

Chapter 2

Morphogenesis and Social Change

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Have we entered a new stage of society that might appropriately be called morphogenetic? To say so is to use the word morphogenetic in a new way. Morphogenesis, a term that comes from the Greek, literally means a change in form or shape. Although its original usage was in biology, morphogenesis was picked up as a term for social change by social systems theorists, who at that time thought biological models might also be appropriate to society.

Margaret Archer (1982, 1995, 2007), however, gave the term new currency in social theory by using morphogenesis to identify a realist approach to the structure-agency problem as distinct from the then more prominent approach of Giddensian (1979, 1981, 1984) structuration theory. As Archer conceptualized it, morphogenesis depicts a dialectical relation between structure and agency that, in contradistinction to structuration theory, does not conflate the two. So conceptualized, morphogenesis also departs from social systems theory, which generally represents a variety of social holism that leaves individual agents entirely out of account.

Archer's morphogenetic approach caught on at least in realist circles, broadly enough to be equated with the realist approach to social theory. I myself have been one of its strongest supporters, describing it as a contemporary articulation of the pivotal principle underlying a non-reductive Marxian approach to political economy (Porpora 2011). As such, morphogenesis is a meta-theoretical rather than a theoretical conception.

To speak now of morphogenetic society is to relocate morphogenesis from meta-theory to theory, that is, to identify it with particular mechanisms associated with a particular social formation. This book as a whole represents an initial appraisal of how apt such a theoretical designation might be.

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But before we even begin speaking of morphogenesis in theoretical terms, we need to understand morphogenesis as the meta-theoretical principle Archer originally conceived it to be. Presenting such understanding is the purpose of this chapter. More specifically, the purpose of this chapter is to present the morphogenetic approach as a meta-theoretical basis for understanding and explaining social change and in fact as the only tenable meta-theoretical basis for doing so.

As I have been speaking of the distinction between theory and meta-theory, I need to make that distinction clear. Although some have sought to provide what they call morphogenetic explanations for some aspect of social life, I believe such effort—or at least that designation of such effort—is misguided. As a meta-theoretical principle, the morphogenetic approach does not explain anything in particular. It resides rather at the level of underlying philosophy or fundamental ontology. The morphogenetic approach identifies the ingredients of any explanation of social change, namely structure, culture, and agency, and the generic form of their interrelation.

Any particular social change will need to be explained by the particular structures, by the particular cultures, and by the particular agents involved. In itself, as a meta-theory, the morphogenetic approach does not say anything about these. Thus, as a meta-theory, the morphogenetic approach explains nothing. On the other hand, I will argue, the morphogenetic approach identifies the inescapable form that every effective account of social change must take when fully explicated.

I will begin by explicating what the morphogenetic approach is. I will then compare it with the other approaches current in sociology today, which end up variously conflating structure, culture, and agency. Then, I will review various forms of social change and how the morphogenetic approach accounts for them. Finally, I will turn attention to the world today with questions about the appropriateness of calling our current stage morphogenetic.

2.1 The Morphogenetic Approach

The morphogenetic approach begins with what Archer (1995) calls analytic dualism. Actually, today, the designation analytic dualism may be a little misleading as there are at least double—and perhaps even triple—distinctions that need to be maintained, in which case we are beyond the dual.

Archer originally coined the phrase analytical dualism against Giddens's duality of structure, which, redefining structure principally as rules, thereby assimilated structure into agency. In opposition, Archer's analytical dualism affirms the continuing need to maintain an analytical distinction between structure and agency. Although they always interrelate causally, structure and agency remain ontologically separate.

According to the morphogenetic approach, structure does not refer to rules as it does for Giddens's structuration approach. As in the case of sociological holism and other more traditional understandings, for the morphogenetic approach as well, structure refers to relations. But in contrast to sociological holism, the morphogenetic

approach does not take structure to be relations among putative parts of a social system regarded as superorganic wholes. Instead, for the morphogenetic approach as for Marx, structure refers to human relations among human actors—relations like power, competition, exploitation, and dependency. I say these are all relations among human actors, but, more precisely they are relations among social positions that human actors occupy. Thus, it is more precise to speak of structure as relations among social positions.

