

Chapter One

Defining the Question

Cultural action to transform the basic structures of the modern world is a general concept that unites most of my books. This is the newest. The meaning and uses of this general concept are, obviously, not obvious.

Reading all of the books in the series would be the best way to form an understanding of the general concept of cultural action to transform the basic structures of the modern world, and to establish a basis for making one's own judgment concerning how far I am right to regard it as a concept that unifies a coherent and useful set of writings. Anyone who completed such a task would probably understand me better than I understand myself. In this opening chapter to this newest book I will try to sketch what I think such an ambitious reader would learn. I hope that by the end of this first chapter even those who begin this book with as we say in California "no clue where my head is at" will come to see the wide-ranging conversations of this book as parts of the even wider-ranging conversations of my other books.

The immediate object of this opening chapter is to define the question to ask about Rosario. Speaking a bit more broadly, the immediate object of this chapter is to define initially the method and the purpose of this study. The method and the purpose will emerge more fully and clearly as the former is applied and as the latter is pursued in the succeeding chapters. Placing the present inquiry in the context of my previous inquiries will contribute to achieving this immediate object. But before proceeding to describe this book's method, and then its purpose, I will write a paragraph about its subject.

Rosario is located on the Paraná River 330 kilometers north and west of Buenos Aires, Argentina, in the Province of Santa Fe. About a million people live there. There were 909,397 inside the city limits according to the census of 2001. The population is unusually stable for a Latin American city, having been 908,875 in the census of 1991. De-industrialization explains why Rosario is not burgeoning as other cities in the region are. Most Latin American cities have been growing fast because of the vegetative

growth of the population and because of flight to the cities due to the mechanization of agriculture in the countryside. Rosario, like Chicago to which it is sometimes compared, is an industrial city that lost most of its industries in the 1980s and 1990s. Often it is helpful not to think of Rosario alone, but to think of an ex-industrial belt stretching along the Paraná River south of Rosario to San Nicolas in the northern part of the Province of Buenos Aires, and north of Rosario to San Lorenzo in the Province of Santa Fe. Still farther north is the city of Santa Fe, the capital city of the Province. The capital is smaller than the metropolis, as Springfield, the capital of Illinois, is smaller than Chicago. Rosario proper is the center and heart of what used to be Argentina's industrial belt. Since 1989, and arguably to some extent since 1985, it has had a socialist municipal government. The empirical aspects of this book are a study of the achievements and limitations of socialism there. I know there will be readers who, as far as the facts are concerned, would approve of all the good things that are happening in Rosario, but who nonetheless will not approve of any facts that bear the label "socialist." Such readers should feel free to mentally delete the word "socialist" wherever it appears and to replace it with some other word or phrase. This labeling issue will be discussed in Chapter Seven.

Now I start the topic of method. A method is a way to go about doing something. The word comes from a Latin root meaning "road." One feature of the method of this book is that it aims to be participatory. The reader is invited to write back. Readers may also write me directly at howardri00@yahoo.com.

Another way this book aims to be participatory is by frequently adopting a dialogue form. Most of the people interviewed speak for themselves in their own words, although I must admit that I have frequently suggested to them things they might want to say. Sometimes I use a dialogue form even where nobody was interviewed, conversing with an imaginary interlocutor. I will do that now, conversing with an imaginary reader.

Reader: I am accustomed to using the term "method" to refer to a way to ascertain facts that is more completely named as "the scientific method." It typically includes gathering data and testing hypotheses. What you have said so far seems to be not about ascertaining facts at all. It is about reporting facts already ascertained. The website is suitable for allowing

readers to ask questions for you to answer. The dialogue form is a way you have chosen to communicate what you know. That is to say, it is a way to move ideas from your head, that of the knower, to other heads, those of people who do not yet know the findings of your study of socialism in Rosario. What appears to be lacking is a method that would provide safeguards that would assure the public, and especially the community of scholars who are in your field (whatever that field might be), that your findings are valid.

Writer: Regarding the scientific method, I agree with one of my Oxford tutors, Rom Harré, who is the lecturer in philosophy of science at that university, that it does not make sense to separate the methods of science from the history of science. (Harré 1970) On a proper view, the methods of science are those which scientists actually use to make discoveries. They have been and are diverse. Anyone who believes there is a single scientific method is deluded. Anyone who believes that the supposed employment of the putative scientific method explains the success of the natural sciences and shows the correct path for the social sciences to follow is doubly deluded.

