

Chapter 1

Anatomies and Dynamics of the Society–Mechanism: Among Myths of Simplification, Facilitation, and Disintermediation

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ABSTRACT

It was post-modernity that first told us that facts were now to be considered interpretations, whereupon the value of theorization diminished to the point where theories became little more than opinions. As a reaction, the reductionisms and determinisms that had previously been dismantled by a novel, non-Newtonian perspective returned as a “tyranny of concreteness,” foreshadowing tomorrow’s post-normality. So, what then is “normality”? Human societies have always been wrapped in chaos, complexity, and contradictions: this is normal for all living beings and for all living systems. A volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) world, therefore, has always existed, and as such is perfectly normal and natural. Therefore, a science based on “post normality” should take into account that normality itself implicates unpredictability, uncertainty, and the impossibility of controlling or managing complexity, including the unexpected events called “black swans,” which are simply intrinsic features of the complex adaptive systems we inhabit.

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INTRODUCTION

The uncertainties and relativities which have been plaguing our civilization from the era of post-modernity onward, from the first announcement of the overcoming of the ‘objectivity principle’, both in philosophical terms and in the realm of the ‘hard’ sciences, the announcement that there were no longer any such things as facts, only interpretations, gave rise to a series of paradoxical ‘side effects’, in which the value of theorization was diminished to the point where all theories became equivalent, considered little more than opinions themselves. As a result, the same reductionisms and determinisms which had previously been dismantled by a novel perspective in physics, focusing on non-Newtonian, quantum phenomena and properties, have since returned (with a vengeance) under the guise of an ‘evidence-based’ search for a completely neutral and absolute...objectivity, in the realm of social sciences as well, resulting in a reinforced “tyranny of concreteness” (Dominici, 1996, 2017b; Hammersley, 2013). And might not this ‘new’ objectivity be yet another social construct, and as such subject to an unavoidable amount of subjectivity, considering that all human beings are, first of all, subjects?

In any case, before speaking of post-normality, we should perhaps ponder normality itself. Our human societies have always been wrapped in chaos, complexity and contradictions: this is normal for all living beings and for all living systems, which in general can be grouped together as ‘complex adaptive systems’ (CASs). A volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) world, therefore, *has always existed*, and as such *is perfectly normal*; as a matter of fact, it is both natural and desirable. Therefore, the idea of a science based on “post normality” should take into account that normality itself implicates unpredictability, uncertainty, and the impossibility of controlling or managing the complexity that comprises us, including the unexpected events often called “black swans”, which are simply an intrinsic feature of the CASs we inhabit (Haken, 1977; Morin, 1977; Kiel, 1994; Kuhlmann, 2013).

In the thirty or so years that I have been studying, teaching, writing, and carrying out research on complexity, I have, time after time, come up against experts from various fields who misinterpret the concepts behind terms such as complexity and chaos. That is the reason that I always insist upon defining and distinguishing the difference between complex and complicated systems before introducing any epistemological or methodological considerations. As a result, I am often accused of repeating myself. But how is it possible to analyze issues, overcome inadequacies, or identify connections, much less find solutions for problems (which turn out inevitably to be *simple* solutions aimed at resolving *complex* problems), based on totally false premises? I find myself obliged to insist on these points, because the confusion between the two abovementioned systems, the tendency to think that a complex system can be described as complicated – and consequently, dealt with in

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