism' (see Heelas et al. 1996), into which are bundled approximations to the above: socially forceful, long enduring and reproductory practices and beliefs. The trouble is the morphogenetic (or M/M) approach does not fit into the trunk because it is clearly not traditionalistic. Hence the lid does not shut. Instead, all three parts of the basic M/M sequence, as summarized above, are challenged by the trope of indeterminate 'flows'.

First, . What Bauman depicts in *Liquid Modernity* is the most volatile version of morphogenesis alone. It derives from a process that minimises or annuls the constraints imposed by structures at the start of the morphogenetic cycle's first phase (T1). Thus, it also annuls one of our core shared precepts, namely that there is no de-contextualized action; all actions take place in a specific context or situation, shaped by prior actions and shaping posterior ones.

Second, . In *Liquid Modernity*, instead of any state of affairs being relationally contested by groups, defined by their vested or objective interests (material or ideational), which lends both shape and solidarity to confrontation, this is replaced by individual free style swimming. Such 'pure relations' as Giddens allows perdure are not pre-formed by interests or ideas and represent a search for an end that is scarcely defined and not contextually conditioned. Therefore 'they turn back on themselves and become an end unto themselves (see Donati, Chap. 7, p. 169). In other words, agents

act self-referentially or with temporary mutual references of convenience, producing an aggregate whose actions are the equivalent of Brownian motion.

Third, . The coining of 'elaboration' to designate morphogenetic outcomes is intended to underline that change is a changing of some preceding social state of affairs (Archer 1979); it is not *ex nihilo* (Bhaskar 1979), because something is not made out of nothing. Usually, 'elaboration' means that defenders of the *status quo* have to make concessions, whilst their opponents must settle for compromises, but neither outcome makes sense without allowing that the contesting agents have goals, themselves shaped by the initial (and temporally morphostatic) context at T1. Conversely, Liquid Modernity requires adaptation and openness on the part of actors/agents. Individuals must be 'open' to any outcome, hoping that it will be positive but without any assurance of this (Donati, Chap. 7, p. 169f.). What makes an outcome positive or negative, if it is neither anchored in ideals nor interests nor durable personal identities? (Archer 2013, pp. 4–10). Nothing remains other than the ephemeral whim of the serially self-reinvented agent.

Yet, all that is solid does not dissolve in water, and chaos is not the necessary outcome. As Al-Amoudi puts it 'a purely morphogenic society is as absurd as a language whose vocabulary would change faster than a sentence could be uttered' (Chap. 9, p. 197). Moderating the hyperbole of the liquidity notion means acknowledging Realism's tenet that all institutions and organizations etc. are only 'relatively enduring'. Its implication is that some will remain comparatively stable whilst others are undergoing 'elaborative change'. This introduces two reference points in the otherwise uniform sea of change: (i) that which (as yet) proves relatively enduring and (ii) determinate changes in particular forms of organization, belief and practice, which rarely alter overnight. As extreme examples, even the French and Russian revolutions needed a couple of decades before their preliminary re-institutionalization took shape. Without such points of reference, Al-Amoudi appears correct that 'it is unclear how Bauman envisages people making any kind of decisions in a world where all institutions would be equally liquid.' (Chap. 9, p. 205).

Whilst 'fluidity' dominates above, 'speed' is the key trope in the second and uni-factoral approach of Hartmut Rosa when he insists that 'In popular as well as scientific discourse about the evolution of Western societies, acceleration figures as the single most striking and important feature' (Rosa 2003, p. 77). This statement hovers uneasily between epistemology and ontology; how things are taken to be is consistently elided with how they are – a common feature in how metaphors gain their often misleading powers of persuasion. As Lawson rightly insists, where social phenomena are concerned, the idea of their acceleration must be metaphorical, if no specification is given of *what kinds of things* are changing faster. It is similar to stating that the speed of 'flight' has increased, without mentioning if this applies to birds' wings or aeroplanes' engines. Thus Lawson re-frames the question: 'what sorts of changes must be underway such that feelings of the speeding up of the rate of social change are a commonplace result' and suspects that these may be 'engendered by *a type of change* that is underway as much as any supposedly general acceleration of social life' (Chap. 2, p. 22).

In other words, we need to get away from the rhetorical collage that runs together fast-food, fast-information, fast-love, and fast-travel etc., used to persuade us about common feelings and then we must identify the generative mechanisms of change with more precision than dubbing this causal power as nothing less than the 'dynamic force of modernity' (Rosa and Scheuerman 2009). Maccarini, who gives the most detailed critique of the 'acceleration thesis' (Chap. 3), begins by firmly distinguishing epistemology and ontology. He then questions the grounding of the 'feeling' in

the 'fact' (made much of by Luhmann 1976) and important as the basis of Rosa's argument. Namely, that late Modernity presents its 'human constituents with a surplus of possibilities of action and experience, exceeding anyone's capacity to 'live them' simultaneously' (Chap. 3, p. 60) or, as Rosa himself puts it, the 'world always seems to have more to offer than can be experienced in a single lifetime'. In turn, such voracity for new experiences is held responsible for the sense of pressurized multi-tasking. Maccarini notes that this *presumes* Charles Taylor's (critique of) secular humanism, in which taking up all the options becomes the functional equivalent of eternal life.

