Edgar Morin – the Uniduality of the Magical and the Real

Søren Askegaard, University of Southern Denmark, Denmark

This paper represents an introduction in consumer research of the voice of Edgar Morin (1921- ) and to his fight against reductionism. One of Morin’s suggestions is to conceive of the world in what he calls conceptual unidualities, mutually constitutive but also antagonistic parts. A central one is the uniduality of human knowledge as being always simultaneously empirical/rational/logical and symbolic/mythological/magical

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Society – a complexus

Edgar Morin is a sociologist of modernity and mass culture. The most important thing to underline is that Morin’s goal is not merely to deliver a cultural critique of the trivial and banal forms of mass culture. It represents an attempt to grasp both the systemic logic between culture production and modern capitalism but also how both this system and its products is formed by and forming the human imaginary and that this forming, beyond a simple alienation also represents a profound humanness – the stuff that dreams are made of. If mass culture is filled with nonsense, it is exactly because humanity is filled with it, not only in a negative but also a positive way.

One of the central conclusions of Morin’s sociology is the significance of the “event”, the fact that a single fantasmatc production of a narrative can produce a long chain of consequences. The event contributes to questioning even multi-causal and multi-rational explanatory frameworks for social and institutional change and provides a foundation for a fundamental critique of social prediction.

Homo Demens

Morin (1974) argues against one the one hand a biologicist reductionism that neglects cultural and communicative dimensions of humanity or reduces cultural forms to reflect simple evolutionary advantages. On the other hand, he accuses anthropology for neglecting the fact, that humans are not only cultural but also biological beings. Human nature and human culture are not “separate layers” of human existence but mutually constitutive. Homo Sapiens is not separate from nature and human order is not in opposition to natural (dis)order, at the same time as disorder is a fundamental and constitutive element in the formation of humanity.

Behind the reassuring name of Sapiens, Morin writes, the true face of the human being appears. It is an animal of hubris, of strong and unstable feelings, an animal that invents demons and chimera and who is always caught in the dilemma of deciding what is real and what is unreal; an animal that is ecstatic, loving and violent; who knows death without being able to believe in it, an animal of delirium and pleasure, myth, magic and illusions. And since we, Morin concludes, by madness understand the combination of illusion, exaggeration, instability, hesitance between real and unreal, subjective and objective, error and disorder, a more correct denomination for the human species might be homo demens.

The uniduality of the magic and the real

Morin’s most important legacy may be his opus major, the search for a scienza nouva as unfolded in the six volumes of La Méthode. In the two first volumes (Morin 1977, 1980), he applies the perspective of complex, open systems on the physical world and the biological world respectively. This he does in order to provide a general foundation for his real concern – the discussion of the complexity of the human knowledge (Morin 1986, 1991) and human societies (2001, 2004). It is noteworthy, that Morin with this work aims at the establishment of a certain unity of science. However, instead of the logical-empiricist goal of analytical and logical reductionism that has served as an unattainable goal for much social science, Morin’s unity of science is based on principles of self-organization and complexity in physical, biological and anthropological systems.

Morin himself highlights three principles that characterize a complex epistemology: The principle of dialogic, the principle of recursiveness and the hologrammatic principle (Morin 1986). The consumer research interest in such an epistemology is first and foremost the acknowledgment of what Morin would call the uniduality of concepts. For example, it generates an ability to see not the opposition between the rational and the magic but their mutual dependence and their deep ingraining in the formation of the human subject.

REFERENCES