So far, we see that one analytical dualism that the morphogenetic approach maintains is the distinction between structure understood as social relations and the agency of people within any such social structural arrangement. Yet there are still other distinctions Archer—rightly, I believe—enjoins us to maintain. In particular, we are also to maintain the distinction between culture and structure and between culture and agency. In all cases, Archer is seeking to avoid what she calls ‘conflation’, the erasure of distinctions that are analytically needed.

The distinction between culture and structure is another that sociology now tends to conflate. Anthropologists may be wont to encompass everything human under the category of culture but, traditionally in sociology a distinction was made between the ideal and the material or between the subjective and objective or what we perhaps now may call the discursive and extra-discursive. In each of the pairs of contrasts just listed, culture belongs to the former and structure to the latter term.

As for Marx so with the morphogenetic approach, the relations constituting social structure may be either subjective or objective in an ontological sense (Porpora 1993). On the one hand, a marriage relation exists only if the people occupying the related spousal positions understand what marriage is and what it entails. It is a relation that in this sense is ontologically subjective or, more precisely, inter-subjective. In contrast, a relation of exploitation or dependency may obtain between people or the social positions they occupy without anyone noticing it. In this sense, those relations are ontologically objective. So the ontological distinction between the subjective and the objective or the discursive and extra-discursive is another dualism the morphogenetic approach analytically maintains.

In contrast, with the so-called cultural turn in sociology (see Friedland and Mohr 2004), the concept of culture has now more or less swallowed up the concept of structure. The one-time debate over whether chronic poverty is the result of social structure as opposed to a so-called culture of poverty is now much harder even to conceptualize. Yet the issue has not gone away. In fact, with the worldwide crisis of capitalism and the attendant increases in unemployment and poverty, the issue has again become prominent (Small et al. 2010; Wilson 2010).

The distinction between culture and agency also needs to be maintained. In at least one regard, culture is what we collectively produce and agency what we individually do with it. To take one example, none of us individually produces language, which is a collective, emergent phenomenon. On the other hand, it is each of us individually who speaks through one language or another, exercising our own individual capacities as coherent selves to choose what it is we say. It is not rather, as poststructuralists would have it, that language is the agent speaking through us.

Thus, an important motivation behind the continuing distinction between culture and agency is not to let human agents be dissolved into culture in the manner of the poststructuralists, who prefer to speak not of coherent persons with coherent Cartesian selves but only of more ephemeral subjectivities or subject positions that appear and disappear in unfolding conversation.

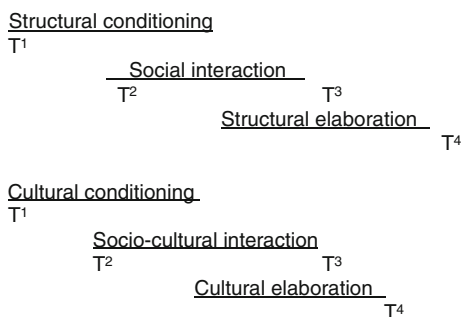
Generally, an explicit premise of the morphogenetic approach is that persons are more than just inert occupiers of subject positions, that they possess both material interests and idealistic convictions and that they act more or less coherently out of both. They can be encountered as coherent ‘thou’s who, unlike subject positions, can suffer, and it is in part to mitigate suffering that we theorize.

The various distinctions captured by the designation analytic dualism are really just the important presuppositions of the morphogenetic approach. We now need to unpack the approach itself. As I mentioned before, for me, the approach simply articulates Marx’s (2000) famous quip that ‘men [and women] make their history but not under circumstances of their own making’. In other words, viewed here as ontologically and analytically distinct, there is, nevertheless, a dialectical relation between agency on the one hand and structural and cultural circumstances on the other. But to break into that circle and understand human action, we must begin with the circumstances, the actors’ context.