Reader: It seems likely that you have a low opinion of Karl Popper's justification for assuming the chair of methodology of the social sciences at the London School of Economics. He admitted that he knew nothing about the social sciences, but he said that because he knew a great deal about physics he knew a great deal about the pattern the social sciences ought to follow.

Writer: My views on his views are expressed in my essay "Karl Popper's Vienna," which is Chapter 9 of my and Joanna Swanger's book The Dilemmas of Social Democracies (Lexington Books, 2006). It is true that I do not agree with his opinion that the natural sciences and the social sciences should use similar methods. (Popper 1957)

Reader: If there is no scientific method whose use explains the success of the natural sciences, what does explain their success?

Writer: I agree with the critical realists who hold that physical reality exists independently of whatever humans may think about it. (Archer et al 1999) The reason for the success of the natural sciences is that they have discovered things that are true, in the sense that they correspond to nature as

it really is. I agree with Martin Heidegger that ontology determines epistemology, not the other way about. (Heidegger 1927) To put Heidegger's point in more ordinary language, the right method for knowing about something depends on what it is.

Reader: I assume that you agree with Immanuel Wallerstein that in an important sense there is only one thing for social scientists today to know about. (Wallerstein 2001) In Wallerstein's terms, it is the modern world-system. Others simply call it global capitalism. There is no social life outside of it for social scientists to study. I gather that you would say that the right method for knowing about global capitalism (also known as the modern world-system) depends on what it is.

Writer: It is a set of norms.

Reader: What kind of norms ?

Writer: Both ethical (moral) and legal norms. Sometimes it is convenient to speak of "rules" instead of "norms" and to say that sets of them form "institutions," or as I often say "cultural structures," or to speak of "social structures," or, following Jürgen Habermas, "symbolic structures." (Habermas 1975) I have argued in detail that it is a mistake to conceive of global capitalism as an economic machine, concerning which liberal, Post-Keynesian, Marxist, institutionalist and other schools of economic thought give competing explanations. It is more accurate to think of it as a set of norms. Economic explanations are shorthand versions of causal analyses whose premises are normative, as I show in Understanding the Global Economy (Maadhyam Books, 2000)

Reader: Let me return to my original question. What is the method that you used to ascertain the facts about Rosario ? I will postpone asking you how you justified studying a particular site when you are a died-in-the-wool Braudelian and Wallersteinian convinced that no site today can be understood apart from its mode of insertion in the world-system.

Writer: My method was an adjustment of the one I used in an earlier book, a study of an adult education program in the south of Chile during the Pinochet dictatorship, The Evaluation of Cultural Action (Macmillan, 1985). I used interviews to find out what people thought, and then I triangulated to nail down selected key factual assertions that they made.

Reader: About 90% of research in the social sciences employs interviews of one sort or another. (Briggs et al 1986) Is there anything distinctive about the way you interview ?

Writer: I used to be a Winchian fanatic in the sense that I went to extraordinary lengths to avoid structuring questions in ways that would produce answers framed within my mentality as distinct from the mentality of the people whose world I was trying to use the interview as a window to look at through. (see Winch 1958) In the Chilean study I compounded my Winchian fanaticism with a desire to build the self confidence of the peasants and to strengthen their capacity to organize themselves. The interviews and interview-related methods aimed to support the same communitarian values that the program being studied promoted. The Rosario experience has been similar in the respect that I sympathize with the values of its municipal government. I have been working together with them to produce texts that would make their ideas clear to outsiders. Since I am working with highly educated people with high self-esteem I do not worry about silencing them by expressing my own views, which I want to express anyway. I do not disagree with them, but I have ideas to add and a purpose to pursue. As in Chile, I circulated drafts of what my interviewees said until they were satisfied that they had been heard and accurately interpreted. Then I triangulated.

Reader: What is triangulation ?

Writer: It is gathering scraps of evidence. Any single scrap of evidence may be untrustworthy or unconvincing. When all of the scraps of evidence converge in confirming a statement, then it becomes reasonable to believe that the statement corresponds to the facts. In Rosario I did not do a great deal of triangulating because it did not take much to show the key facts to be true beyond reasonable doubt.

Reader: Why do you count your efforts to make your book mainly a series of dialogues, and to make it a catalyst for encouraging your readers to interact in cyberspace, as a context of justification, as a part of your “method” for showing that your claims are significant and valid?