Yet why should we accept that 'humanity' seeks to sample all the options? As I have presented it in Volume I, the tendency for 'variety to produce more variety' confronts agents and actors with a 'situational logic of opportunity'. Having opportunities presents them with a *choice*, and what we choose depends upon our *concerns* – the things that matter to us or the 'importance of what we care about' (Frankfurt 1988). Far from there being some felt obligation to taste everything and far from these being the kind of experiences that we have to undergo before we know if they matter, *The Reflexive Imperative* showed many students deliberately turning their backs on a variety of University offerings, guided by their compass of concerns (Archer 2007, 2012). [3] There is no equivalent imperative to be bombarded by communications and condemned to multitasking; in Europe some of us refuse to give houseroom to a television, discipline the use of mobile phones if we have one, and would not be seen dead on social media. These are choices to be made and to those who will invoke 'social pressure', it is interesting to see young teenagers recently sporting a new tee-shirt on the Lausanne métro reading 'You won't find me on Facebook or Twitter: I have a life'.

Moreover, taking a historical step back, are speed and multitasking really novel features of late Modernity? Did not payment by 'piece-work' in textile mills and mines, from the late eighteenth to the end of the nineteenth centuries, place more of a premium on 'speed'? What counts as a more extreme form of multi-tasking than a woman giving birth whilst working down a mine? Indeed, the historic picture was the reverse, with the nobility courting 'speed': hunting and coursing, horse and dog racing and eventually the beginnings of competitive sports. Significantly, those Victorian ladies whose boredom and means encouraged some to hunt were known as 'fast'. In parallel today, 'downsizing' and 'downshifting' to a slower pace of life are luxury options available only to the better-off.

The three of us who explicitly examine the 'acceleration thesis' are unanimous in concluding that rather than further rhetorical montage and repeated assertions that the rapidity of change eliminates the stability required for planning a life, a generative mechanism is needed to account for the alleged 'speeding up'. However, the three motors responsible for acceleration adduced by Rosa ('economic' – capitalism's need to increase productivity; 'cultural' – more options on offer; and 'structural' – selection amidst increased complexity and contingency requires faster processing) fail to convince as 'key accelerators'. As Maccarini argues of the three, 'it is their mutual relations, not their work in isolation or their aggregation within a regression model, that triggers acceleration or deceleration.' (Chap. 3, p. 64). Instead of the 'unitary logic' that Rosa holds to underpin these motors of modernization, Archer argues that 'the process responsible for current morphogenesis needs to accentuate *relationality*, rather than multi-variate analysis; *contestation* rather than co-variance; and *malintegration*, rather than functional differentiation' (Chap. 5, p. 107). Indeed, Maccarini inverts the argument in which the speed of change starred as the prime mover by maintaining that the proper identification of a generative mechanism would also account for historical surges, lags and what could be called the social distribution of speed – as a penalty or a premium. Thus, if 'acceleration does not always occur at the same pace in all historical time spans that is because it is

linked to morphogenetic/morphostatic cycles, whose structural and cultural emergent properties, institutional configurations and situational logics *produce their own temporal structures and rhythms.*' (Chap. 3, p. 63).

## **1.2 The Retreat of Morphostasis and the Advance of Morphogenesis**

In a nutshell, this subheading may seem to summarize the state of affairs to which the advent of a Morphogenic society would conform. However, there are two important caveats to enter.

The first is a warning against naïve nominalism. Because any social phenomenon (institution, role, group, belief or practice) continues to bear the same name, it cannot automatically be regarded as being 'the same' and therefore exemplifying morphostasis and thus providing the *continuous stability* some regard as indispensable in all forms of planning.

Such nominalism is especially tempting with regard to the two old Leviathans: the market and the state. Capitalism is still (rightly) called capitalism - despite the ebb and flow of adjectival qualifiers - yet as Marx realized and as Porpora illustrates, it has to be creatively competitive and thus subject to change and hence is shackled to both morphostasis and morphogenesis. [4] Morphostatically, capitalism continues to be based upon private property and wages to be defined by market exchange, even as these alter in form; just as its logic of action remains competitive and its outcome is unchangingly zero-sum, though now on a world canvas. Furthermore, its relative durability cannot be attributed to the collective clairvoyance of capitalists nor to the undoubted processes of marketization, commodification and manipulated consumerism. Granting that all of these are at work, it remains 'paradoxically' the case that 'one of the major mechanisms of change is the conservative force of popular inertia and vested interest (in not downsizing their life-styles) which preserves the need for continuous change.' (Porpora, Chap. 4, p. 88). In other words, a central institution - the economy - is neither purely morphogenetic nor morphostatic.

Since parallel arguments can be made about the state, morphogenesis and morphostasis can also be at work within major social institutions, just as they can within and between meso-level organizations, as Lazega (Chap. 8) illustrates for science laboratories. For those who hold that some morphostatically maintained stability is necessary for life plans to be formed, these elements may suffice. However, they are not the only sources, as will be seen.