Essentially, the morphogenetic approach signifies the understanding that people always act out of structural and cultural circumstances, which their very actions then proceed to modify or sustain. The element of time is therefore introduced as depicted in Fig. 2.1. We begin at time T^1 with the antecedent circumstances either structural or cultural or both. Whereas in Giddens’s structuration scheme, motivation disappears (see Porpora 1993), according to the morphogenetic approach, there are dual sources of motivation, i.e., both structural and cultural. Structural motivations derive from the interests built into social positions, and cultural motivations derive from people’s value commitments and ultimate concerns.

As people act within their structural circumstances over time T^2 , they alter or sustain those circumstances in the process Archer calls structural elaboration (Fig. 2.1). The same applies to cultural conditions. They are altered or sustained by human actions. The results at time T^3 are the altered and sustained circumstances that comprise the antecedent conditions for any further analysis of action.

Fig. 2.1 The morphogenesis of structure and culture.
Source Archer (1995, 193)



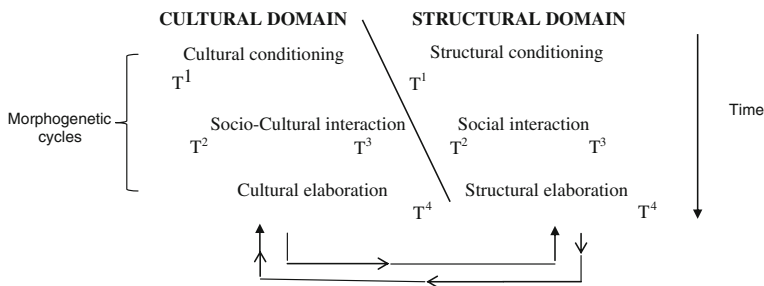


Fig. 2.2 Morphogenesis with structure and culture together. From Archer (1995, 323)

Figure 2.2 depicts the morphogenetic process in a more detailed manner, and it is clear here how, for Archer, culture and structure are both incorporated. However much people act on their structured interests, for example, they will always do so in ways that are culturally informed.

Crucial to the morphogenetic approach is that human action is undetermined even by structure and culture taken together. Instead, even with all the structural and cultural factors taken into account, human agency always exhibits an ineluctable creativity (see Joas 1997) that defies subsumption by any kind of nomothetic laws (see Porpora 1983). Thus, even taking structure and culture fully into account, human behavior can never be explained in terms of such laws. Instead, the morphogenetic approach favors narrative history as the paradigmatic form of explanation with the particularities of time and place always taken into account.

In sum, the morphogenetic approach completely supersedes the whole opposition between methodological individualism and sociological holism. In contrast with methodological individualism, people do not act apart from or outside of cultural and social structural contexts, and in contrast with sociological holism, the causal focus is on individual people enmeshed in a nexus of human relations, not on parts of a social system connected by functional relationships.

Ultimately, the morphogenetic approach brings together as analytically distinct concepts structure, culture, and human agency. Perhaps, to be added to this list should also be things, both natural and humanly made, since, as we will see in the next section, new or transformed things also play a role in social change.

2.2 Social Change Understood Morphogenetically

So, again, for the morphogenetic approach, social change involves a dialectical relation between human agency and the contexts in which those agents find themselves, contexts that include culture, structure, and physical things. Within that overriding framework, however, change may take a variety of forms.

One kind of change follows from invention. Consider, for example, the invention of the cotton gin, of the computer, or of the Internet. There are all sorts

of motives for invention, but certainly the prevailing context must include capitalist relations wherein one gains monetary compensation from inventing labor-saving technologies. The cotton gin or cotton engine was certainly a labor-saving technology that in turn effected great changes of the prevailing culture and social relations. As cotton became much more profitable, cotton production spread across the antebellum American South, expanding and entrenching the institution of slavery along with it. With that transformation and the enormous wealth it created, Aristocratic southern culture developed as well. Thus, in morphogenetic terms, a change—in this case an invention—created by human agency situated in an original context led to a radically changed social and cultural context.