Writer: First, participation counts as part of my efforts to produce knowledge, and not just as part of my efforts to communicate what is

already known, because I count on participation by dialogue partners and readers to save me from my mistakes. As my favorite economist John Maynard Keynes wrote “It is astonishing what foolish things one can temporarily believe if one thinks too long alone.” (Keynes 1936, p. vii) Producing a book as a collaborative effort with highly intelligent people with firsthand knowledge is an efficient way to pursue truth. It is not mainly a matter of verifying data. It is mainly a matter of capturing how discourse and practice interact, of understanding the context and significance of idées-forces.

Reader: I am surprised by the way you calmly speak of truth and of statements corresponding to facts just as if as if the correspondence theory of truth were still a respectable theory in post-Wittgensteinian, post-Heideggerian, post-Nietzschean, post-Derridean, and post-Foucauldian academic environments.

Writer: I find it convenient to use some old-fashioned terminology that other people find it important to deconstruct, criticize, question, and destabilize. It is not because I disagree with them or do not appreciate their motives for doing what they do. It is because I am engaged in different sorts of projects which lead to different priorities when it comes to weighing words and deciding whether to use them or not.

Reader: Namely, you are engaged in what you call “Cultural action to transform the basic structures of the modern world,” which is a concept you explain in the fifty letters of Letters from Quebec. (International Scholars Press, 1995). There you argue that philosophy always has been cultural action, that is to say, it has always been changing culture to make it more physically functional. You argue that Paulo Freire’s idea, “cultural action,” and Antonio Gramsci’s similar idea “moral and intellectual reform,” suggest a superior way to understand the activities of Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Descartes, Kant, Marx, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Derrida, and others. Am I anticipating a second reason why participation counts as part of your efforts to produce knowledge, and not just as part of your efforts to communicate what is already known?

Writer: Yes. As Paulo Freire said, dialogue produces its own kind of truth. It produces agreements, shared understandings, and shared projects.

Reader: Do you mean that social reality, including even the basic structures of the modern world, is changed by talking ?

Writer: Yes. There are social scientists who appear to think that their talk does not change anything until their research findings are applied. They think of themselves as producing verified knowledge, or, more modestly, falsifiable hypotheses that have been tested and not falsified, confirmed by systematically analyzed and interpreted datasets, which can be used by decision-makers to make decisions. They do not think of themselves as changing the world in their research process, but only as preparing the way for interventions in social reality that will follow later when social actors use their research findings as inputs for decision making processes. It seems to me that such social scientists already made many decisions when they decided on a way to go about doing their research. Then they already set out on a road. I think of social science in terms of the late Wittgenstein's idea of language-games. (Wittgenstein 1958) Social scientists are making up and playing language games as everyone else is. What they do is part of the natural history of the human species as is what everyone else does. In John Searle's terms, everything they write or say is a speech act, which has consequences in the world, as all actions do. (see Searle 1969)

Reader: So you think of yourself as walking on the road of cultural action to transform the basic structures of the modern world by participating in a collaborative effort to reflect on Rosario's socialist experience?

Writer: Yes. Here I do follow Foucault. I think that discourses create their own objects (Foucault 1971) and that in Rosario, and in general among cultural creatives in Argentina and Brazil, important new discourses are creating important new objects. Participating in this process is part of finding out, as distinct from reporting, because it is part of making the social reality being studied.

Reader: Earlier you said that in Rosario your method was an adjustment of the one you used in Chile in the 1980s. What was the adjustment and why did you make it ?

Writer: I adjusted the method to the purpose.

Reader: As an outsider you probably had a purpose different from the various and diverse purposes more or less consciously pursued by one or

more of the million or so people in Rosario; and probably also different from the programmatic proposals submitted to the voters, on the basis of which the voters have repeatedly returned socialists to office.

Writer: The programmatic proposals submitted to the voters at election times are strictly nuts and bolts, a sewage plant here, a bridge there. The socialist candidates for mayor tell the voters exactly what they will do, how much it will cost, and when the work will be completed.

Reader: That reinforces my opinion that what you want to know about them is probably different from what they want to know about themselves.

Writer: I come to Rosario as a citizen of the world, incidentally as a member of the international commission of the Socialist Party of the United States, and as a research professor from a college in Indiana who could go anywhere and study anything. I choose to study Rosario because I find there ideas for solving humanity's basic problem.

Reader: Once again I sense that you hold views that are out of fashion. The idea that humanity has one single basic problem is today regarded as the dumbest idea that ever was, and the most harmful.