The second caveat is to alert or remind us that nearly all of the most novel morphogenetic social innovations will also themselves need to be institutionalized, to some degree. In other words, 'new variety' is not exclusively morphogenetic, it necessarily spawns certain novel morphostatic elements. This is as true of Wikipedia with its 'hundreds of pages of rules now' [5] as it is for some of Lazega's successful research centres which can 'hoard' or monopolize opportunities, and as it was found to be by one of my young activist interviewees who discovered she could have a full-time career within Greenpeace. Certainly, this provided sufficient 'stability' for her to formulate a life plan, starting with an internship in the organization. In turn, this caveat is of great importance when we come to the contributions of Donati, Hofkirchner and Wight, all of whom venture to discuss macroscopic morphogenesis and to project it forwards in a form that simultaneously generates an equally new form of '*stabilization*'.

However, some contributors, who are far from resistant to the intensification of morphogenesis in late Modernity, are also attracted by the notion of itemizing 'what was saved from the fire'. In other words, what forms of negative feedback nevertheless persist? Clearly, this relates to the first caveat because it asks what has been salvaged from the past and transmitted into the present as *resilient and on-going* morphostasis. Were the list to be long and convincing, it would indicate the state of affairs that I have termed 'morphogenesis bound'. That is where the generation of new 'variety' is restrained and slowed down by the durability of past practices, beliefs, and interests, which remain sufficiently attractive to marshal enough support to protect and to prolong them *despite and among* the morphogenetic changes underway.

Conversely, 'morphogenesis unbound' would reflect a state of affairs in which 'variety fostering more variety' is untrammelled by enduring morphostatic processes that moderate the rate, quantity and quality of novel changes produced by positive feedback. To repeat, were the 'dead hand of the past' to lose its grip, this does not necessarily spell chaos because new forms of *stabilization can emerge in the process of morphogenesis itself, namely that some changes and new developments are found to be so beneficial that planning is associated with forwarding them.*

Thus, 'stability' and 'stabilization' must be distinguished and not used interchangeably, because the durability of 'old' morphostasis is not the sole platform making planning feasible (and distinguishing it from betting). This will be discussed further later on.

### **1.3 Does 'Stability' Derive from the Survival of Morphostatic Elements?**

Before examining the list of elements considered to have 'survived the fire', it is worth underlining that no form of 'morphostasis' constitutes a default option; its endurance is just as activity-dependent as any morphogenetic trajectory. The difference is that whereas agential support for 'morphostasis' depends upon the continuing defence of pre-established *vested* interests, that for 'morphogenesis' is advanced by the *objective* interests of agents who are beneficiaries of novel benefits that have no history, only the promise of a future. [6]

The most detailed attention to morphogenesis 'bound' or 'unbound' and their conjoint activity-dependence is provided by Lazega (Chap. 8) in the setting of cancer research teams, which in principle are committed to progressive morphogenesis and the logic of generating new opportunities (of cure or remission). As funded research Centres that vary in reputation and with internal hierarchies, where success is highly dependent upon personal repute in the field, this is a structurally differentiated domain rather than an empty canvas (i.e. what goes on is manifestly context-dependent). What is explored by examining the micro-level networks of collaboration between individual scientists and the meso-level collaboration of the Centres themselves is explicitly linked to examining 'morphogenesis unbound'. Specifically, this would mean scientific actors creating new relations beyond the boundary of their employer organization and thus expanding their own opportunities (of increased repute) beyond the limitations imposed by their current employment structure. Equally, morphogenesis unbound would apply in the same way to the Centres themselves.

Both scientists and their Centres behave strategically, and some strategies are more effective than others. Opportunities are created by the exploitation of 'pools of contingent complementarities' and the most effective personal strategy is one in which the scientists keep a foot inside their own Centre



whilst forming networks of individual collaboration outside them. Thus, some combine structure and culture in new ways prior to setting up new organizations, representing morphogenesis unbound.

However, qua organizations, the Centres can 'catch-up' with other kinds of scientists they employ (but who followed different strategies), appropriating and hoarding the opportunities they created, thus 'binding' their morphogenetic initiatives to the prior structural context. Failure to do so will produce 'lags' (between the research initiatives of thrusting scientists and the sclerosis of the Centre's research programme) that facilitate the scientists' emancipation from and creation of a new emergent structure. Thus the lag between the two levels (micro- and macro-) is held to be the main activity-dependent source of morphogenesis, increasingly unbound by the existing structure. Lazega volunteers that recuperating such innovative scientists is something that is facilitated when a new product can be 'immobilized' by a protective patent and that this 'lag' and morphostatic 'drag' would likely be less pronounced in less well-protected fields such as the arts or religious movements. Where the salvage list is concerned, it is remarkably difficult to supply an uncontroversial one dated circa post 1980. Certainly, the capitalist market remains and continues its morphostatic confirmation of natal socio-economic status but the nature of market operations has been damagingly daring in its morphogenetic seizing of multinational markets and invention of new opportunities and instruments for finance capital. Indisputably, the state remains despite having ceded many erstwhile powers to supra-national agencies, despite having taken 'welfare' out of its European title, and despite having cut its links with the promotion of social democracy. It is very difficult to see how the last 20 years of drift towards political 'centrism', a politics without commitment whose policies vacillate with the daily tactics for remaining in power, add stability to anyone's life, particularly amidst austerity. Obviously, natural language endures but syntactically deteriorates in the face of mass entertainment and morphs considerably with new technologies for communication. The Cultural System (as opposed to Socio-Cultural relations) (Archer 1988) remains because it is fire-proof and it is perhaps even bomb-proof now, given cloud archiving.