Similar stories could be told about the computer and the Internet. Certainly, both profoundly transformed the prevailing divisions of labor and both, in turn, also profoundly transformed cultural consciousness in all sorts of ways. One need only consider, for example, how young people now do much of their dating via online mate-matching services.

Turning now from physical things, a second kind of change, often purely cultural, is associated with work done within a paradigm or genre. Certainly, the change is great when it is an entire paradigm that changes, when we move, for example, from classical to quantum physics or from Newton to Einstein. Nor is it only in science that we can speak of paradigm changes. We can speak equally, for example, of large transformations in aesthetics as, for example, the shift from realism to impressionism in painting or from modernism to postmodernism in architecture.

But change also occurs within a paradigm or aesthetic paradigm. The accumulation of knowledge through the work that Kuhn (1996) termed normal science within a paradigm still represents change, even if the results are less dramatic than scientific revolution. And it is the same with aesthetic disciplines. The production of different artistic pieces within a genre is a change, even if those pieces leave the genre intact. These smaller changes too can only be understood within a framework that begins with actors acting in a prevailing context.

What is true of the smaller cultural changes above is true as well for smaller changes in social structure. Not all changes in social structure alter the structure. Some changes merely alter the incumbents of each position. Such change occurs, for example, after an election in which an opposition party takes over from the party that was previously in office. Again such circulation of elites results from actors acting within a prior social context. The ensuing result, while not in itself dramatically transforming the structure of relations, might lead to such if the new incumbents opt to take matters in that direction and succeed in doing so.

According to the social regulationists such a meso-level kind of change occurred in the 1980s with the transition to a post-Fordist regime of production (see Jessop 2006). Regulationist regimes of capital accumulation are long-standing accords between capital and labor. Such regimes thus are not alternatives to capitalism but rather are a specific *modus vivendi* within overarching capitalist relations. Often being internally contradictory, such regimes, the regulationists argue, encounter crises that lead to the renegotiation of new regimes.

According to the regulationists, it was such a renegotiation that occurred in the 1980s. Consistently unable to realize sufficient profits under the old regime, capital sought to renegotiate the allocation of surplus that capital and labor each enjoyed. Under the post-Fordist regime that has governed us ever since, labor has been put very much on the defensive with consequences that show up in such structural effects as increased inequality.

Again, such regime transformations do not happen naturally of their own accord without human agency. When they do happen, they emerge out of struggle, struggles between actors situated in social positions with differing power and resources. In the US, the struggle that led to the current regime of accumulation was known as the ‘Reagan revolution’, and Reagan’s role in ushering it in is a big part of why he remains iconic for the American right.

Of course, it is not just to changes within a society that the morphogenetic approach can be applied. It also applies to the more fundamental transformations through which one form of society or mode of production mutates into another. Part of what led to the transition from feudalism to capitalism, for example, was the way in which actors, powerfully placed within the old regime, changed the cultural rules, which in turn changed the prevailing relations of production. Specifically, between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, the rich landowners in Britain altered the cultural rules of property ownership, converting serfs into tenants and finally into a landless proletariat for growing British industries. What essentially we have to do with here are structured interests and the power of one class of actors to effect cultural rule changes with deleterious effects on the structural position of another class. In between the two structural formations lie what I have called the position-based agency of individual actors (Porpora 1987).

2.3 The Morphogenetic Approach Versus the Current Conflationisms

Today, the major alternative to the morphogenetic approach is some variety of what Archer (1988, 1995) terms conflationist thought. First, with the so-called cultural turn, structure was devoured by culture. But culture too eventually was itself devoured—by discourse and practice.

One strand of conflation traces back to Bourdieu’s (1993) concept of a *field*. That concept conflated structure and agency. Admittedly, Bourdieu did speak of interests and the resources associated with different social positions. Still, for Bourdieu, objective structure largely became structure subjectively internalized in the form of habitus. For Bourdieu—and later Giddens, this move was powerfully rhetorical, seeming to overcome the opposition between structure and agency with structure now understood as both objective and subjective.