Writer: Let me explain a bit how I use the term "basic." I find it useful to say that human life is governed by cultural structures. That is to say, it is governed by sets of norms that are learned, not biologically inherited. Among the cultural structures some are basic. The basic ones are the ones that govern meeting basic needs. For example, in a pastoral culture the basic structures govern (among other things) herding animals. My idea is similar to Wallerstein's idea that history is moved more by what needs to be done to acquire the staples of life than by trade in luxury goods, or than by anything merely incidental to what is required to keep life going. (Wallerstein 1974, 1980, 1989)

Reader: Following that line of reasoning one could affirm that getting an adequate supply of drinking water is a basic problem. Getting emergency medical attention when it is needed is a basic problem. And so on for all of the necessities without which human life cannot continue. But I do not think your line of reasoning justifies saying that at this point in history humanity as a whole has one basic problem.

A Second Reader: It seems plausible to me to say that in an important sense humanity today has one basic problem, which is achieving a sustainable relationship to its habitat, the planet earth, although it would also be plausible to say in another sense that there are as many basic problems as there are basic needs. I have read about the various mathematical models that try to predict the human future, the Club of Rome Report, the Mesarovic and Pestel model, the several Meadows and Meadows models. They all project that pollution, population growth, and resource exhaustion will cause global systemic collapse in this century. Such projections were made even before India and China launched themselves full tilt into automobiles for large and growing middle classes, with all that that implies. The specific predictions of the ecological pessimists have, on the whole, turned out to be wrong. Peak oil has not come as soon as they expected. Biofuel and atomic energy may replace fossil fuel more than they expected. The present population of the earth is greater than experts once thought possible, certainly greater than Malthus thought possible. Nevertheless, I am persuaded that the philosophy of the pessimists is right even if collapse does not come in this century. A few centuries are nothing in geologic time. A few centuries are not long in the history of the human species. The general trend is that homo sapiens sapiens is an animal destroying the biosphere and therefore destroying itself. These considerations seem to me to constitute good reasons for saying that humanity has one problem that is in a meaningful sense more basic than the others. It is a problem imposed on it not by social reality but by physical reality. If it is not solved, it will not matter what humanity does about its other problems, because it will be an extinct species. (Meadows et al 1972, Mesarovic and Pestel 1974, Meadows et al 2004)

Writer: I think about today's world differently. It is true that reversing the march toward ecological catastrophe deserves priority in the sense that it must be done. It is also true that a culture of peace and an institutional framework of peace must be built before the human species destroys itself with its increasingly powerful weapons. But I think there is something else that better deserves to be called humanity's basic problem.

Reader: Let me guess. Your view is that the main reason why the rainforest is being logged, the main reason why the hole in the ozone layer is widening, the main reason for global warming, and so on, is not that people do not understand nature well enough, and not that human values are self-centered instead of earth-centered, but rather that the economy is driving the

destruction of the biosphere. Similarly, you agree with David Harvey's explanation of the present war without end being conducted by the United States. Harvey finds the neoconservative strategy for a New American Century to be driven by the logic of capital accumulation together with the logic of political power, which he calls territorial logic. The governing neoconservatives think that the United States needs to control the Middle East's oil spigot in order to keep power in a world where the USA is no longer competitive with Asia economically. (Harvey 2003)

Writer: I really do not have anything to add to what Noam Chomsky (2003), Pierre Bourdieu (1993), Nestor Garcia Canclini (1992), David Harvey (2003), Charles Lindblom (1982), Karl Polanyi (1944), Immanuel Wallerstein et al (1983), Ellen Meiksins Wood (2004), and many others have already said. I simply draw the conclusion that if humanity cannot do what it should do –what it must do to survive as a species and also what it should do for many good ethical reasons-- because it is driven by systemic imperatives, then its basic problem is to escape from the systemic imperatives.

Reader: In other words, the basic problem is not to preserve the biosphere or stop endless war, but to make it possible to preserve the biosphere and to stop endless war.