The growing cultural archive is extremely important, not because it provides 'stability', but, on the contrary, because it hosts innumerable 'contingent complementarities' (items co-existing at any time that are complementary to one another), ever-open to creative exploration and these are growing exponentially as new items are added to it, given the *sui generis* tendency of morphogenesis for 'variety to foster variety'. Porpora puts together two metrics that appear to substantiate this qualitative thesis: 'Wikipedia reports that whereas in 1986, the world's total informational storage capacity was approximately 2.6 exabytes (one exabyte representing some 10<sup>18</sup> bytes), that figure now is close to 300 exabytes. Similarly, with the rapid rise of telecommunications, the world's capacity to exchange this information has likewise expanded exponentially, from 281 petabytes (one petabyte representing some 10<sup>15</sup> bytes) in 1986 to 65 exabytes today.' (Chap. 4, p. 83). If the methodology involved is respectable, this tells us that our information (knowledge) outstrips our communication by almost 5-1. Nothing rides on the accuracy of these figures, although they confirm the expected growth of information logged-in and may well indicate that this corpus contains ever more numerous complementary items than we notice, think about and communicate to others. In any case, the Cultural System is the site of considerable morphogenesis, not a locus of stability, particularly for those of us who deny the assertion that what is cultural is by its nature 'shared' (see Archer and Elder-Vass 2011).

I find it difficult to extend this list non-trivially. Conversely, the list of 'losses', when considered objectively in relation to 'stability' are considerable and cannot be reduced to differences in evaluation. In our first volume, I gave the following illustrative list to point to the profound

qualitative changes potentially involved as morphogenesis becomes increasingly unbound: 'loss of inter-generational contextual continuity, of habitual and routine action, of vested (but not objective) interests, of traditional social classes, of cultural capital, of lasting norms, of a stable role array, of representative political parties, and of institutionalized forms of geographical belonging' (2013, p. 12). All of these require investigation and substantiation. For example, my trilogy of books on 'reflexivity' shows not only an increase in its practise, as habitual action becomes decreasingly suited to a rapidly changing context of decision-making, but also a corresponding change in the dominant mode of reflexive deliberation practised. In this volume, Al-Amoudi provides a convincing analytical account of the decline in normativity that has accompanied morphogenesis over the last decades, *without* it being fully unbound. Were it fully unbound and without endogenous forms of stabilization, then Bauman's problem would surface in full force, namely how can people make 'any kind of decisions in a world where all institutions would be equally liquid'? (Chap. 9, p. 205). Thus Al-Amoudi seeks a mid-way point between Maccarini's [7] morphostatic elements that 'survived the fire' and represent enduring stability with his acknowledgement of an intensification of morphogenesis through the exploitation of 'contingent complementarities' that results in new variety.

That 'variety fosters more variety' is perfectly compatible with endorsing this 'mid-way point' as characterizing the situation today, without commitment to it being any more than temporary. In other words, the problems created by the current intensity of morphogenesis for current normativity may themselves undergo intensification in the near future (which does not mean they ultimately defy solution). In any case, the major normative problems identified are eminently susceptible of empirical investigation now and by longitudinal study. In summary, and with some additional commentary these are the following:

*Firstly*, a weakening of inter-generational solidarity, as dual career employment becomes more necessary and desired by many it results in extended out-sourcing for child-care and that of the elderly. As more engage in this practice, less shame attaches to 'bailing out' of previous moral responsibilities towards the young and the old. Indeed, one could go further and suggest that the 'demographic winter' is produced by an increasing percentage of couples rejecting the traditional norm tying marriage to reproduction in favour of their privately defined personal utilities.

*Secondly*, normative problems are posed by new technological forms of communication that existing norms and conventions can neither address nor regulate. These include the incitement to parade 'intimate' forms of self-presentation on social media, that feed the novel practice of cyber-bullying, blackmailing and are currently spiking in 'slut-branding'. In general, the moral parameters of 'hacking' are volatile, as epitomised in today's ambivalence towards 'whistle blowers' (treasonable or criminal versus those unveiling what a democratic populace needs to know) and towards *Wikileaks* as a quasi-institutionalized source of revelations.

*Thirdly*, the predominance of morphogenesis makes existing solutions to the current crisis (both national and supra-national) more contestable, in speed and geographical range. The spread of the *Occupy* movements to most European capitals is now being matched by mass protests in Brazil (starting from raised bus fares in Sao Paulo) and in Istanbul (beginning from a dispute over uses of a public park). Their common denominator is that in the past, opposition to hierarchical decisions was painfully slow to organize, e.g. the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (Mattausch 1989). Crucially, it entailed an accumulation of grievances before these could impact on the central decision making arena, but also a simultaneous dilution of demands to make necessary alliances possible (Archer



1979, Fig. IV, p. 273). The opposite is now the case; protests are readily organized (through social media) and, once mobilized, there is accretion of other discontents and a fast elastication of the oppositional agenda.

*Fourthly*, Al-Amoudi details the increasing use of arbitration to settle normative disputes rather than juridical process. In high-tech issues, juries are held to lack the necessary expertise; arbitration protects confidentiality; and it allows the more powerful to impose their choice of arbitrators on less powerful plaintiffs. In short, the growth of arbitrage derives from the morphogenetic 'complexity of novel products, processes and practices' (Chap. 9, p. 214), where case-law or legal precedent would be largely non-applicable.