The rhetorical power of the move became apparent when Giddens’s work interpreted Bourdieu for an English-speaking audience. That interpretation, which

Giddens termed structuration theory, literally swept the Anglophone world. Even today, when Giddens's name and the very expression structuration theory have faded from sociological memory, the idea remains predominant as practice theory.

The idea, expressed in Giddensian terminology as the 'duality of structure', is that structure is both the medium and outcome of agency. There actually is nothing wrong with this formulation as such except that structure has now been defined as 'rules and resources'.

At first glance, it is a highly peculiar understanding of structure as it is not structural at all. A rule—'Stop on Red' or the six points awarded for a goal in American football—is a structure? Money in the bank is a structure? Where is the consistency with the relational way the word structure is employed in other contexts, say the structure of a bridge or a language or class divisions?

In Giddens's language, what ought to be relational is reduced to monadic things, purely cultural things like rules and purely material things like guns and money. Giddens sometimes refers to these things as structuring principles, which makes more sense than calling them structure itself. Differential possession of them, which is relational, will result in further relational distinctions. So guns and money and certain rules may well be structuring principles. To call them structure itself departs from any traditional sociological understanding of structure as relations, relations either among social forms or groupings or, alternately, among social positions.

To be fair, Giddens was largely just translating Bourdieu. Although there is in Bourdieu's concept of a field a hazy sense of structure as relations among social positions, Bourdieu did not really unpack structure that way. Instead, he principally spoke of structure either as internalized habitus, which, as knowing how the game is played, is largely understandable as internalized rules, or as the resources to which Giddens likewise refers.

Hence, in Giddens, we get structure as rules and resources. It is as such that structure is now understood by many Anglophone sociologists. Of course, later in the U.S., Sewell (1992) would amend Giddens's definition of structure to include cognitive schemas, an additional monadic notion which, with the ongoing cultural turn, was readily absorbed.

What about structure as it was more traditionally understood—as relations among social forms or positions? In Giddens's formulation, this idea was termed the social system and treated purely as a causal effect of rules and resources without any independent effects of its own. So relegated, what was traditionally understood as social structure becomes a causally inert epiphenomenon, certainly not there to counter anything like the current reprise of the culture of poverty thesis.

As noted above, what we have in fact in the trajectory from Bourdieu to Giddens is a double conflation. First, we have the conflation of culture and social structure, and, second, we have the conflation of structure and agency. In Giddens's formulation, culture first swallows up structure. Although there are multiple understandings of culture, in sociological terms, culture has regularly been understood as the realm of inter-subjectivity. As Davies and Harré (1990) later maintained,

if culture resides anywhere, it is ultimately in the shared consciousness we carry around in our individual heads. Thus, to understand structure as rules and a *fortiori* as cultural schemas is to envelop structure within the inter-subjective. Of course, there remain material resources but, as they are inert on their own, they require human acts to exert any effect. Thus, their role too is ultimately encompassed by subjectivity.

If the first conflation is the capture of structure by culture, the second conflation is the reduction of what is left to the concept of practice. Practice, what humans do, their performativity, becomes all. In what they do, in their activity, human agents invoke the rules they carry in their heads and deploy the material resources they find at their disposal and in the process transform both. The structure-agency problem appears overcome along with any remaining opposition between idealism and materialism. Both oppositions are sublated by the concept of practice.

Alternatively, as in Foucault, everything is reduced to discourse. The material or extra-discursive disappears. As many have lamented, language now becomes everything. In fact, on this account, it is not just social structure that disappears. Human agency disappears as well, i.e., any subject of effective action. Instead of human agents or subjects, we have only Lacanian subjectivities or subject-positions, stances adopted through which language works its autonomous magic.

