

Book Review

Psyche's Veil: Psychotherapy, fractals, and complexity, by Terry Marks Tarlow. New York: Routledge, 2008.

Psyche's Veil is a book about psychotherapy, fractals and complexity. Its title seems to mean that beyond the "Psyche" there is much more than is already known. Moreover, we find out in this book that Complexity Theory makes the "Psyche" better understood.

Marks-Tarlow started her book with the therapy of Sabina, a case that should be a classic example for a highly nonlinear system. The proof she made for this was a semantic level analysis that used language analysis and metaphors. After that came Rita's case with many examples of phase transitions, followed by Charlotte with her self-organizing abilities, and finally a "Fractal Jimbo." At the end Marks-Tarlow continued the path of the self-similarity point of view with an analysis of other psychotherapeutic examples: the behavior of the sexually abused Mae and then an opposite case, the "superman Puck," both of whom could not arrange their lives because of the internal discrepancies and bad assumptions for their lives. The assumptions led to progressively always more structured behavioral repetitions. The repetitions are the most important condition (from a mathematical point of view) to obtain a fractal structure. This is a main statement of this book. The biggest part of this work concerns on fractal property of "Psyche" and the final statement is that "... the myth of Psyche represents a real story" (p. 283).

I read this book three times because I had a problem understanding it after the first and second reading. Then I stopped the reading in order to reflect on my own sanitary views of nonlinear dynamics. Why?

At first reading, this book shocked me with an extremely wide range of topics. I had to look in the deepest parts of my memory for things that I learned many, many years ago and never thought were important for my activities around complex systems.

There were a lot of "boxes" in the book where nonlinear terms and measures were mathematically defined. That they were just put into the text without any direct correlation with the narration made me sad. At this moment I thought, "here is one more scientist who writes about things that (s)he as a non-physicists cannot understand."

Many years ago my colleagues and I wrote a series of articles which proved the nonlinear character of psychotherapy processes (Kowalik, Schiepek,

Kumpf, Roberts, & Elbert, 1997; Schiepek & Kowalik, 1996; Schiepek et al., 1997). We had never had a need to think concurrently about things like Oedipus, Oracle, Vagina Dentata or Sphinx, however. But Terry Marks-Tarlow did. Why? I suppose, she is saying that just now, in that moment, a historical jump in the theory of psychotherapy is occurring and that the ontological context of this theory is the most important one. It is more than psychotherapy science itself. It is a philosophy. Maybe she is right. Psychology and the theory of psychotherapy are both evolving more and more into the natural sciences and are this day going out rapidly from the Humanities Science. But, there must exist a bridge between both, so it is good that we have scientists making this bridge. Terry Marks-Tarlow is one of them. A good one. While a “human free will” is questioned (Soon, Brass, Heinze, & Haynes, 2008) it will be one of most fascinating questions concerning how a human psyche is organized.

During the second reading I was amazed, for instance, at the citation of a neurobiological study devoted to the propagation of emotions in the population of rats (Knapska et al., 2006). It is really a very significant study for a neurocognitive understanding of social behavior. This point came so unexpectedly, however, that in that moment I was almost sure this book is a “patchwork.” I know now, it is absolutely not. I recovered from that idea after the third reading of this book.

The typical reading matter of the scientists is an article that describes an experiment, a model or a theory. An article that describes an experiment must be persuasive enough to conclude some hypothesis that is interesting for this scientist. Beyond articles, there are books with scientific context that are mostly either collections of strictly defined themes or a popularization tool devoted to a topic that should be better pronounced in society. There are still other types of books that present general trends in science. I do not know to whom they are addressed. Maybe they are intended for future generations or for the history of science. I think Marks-Tarlow's book belongs to the latter group. I am sure that no single physicist profited from the works of Wittgenstein although he discovered things that were important without a real physical knowledge by just using the analyses of language, metaphors and simple logic. Amazing, but true.

After the third reading I concluded that Marks-Tarlow's book is a good piece of work. Nevertheless, there are some discrepancies which need to be mentioned. For instance, it is correct that in general the complexity in depression is scaled down. But there are many types of depressive states where the relationship does not hold true. Even the “depressives” belong to the group of nonstationary disorders, thus it means, sometimes situations happen behind the statistics (Röschke, Mann, & Fell, 1994).

While writing about a reconstruction of an attractor it is not good to forget Takens (1981, 1985), whose theorem made this reconstruction possible. The book's citation style here is very loose and goes more often than not to the last published reviews instead of the real sources.

Concluding, this book is a puzzle with many thousands pieces, a very complex one and an extraordinary thoughtful flow of (accurately) collected knowledge passed to its topic. It is not enough to read this book only once. Go back and read it again and again. You will experience something new each time. I promise.

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