*Fifthly*, there is the problematization of forms of 'oppression and inequality' that had previously been condoned and had remained morphostatic. 'Gay marriage', now legalised in 13 countries (May 2013), has been the most contentious instance. However, generically, this can be seen as the novel tendency for 'human rights' to prevail over prior statutory rights. [8]

Significantly, in his own study of *Occupy Geneva*, Al-Amoudi found the same rapid development of new norms within the tented movement as has been described for Wikipedia. In moving on to examine the generative mechanisms advanced to account for morphogenesis since 1980, these findings prompt one to examine whether this rapid change based on positive feedback produces its own processes of 'stabilization', and if so, how?

## **1.4 Venturing Generative Mechanisms**

Overall, contributors appear convinced that the existence and exploration of 'contingent complementarities' (ideational or usually in combination with material interests and enterprises promoting them) both kick-start morphogenesis and are then amplified by it. However, it is one thing for the philosophy of social science to advance and defend the notion of generative mechanisms (Gorski 2009), but a further and necessary task for social scientists is to adduce specific mechanisms accounting for particular instances.

Two of us do venture particulars that seem promising answers to *which* 'contingent complementary' could explain the morphogenetic take-off *circa* 1980 (Lawson, Chap. 2 and Archer, Chap. 5). However, although it is essential to identify the causal powers responsible for any given instance of morphogenesis (including the countervailing powers also shaping actual outcomes), these need not be substantive and empirical particulars as they are in the above two chapters. Instead, they can fulfil the specification requirement by identifying a gamut of qualitative changes representing a newcomer to the history of social formations. This is the path taken by Hofkirchner (Chap. 6) and Donati (Chap. 7). Because of their broader canvases, they also make bolder contributions to the issue of 'stabilization' and hence to a preliminary assessment of how realistic it is to envisage transition to a Morphogenic Society.

As explicit Critical Realists, it is unsurprising that the accounts proffered by Lawson (Chap. 2) and Archer (Chap. 5) both emphasise agential power-play, identifying the key to the re-shaping of late modernity in *relational contestation* between proponents and opponents of the changes that hold potential for societal transformation. In making this central to the generative mechanisms they advance, their two accounts are quite similar, they are substantive and thus open to empirical

critique, and they are probably stronger than Hofkirchner and Donati in offering precise answers to the 'how' question about recent change. Conversely, and precisely because of their substantive focus, they are both weaker than Hofkirchner and Donati about 'where we are going' and 'what could stabilise it'. However, all four contributions are unanimous that late Modernity has not yet given way to something we could call global Morphogenic Society. At most, we all view the present conjuncture and crisis as 'transitional' and it seems worthwhile to focus upon our similarities and differences in terms of what could turn 'transition' into 'transformation'.

Lawson's generative mechanism consists in the interplay between (i) the perpetual technological change made possible by continuous advances in science, and, (ii) capitalists 'who seek in technological developments novel opportunities for advancing their power' (Chap. 2, p. 32). What is generative about this conjunction is that contestation and resistance are decreasingly concerned with struggles over occupancy of existing positions and the rights and obligations associated with them, but, rather, with the creation and occupation of novel positions with associated emergent rights especially associated to the mechanisms of social destabilisation. What is novel is the link-up with new technology and its ensuing immunity to past forms of resistance by those who consider themselves not to be its beneficiaries. Instead, capitalism's inherent thrust for new markets is massively augmented by the unprecedented mobility of technological products with two results: the novel boost given to multinational enterprises in locations that evade organized worker resistance, thus assuring high profit margins, plus the variety introduced by the technologically assisted finance capital mobility, outside the reach of national government control. Together they culminate in an unprecedented undermining of previously enduring sets of positional obligations and rights. As such, Lawson holds them responsible for the sense of social acceleration as a manifestation 'of a repeated loss of existing bases for any significant control or planning experienced by so many' (Chap. 2, p. 45).

Archer broadly accepts his argument but, because she accords much greater relative autonomy to 'culture' in relation to 'structure', the generative mechanism she proffers is bipartisan. It is the new morphogenetic synergy established in the 1980s between 'university' science and the innovative thrust of capitalist enterprise that furnishes the 'novel leap' *because* technology systematically related the two in a manner that the previous practices of educational systems had largely kept apart. In short, Archer deals with *two groups* of agents/actors, and the realization of their synergistic cooperation, without homogenizing their aims or actions and despite celebrity cases of financially motivated complicity. Lawson does acknowledge both the existence of the 'scientist producers' of information technology and accepts that they have a special interest, i.e. 'an incentive in its being diffused, and do act in various ways to encourage that diffusion' (Chap. 2, p. 40), including their development of the cyber-commons. However, this is held to be an 'additional factor' with 'reinforcing effects' on the trajectory he sketches. What I call the techno-scientific 'diffusionists' are not recognized as distinctive group (agreed, not one embracing them all), with aims, ideals and forms of organizational innovation that directly oppose those of capitalism's new captains.

Thus, Archer highlights that the 'contingent complementarity' can be exploited in different ways, to different ends and in pursuit of different values, which financially innovative capitalism meets with a novel type of resistance (unrelated to the now impotent form forged by past industrial relations). In synergy, the diffusionists and the finance capitalists together promote morphogenesis but of different kinds that pull society in entirely different directions.

