

Introduction

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The old normal is not the new normal, and neither normal should be normal at all. Our world was in crisis before the COVID-19 pandemic, and now we face increasing pressures to change our relationship with the world and each other. The challenge we are faced with is a challenge Ivan Illich discussed many times; we have built our institutions, tools, and institutions as tools in ways that have led us to this situation. Beyond that, these tools and institutions have momentum and institutionalize the problems they were created to address. Like medical care that has a lessened motivation to cure you in capitalism because medical care must pursue profit, other institutions are caught in the same bind and trajectories.

Before the pandemic, things were, in theory, normal. Normal in the sense that they were bounded by the amazing and profoundly abnormal. These abnormal situations were considered exceptional, but still happened enough to make us aware of it. Whether the abnormal event was; a one in one thousand year storm, a nuclear accident, a volcano erupting, a gas crisis, a neo-fascist uprising, various effects of global climate change, or the multiple messes around technologies and their incorporations. The normal wasn't normal, but the day to day was at most times for many people reasonably within their expectations, even if it entailed any number of sexism, racism, ageism, capitalism, or other oppressive/exploitative regimes within it. People knew to expect the everyday evils of their situatedness, and occasionally people organized to resist and foment change. People knew the 'law' and 'common-sense ethics' were

not always on their side, but at least they knew where they stood. They had a sense of what was changing and what could change, even if that sense was frequently wrong. In short, people had an operational sense of what they desired to be normal and operated within a world where those operations made them feel normal.

Reading Illich allows us to recognize the normally abnormal and abnormally normal situations, diagnose them, and blame the historical and contemporary contingencies that generated them. From *Disabling Professions* to *Tools of Conviviality* to his later works calling for institutional reform, Illich promoted an awareness beyond the situated normality of our everyday lives. He pointed out that the hegemony was not merely the operations of another, but an operation of ourselves to that other. Illich makes us realize that within the construction of the 'normal' our complicity is explicit. Our willful lack of awareness is diagnosed as part of our problem, and a deepening engagement and will to change would allow people to generate the alternatives to move forward with a better life.

After the COVID-19 pandemic passes, and currently, it seems that within a year or two, we will have opportunities to establish a normal that is both different from the pandemic normal and the old hegemonic normal. We are already practicing difference in our lives. Energy usage is down in the western world, for instance. Perhaps there is hope for a new normal. The question facing us is, what will that normal be?

This special issue challenged authors to confront the possibility of that normal, to reach beyond technological and social solutionism, and find a way forward in conviviality. It challenged the authors with a very complex set of questions, and the authors responded in greatly diverse and meaningful ways. Each takes their unique path to think about this new normal. Some of these paths open meaningful dialogues and theoretical trajectories to that new normal,

and others are fruitful in other ways. All are worthy of thoughtful engagement and consideration.