How do you explain social change without analytically distinct structures, without actors, without agency? You don't. Foucault, for example, does not explain the transition from sovereign punishment to the contemporary discipline of the prison. In fact, he does not explain any of his transitions. Instead, Foucault deliberately presents us with discontinuity. Apparent discontinuity in fact is a rhetorical ploy by Foucault to de-center the actor. It is part of Foucault's anti-humanism. To explain the transitions, the acting subject would need to reappear. Foucault says so himself.

If history could remain the chain of uninterrupted continuities... it would be a privileged shelter for consciousness: what it takes away from the latter by bringing to light material determinations, inert practices, unconscious processes... it would restore in the form of a spontaneous synthesis; or rather, it would allow it [consciousness] to pick up once again all the threads that had escaped it, to reanimate all those dead activities, and to become once again the sovereign subject in a new or restored light. Continuous history is the correlate of consciousness (Foucault 2008, 300).

So here we have a passage from 'On the Archaeology of the Sciences', in which Foucault himself says what I just said. To allow for continuous change, Foucault admits, is to readmit the active subject. To avoid such agency, we must avoid considering the tissues of causality that link history together coherently.

Of course there are going to be discontinuities between historical epochs, but even discontinuities are going to be created morphogenetically by continuous actions of actors acting from within their originally structured positions. And above, remarkably, Foucault recognizes this very fact. And like Althusser, he seems to fear the re-entrance of Hegel's transcendental subject of history should any, even non-transcendent subjects, be allowed into the analysis.

Similar to Foucault, although on the more post-Wittgensteinian grounds of Winch (1958), Giddens also not only does away with structure but also full-fledged, motivated actors. Instead, Giddens denies that motives are anything that activate actors from within. Thus, he too is without resources to explain change. He talks a lot about the characteristics of a reflexive modernity but does little to explain how we got here. Although he uses the word *explain*, his goal seems exclusively to *understand* in post-Wittgensteinian fashion. It is little surprise that Giddens too expressly favors discontinuity. Thus, in *Consequences of Modernity* (Giddens 1991, 4–5), he speaks more of discontinuity and, drawing on postmodernists, says we need to move away from the continuous story lines of narrative history. Without motivated actors, he has little choice but to make this move. In *The Constitution of Society*, he validates it.

The modern world is born out of discontinuity with what went before rather than continuity with it. It is the nature of this discontinuity—the specificity of the world ushered in by the advent of industrial capitalism, originally located and founded in the West—which is the business of sociology to explain as best it can (Giddens 1984, 239).

In contrast with the narratively a-historical approaches of Foucault and Giddens, any narrative historical account of social change—which is really to say any full account of social change at all—must invoke at least implicitly the morphogenetic approach. We see that, for example, in Rostow's (1991) famous *Stages of Growth*. *The Stages of Growth* is either a theory of metaphysical tendencies inherent in all society or, to the extent that it is not metaphysical, it implicitly embraces the morphogenetic framework.

Regarding the latter, consider, for example, Rostow's first stage, the preconditions for take-off. The creation of such conditions must involve actors in the pre-existing structures and culture of traditional society making changes in that structure and culture that make society ready for Take-off. These include, for example, the adoption of the Protestant work ethic, the commodification of agriculture, and/or investment in infrastructure. In any case, people, either through aggregate individual action or collectively through government will be doing something, something grounded within a prior cultural and structural context.

The morphogenetic approach is likewise implicit in Weber's (2002) transvaluation of ideas from the Protestant ethic to the spirit of capitalism. In the Protestant Reformation, actors embrace new ideas of salvation, which they transform in their own minds—what Archer would call a process of cultural elaboration—until it ends up a new cultural creation: the Spirit of Capitalism. Here, the morphogenetic approach is very much in evidence. And, certainly, in the phenomenological tradition of Weber's *Verstehen* sociology, coherent actors continue to be very much present.