These differences culminate in equally different answers to 'where is late Modernity going?' and

what can stabilize the morphogenetic scenario that Lawson and Archer address. In the near future, he foresees global society being 'characterized by flux, reflexivity and uncertainty, perhaps to an increasing extent' (Chap. 2, p. 45) and I agree, but not for the same reasons. Lawson suggests that in the longer term his generative mechanism itself will provide an 'additional spur' to tendencies towards the 'good society' because capital will lose places to run and the capacity of playing one group off against another, leaving globalization as a process that will ultimately foster human fulfilment and emancipation.

Here, I find myself closer to Hofkirchner and Donati in general. Specifically, if 'stability' is equated with lasting obligations and rights associated with relatively fixed positions, this seems to me more of a formula for resignation than for control and planning. Contingency is a necessary part of human life in an open system, [9] but the growing pool of 'contingent compatibilities' can indeed furnish a basis for planning by seizing upon one as an opportunity to develop into a life-plan (that need not be monadic or individualistic), which neither depends on competing/defeating others nor has to overcome the resistance of entrenched rights, interests or power.

I look to two stabilizing factors that do not work by perpetuating elements of past 'stability' or establishing enduring rights and duties associated with (new) positions. The first source of 'stabilization' is our human ability to have 'concerns' and to accept that they must be prioritized, whilst other things that matter to us are accommodated and subordinated to them if not eliminated. If this is the case today - and none of my small group of subjects who grew up since 1980 found difficulty in detailing their three main life concerns (Archer 2012) - it seems dubious to define human fulfilment in Rosa's terms of 'realizing as many options as possible from the vast possibilities the world has to offer' (2009). However, the drawback to considering this human ability as an anchorage is that it presumes that humanity remains unchanged in kind. Yet, Maccarini's discussion (Chap. 3) of human enhancement technology (HET), already underway, puts a big question mark over my assumption, as it does over Hofkirchner's and Donati's. Second, is the discovery that the modality of Meta-reflexivity (entailing social as well as self-critique) is on the increase amongst educated young people. However, so too is Fractured reflexivity (subjects incapable of designing purposeful courses of action). Within it, the appearance of a sub-group who were termed Expressive reflexives is troubling. These subjects respond to daily events on the basis of their 'gut-feelings', but nonetheless accumulate the incoherent results of these responses over time. Possibly, these 'failed planners' are on the increase too. Were that the case, it *could* impact negatively on the current reflexive pursuit of 'relational goods' outside both market and state. [10] This is the key point at which there is a direct link with Chaps. 6 and 7.

## **1.5 Endogenous Processes of 'Stabilization'**

As had been seen, those who hold 'stability' indispensable to any form of planning have understood this as a need for some degree of contextual continuity, that is, for the endurance of sufficient morphostasis to underwrite it, especially when morphogenesis becomes pronounced. The implication is that fully 'unbound morphogenesis' could never be. The alternative - not always recognized - is that there are forms of 'stabilization' produced by morphogenesis itself that furnish an equally adequate (and more consonant) basis for planning activities.

Arguments for this are advanced by both Hofkirchner and Donati; the former in abstract theoretical terms and the latter supplying more sociological detail. Neither author maintains this is now the case or will become the case after late modernity, only that a Morphogenic society providing its own

processes of 'stabilization' is a possible future. At rock bottom, both of their arguments converge upon a conception of a future Morphogenic society where the generation of the emergent 'Commons' (Hofkirchner) or 'relational goods' (Donati), are sufficiently desirable to promote their own defence. In other words, they prompt their own 'stabilization' (which does not mean they remain unchanging) because they solicit increasing agential support through feed-forward rather than negative feedback (morphostasis). Feed-forward is illustrated by 'free giving', which solicits and reinforces reciprocity; someone or some group has to venture first in order to initiate this felicitous upward spiral (Donati 2003). Reciprocity carries its own collective reward, entailing both an objective benefit and a subjective orientation towards it. In case this seems too abstract or idealistic, it is even more striking that Colin Wight (Chap. 10) provides an illustration of the shift from competition to co-operation, in – of all unlikely candidates – the normativity coming to govern the circumstances and conduct of war.

Hofkirchner, as a theorist who endorses the self-organization of the social order is not handicapped in conceiving of the re-creation of social systems (their selftranscendence) from the combination of agential actions at the micro-level. In turn, the emergent systemic relations act back upon agency through downwards causation, thus initiating a process by which 'the whole existing social system is worked through and adapted accordingly to form the new system' (Chap. 6, p. 126). At a stroke, it appears that the explosive potential of the disjunction between 'system integration' and 'social integration' has vanished. But, Hofkirchner's argument is more complex and it is more accurate to say that it has the potential for being defused.

His approach is not based upon evolutionary *functional* adaptation; on the contrary, he maintains that '[a]ntagonisms in societal relations with respect to the commons are the engine of change' (Chap. 6, p. 127) and that, for example, the introduction of supra-nationally regulated financial capitalism to 'resolve' the present crisis would simply be an attempt to prolong capitalism. [11] In outlining the conditions for the advent of a 'Global Sustainable Information Society;' (as opposed to nuclear extinction) these rest upon a scenario in which '[b]oth information and self-organization are underpinned by a common logic – the logic of the "third"' (Chap. 6, p. 131), which is shared in their own terms by Donati and Archer, and ultimately constitutes the basis of 'stabilization'.

In simplified terms, agents orient courses of action not to their own egocentric interests, not to their group's (competitive) vested interests, but to the full actualization of the system's common goods that are already 'good enough' (meaning better than in the past) to encourage the intensification of shared common goals. In a nutshell, the common orientation towards society's commons is the source of 'stabilization' which, because 'good' is always the enemy of 'best', is not condemned to 'stability' or reliance upon morphostasis: 'Any build-up of social order is the build-up of something third. All actors contribute to the emergence of that order *that grants their interactions stable relations* : : : The new structure plays the role of the "third", the actors assume the roles of the "first" (ego) and the "second" (alter)' (Chap. 6, p. 133, my italics).

There is no inevitability here, only a possible morphogenic future and one that 'works only via the actors being [epistemologically] aware of the Third', Meta-reflexive about its development, and co-operative in its realization (Chap. 6, p. 139). But all three of these activities depend upon 'stabilization' sufficient to make them possible. The account is a compelling overview but raises some sociological questions: how amidst the dominance of economic competitiveness and bureaucratic regulation by the state does the co-operative 'third' originate? How does co-operation raise its head, let alone become consensual and rise from the ashes of normativity's decline as

described by Al-Amoudi? Does working in terms of the micro-actors and the macro-system alone (and concentrating mainly upon 'information') hamper giving answers to the above? This is where Donati, as the founder of 'Relational Sociology', provides clarification.

Relations and relationality are central at all levels of Donati's analysis: 'Social morphogenesis begins with relations, and it is through relations that new social forms are generated. It is through social relations that compatibilities, contradictions, and complementarities between the elements that compose the relation are, or are not realized in varying ways and degrees' (Chap. 7, p. 150). Consequently, he maintains that because interactions always take place in a relational context, relations cannot be reduced to their communicative or informational content alone since the former is the context of the latter. Moreover, Donati explicitly includes an institutional meso-level, absent in Hofkirchner's theorizing, that is crucial for his own generative mechanism.

In shorthand, he argues that the domination of the social order by the state-market binomial (or '*lib/lab*'), within a cultural matrix of individualism, is progressively challenged by groups evaluating and instigating projects according to the superordinate importance attaching to emergent 'relational goods'. From morphogenesis, Donati argues that a new variety of ends and means for the relation is produced, agents/actors need to select them and try to generate new combinations and interdependencies among the selected varieties *so as to stabilize an emergent relation*. How does a stabilizing selection occur in practice and on what basis are evaluations favouring the emergent *tertium* made? In a word, Donati's answer is experientially: the selection of variety to be chosen is evaluated on the basis of the meaningful experiences that the agent can obtain in contrast to what can be offered by other types of relations. The 'other types' stand for relations governed by 'competition' (with its necessary losers), and political command (where the majority are losers). Conversely, a relational *tertium* recommends itself because of its potential to produce 'win-win' outcomes, leaving no-one out, because it works in terms of the common good (micro-, meso-, and macro-) rather than the 'total good' of economics or the 'general good' of politics. [12]

With considerable compression, I simply want to signal the principal stages of his argument in the following sequence: < the emergence of the *tertium* → representing a new opportunity for social re-ordering → how its selection objectively recommends itself → how its social insertion constitutes stabilization, by re-directing agential courses of action → with consequences for the social formation dominant in late modernity>.

No less concisely, the ultimate base for the emergence of 'relational goods' is one that begins from a cultural change of values, grounded in 'contingent complementarities' (new opportunities for the social order to be combined otherwise) and prompted by the concerns endorsed by Meta-reflexives (the non-fungibility of human relations). Stabilization derives from the manifest benefits - themselves relational - generated and evidenced by 'relational initiatives' (for example, in child care, family oriented social work or co-operative production). These produce Added Social Value in terms of trust, co-operation, reciprocity in comparison with the same activities executed on the basis of bureaucratic regulation or the exchange of equivalents. Such 'stabilization' supplies the key basis for choice and planning, be it the life of a couple or choosing the kind of employment to seek or to shun. What changes is that agential actions are reflexively oriented to the *tertium* (to the relational goods themselves - produced in various forms from the dyad to global society). Correspondingly, agents and actors withhold their support from relational evils.

In terms of social transformation, what Donati points to 'is that a *societal* morphogenesis is in fact being produced, which leads the Third Sector to emerge in such a way as to change the *lib/lab* structure'. (Chap. 7, p. 164). Nevertheless, it is a process of gradualism, in which there are slow gains, frequent reverses and no triumphalism; in this it is close to Archer's conclusions. On the one hand, slow progress is made because the two Leviathans continue to increase the deficit in social solidarity, as highlighted in the current crisis. Rather than economic fixes that fail (quantitative easing and austerity measures) or a further rolling back of welfare benefits, Donati holds that the growth of the Third Sector will gradually precipitate further morphogenesis such that 'the state has to adopt a social governance style of action, implying more civic participation in designing and implementing its plans, instead of using a pure authoritative style; and the market has to consider the relational dimensions of its modes of production and consumption, implying, among other things, an active, symmetrical and non-instrumental role for the non-profit sector within it. The triangulation of state-market-third-sector gradually produces (at T4) an elaborated structure.' (Chap. 7, p. 166).