And, finally, we find the morphogenetic approach ineluctable even if we look at the Althusser-Thompson-Anderson debate. Althusser (2009, 2010), of course, was one of the key figures in the Anti-humanist movement, reducing class actors to Lacanian subject positions, who like Foucault's subjects, were more acted upon than actors—in Althusser's phrase, mere carriers of structure. Defending Althusser

from Thompson's (1978) too voluntaristic critique, even the structuralist Anderson (1980) had to admit that even if actors generally do not realize the full effects of their actions, historical actors are still doing something intentional that cannot be left out of account (Porpora 1985). The conclusion is that the morphogenetic approach is the ineluctable mechanism of social change. How now do we apply it to our current situation?

2.4 Where Are We Now?

So where are we now? Our period has been labeled in multiple, different ways, from Late capitalism to liquid or reflexive modernity to post-modernity. Each designation calls our attention to different social mechanisms. Now, Archer is suggesting a new designation for the present moment: Morphogenetic society. It follows from all we have so far discussed that on whichever mechanisms we focus, our analysis will still need at the meta-theoretical level that implicates the morphogenetic approach.

In particular, therefore, any collapse of everything into practice or discourse leaves us without resources to explain all that is going on today. Consider, for example, Harré's account of the 2008 financial crisis.

Institutions are not ontologically basic, nor are any other seemingly structured entity-like beings. From the point of view of the conversational source model an institution is an appearance, an illusion presented by the relative stability of the flux of social acts that are constitutive of the then and there social reality. The need for a clear ontological viewpoint has been illustrated dramatically in the "collapse" of part of the "banking system". Talking that way distracts our attention from the reality, the flux of social acts performed by a loosely bounded group of active agents, following discourse rules that proved in the end to be incoherent. There is and was no "banking system" (Harré 2009).

There are many things beyond Harré's analysis above, beyond, that is, people just talking with each other in various situations. What Harré appears to be saying here is that the failure of what we call the banking system was due to incoherent rules. What does Harré mean by incoherent rules? Why were bankers following them rather than 'coherent rules'?

Beyond Harré's conversational model lies a structure of inequality, overlaid on the competitive relations of the capitalist system, which induce ever more fevered profit-maximization. Such structures, which are relational, are not reducible to people's talking together here or there.

Yes, rules, too, were partly responsible for the crisis, but most pivotal were not rules governing any particular, situated conversation that bankers were having with each other. The pivotal rule changes were the Garn St. Germain Act under President Ronald Reagan and the Graham-Leach Bliley Act under President Bill Clinton, which together greatly expanded the riskier domains in which banks and savings and loan organizations could invest and lend (Foster and Magdoff 2009; Lim and Lim 2010).

Even here, we must ask why the rules of investment were relaxed, which requires us to speak of political power and of the heightened business competition of hyper-capitalism. And a key part of the crisis as well, at least in the United States, was the current concentration of wealth, not seen since the Great Depression, which left little buying power in the hands of the majority so that capital, with a surfeit of funds, was forced to invest in ever riskier ventures. All these relational factors too lie beyond anyone's situated conversation.

If Harré's social positioning theory will not suffice, neither will cavalier references to nonlinear processes; self-organizing systems; or departures from equilibria such as we find, for example, in Urry's (2003) *Global Complexity*. Social systems do not just spontaneously and mystically self-organize. To the extent that there is any such tendency, it must, again, happen through human beings, who in turn must do something to bring it about. Thus, talk of complexity theory either returns us to functionalism with unexplained feedback loops or, at the meta-theoretical level, to the morphogenetic approach.

Is there any purchase in speaking of morphogenesis not only at the meta-theoretical level but at the theoretical level as well? Does it make sense, in other words, to speak of the present as morphogenetic society? That question is what the remainder of this book is about. Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter to contribute to that endeavor, we can at least end with some questions that will need to be answered in relation to it:

- Why characterize this society at this moment as morphogenetic? Was not morphogenesis an element of all previous societies as well?
- How is this designation different from 'liquid modernity' etc.?
- What is the underlying mechanism of change in this so-called Morphogenetic Society? Is it different from some aspect of capitalist dynamics?
- Is the putative mechanism of change the dominant mechanism operating today?

By the end of this book, these questions should find their answers.

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