Reverses are common, as Donati illustrates by the dilemma faced by co-operative ventures, trapped between 'system requirements', entailing market competition, and 'social integration' requirements, involving pro-social ends. Failure to meet the former means the enterprise fails, yet being too good at competition means abandoning the primacy attaching to sociality with the co-operative venture then becoming part of the market. What he advocates for the gamut of pro-social undertakings is that they not only hold tight to their values and norms promotive of social integration, but devise means of making system integration relational, i.e. inserting the pro-social into both the means of production and its ends.

In a sense, this is an updated version of the 'revised sequence' put forward by J.K. Galbraith (1967), where the firm serves its employees rather than them serving market competition, although it has nothing else in common with his 'New Industrial State'. On the one hand, it appears to confront Porpora's view that despite its mutations to date, capitalism of its nature remains necessarily competitive. On the other hand, it could be countered that what is being advocated is a process of internal deconstruction of capitalism as known and its reconstitution as a civil economy.

However, let us recall that the whole of the above scenario stems from an initial change in values, or what Donati calls the 'guiding distinction' of a social formation. Many would withhold such autonomous powers from the cultural domain, dubbing their protagonists utopian. However, Colin Wight (Chap. 10) gives considerable pause to such instant dismissals by his bold argument about the normativity of international relations, and especially the resort to war. These, he maintains, have shifted towards transnational co-operation after the Cold War, a thesis which subsumes the counterfactuals springing readily to mind. If correct, this would constitute the most important and novel source of 'stabilization'. Wight succinctly summarizes his own case, one that properly acknowledges all elements of SAC (structure, culture and agency) in his account of normative change:

Military cooperation with smaller armies, which are technologically dependent, reinforces the need to cooperate in terms of development, research and design. The global financial crisis actually feeds this process of positive feedback, by restricting access to funds and hence inducing more cooperation. The increasing recognition of the global nature of all problems also fosters cooperation rather than competition. States are socialized into this cooperative environment



through prevailing norms and the influence of international organizations. In this way cooperation fosters cooperation rather than competition, and cooperation produces a commitment to the values and norms of non-violence and cooperation, which leads to more socialization and hence more cooperation. It is a genuine positive feedback loop. (Chap. 10, p. 237)

Moreover, his contribution gives more credible reasons for the loss of nation state powers than those found in the corpus of works on globalization. If these can be sustained, then this old Leviathan may not 'wither away', but cease blocking the way to the development of a more robust civil society.

## **1.6 Conclusion**

In one sense, this book can be regarded as a ground clearing operation – above all in demonstrating that the endurance of past morphostatic mechanisms is not a necessary condition of necessary 'stability' because morphogenesis introduces its own endogenous modes of 'stabilization'. This appears to warrant our exploration of 'morphogenesis unbound' from morphostasis. In another sense, because no-one is as yet prepared to proclaim the advent of global Morphogenic society – for reasons exceeding the unavoidable intervention of contingency in open systems of which the social order is forever a member – we need to compare, contrast, and creatively consolidate the partial and partially contestable generative mechanisms that we have tentatively begun to venture in this text. And that will be the task of Volume III.

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## Footnotes

[1] Leaving aside a tendency to retreat into global ethnographies that is marked worldwide in the tables of contents of Journals.

[2] Such theorists would still protest, for example, against torture, but on much the same organic grounds as they oppose cruelty to animals.

[3] Just as the previous study, *Making our Way through the World* (2007) Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, showed the intentional rejection of opportunities for social mobility by some.

[4] In Porpora's words, 'Competition as an abstract relation [continually] stands behind competition as observable behaviour' (Chap. 4, p. 78).

[5] A verbal statement made by Jimmy Wales at the Plenary meeting of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, 2012.

[6] I have previously listed 'vested interests' as largely falling victim to the fire (2013).

[7] This is a position that Maccarini usefully spells out but does not personally endorse.

[8] See for example, the recent British decision that they trump military rights and soldiers may invoke a breach of human rights where the provision of inadequate equipment or transport is concerned.

[9] For example, the great plague destabilized fourteenth century feudalism when one third of the European population died, producing a shortage of agricultural labour and a reduction in income for landowners.

[10] It remains to be fully established that personal Meta-reflexivity is the most propitious for collective reflexivity valuing 'relational goods' most highly, although the tendency works in that direction. See Archer 2012.

[11] His argument that 'As long as social systems could externalize the negative effects, their self-organization was compatible with the enclosure of the commons; now that they are interconnected as they are, the enclosure of the commons is not tenable any more' (Chap. 6, p. 130) gives some ballast to Lawson's conclusion (Chap. 2) about the effects of global finitude in denying capitalism a future.

[12] Stefano Zamagni (2011), uses the following metaphor to differentiate between the Total Good and the Common Good: 'The total of an addition remains positive even if some of its entries cancel one another out. Indeed, if the objective is the maximization of the total good, it may be convenient to nullify the good (or welfare) of some, if the gains of others more than offset the losses of the former. In a multiplication, this is clearly not possible because even if only one entry is zero, so is the result of the product.' 'The proximate and remotes causes of a crisis foretold: A

view from Catholic Social Thought', in José T. Raga and Mary Ann Glendon (eds.), *Crisis in the Global Economy: Re-Planning the Journey*, Vatican City, 2011, pp. 322-3.