Writer: This ties back to my concept of the basic structures of the modern world. The basic cultural structure is the one that governs meeting basic needs. In the modern world that basic structure is the dynamic of capitalism. The basic problem is to transform it. It is true that there are multiple basic needs. However, the cultural structures of the modern world prescribe one dominant way of meeting a need, whatever that need may be, namely by buying whatever is needed with money. They prescribe one dominant dynamic for producing whatever may be required to meet a need, namely the motive forces associated with the logic of capital accumulation. Production is standardly done not because the product is useful, but because the product can profitably be sold. The challenge of reconsidering and modifying the basic structure has holistic properties that make it useful to think of it as a single problem with tightly interrelated aspects. In Dilemmas of Social Democracies (Lexington Books 2006) Joanna Swanger and I used the concept of basic cultural structure, and the related concept of constitutive rules, to make historical case studies of the frustrations of social democracy

and the rise of neoliberalism in Spain, Sweden, Austria, South Africa, and Indonesia.

Reader: I fear that our conclusions are outdistancing our understanding. We are using concepts that are not sufficiently clarified, although I have no doubt that you and others have clarified them thoroughly in books I have not read. Could you say a little more now about the concepts of “systemic imperative,” “logic of accumulation,” and “dynamic of capitalism.”

Writer: : I got the idea of “systemic imperative” from Ellen Wood. She cites a number of systemic imperatives: the imperative of competitiveness, the imperative of productivity, the imperative to maximize profits, the imperative to lower the costs of production. They can be summarized as the imperative to accumulate capital. The point of calling them imperatives is that people have to obey them whether they want to or not. Entrepreneurs and investors, although they are usually upper class and although they usually have more options in life than the impoverished, must nonetheless obey the systemic imperatives. Governments must obey them. In my terminology, it is the cultural structures that impose the systemic imperatives that drive humanity toward ecological collapse, toward endless war, and in other directions humanity would not go if it were free to plan its actions wisely.

To clarify the concept of “logic of accumulation” I will start with its classical source in the writings of Karl Marx, and then mention how it has been used more recently by the French economists known as the regulationist school.

Let me start by using a simplified version a diagram Marx employs in the second volume of Capital:

$$M \quad \rightarrow \quad C \quad \dots P \dots \quad C' \quad \rightarrow \quad M'$$

Marx schematizes production under capitalism as starting with money, M. With money the investors or their agents buy commodities C. Significant among the commodities is a peculiar commodity, labor-power, which is bought by paying wages to workers. Other commodities purchased include raw materials and whatever else it takes to produce. The workers then get to work, engaging in the productive process, which results in more

commodities C'. The commodities C' are worth more than the commodities C. If it were not so, it would have been an irrational investment, and the investors would not normally have made it. C' is then sold for M'. The point and purpose of the process is that M' is greater than M. More money comes out than goes in. In other words, capital is accumulated. If capital is not accumulated, the process stops. There is no work for the workers, nothing produced, and nothing for the government to tax. (Marx 1967)

The concept of "regime of accumulation" used by the French regulationists, David Harvey, and others, starts from the premise that whatever else a capitalist society does, it must accumulate capital. If it does not do that, then it cannot do anything else. Consequently, there must be a legal system, a political order, a culture, and whatever else it takes to keep capital accumulation going. A set of institutions which achieves that objective is a "regime of accumulation." A number of different regimes are possible. What they all have in common is that they establish the conditions necessary for capital accumulation. (Aglietti 1979)

We arrive again at Ellen Woods' concept of systemic imperative. The system itself (the cultural structures in my terminology) commands that capital must be accumulated, one way or another. The French regulationist concept of regime of accumulation is a little different from Ellen Woods' concept of systemic imperative in that she refers to certain constant requirements: competitiveness, productivity, keeping costs down, maximizing profits. The French concept puts the emphasis on requirements that can vary; for example, at a certain point in history television becomes part of a regime of accumulation that requires a mass consumer culture. Without television a particular regime of accumulation will not work, even though other regimes of accumulation, which do not require television could exist and have existed.

To explain the "dynamic of capitalism" I will refer to a book about the Chilean coup d'état of 1973, which I did not write myself, but which nonetheless forms part of the series of which the present study of Rosario is the newest. The "dynamic of capitalism" is for the most part the same concept as "systemic imperative" and "logic of accumulation" although it looks at the cultural structures from a slightly different angle.

In Chile in 1973, as in Argentina in 1976, the military claimed to be intervening in politics for the sake of the nation as a whole. Part of their argument was that class struggle and democratic politics had brought the economy to a standstill. The idea of “dynamic of capitalism” is (among other things) a way to understand why their rationale for violence seemed correct to them, looking at the world from their point of view. The economy came to a standstill because that dynamic is incompatible with the approach to building socialism that Chile’s Popular Unity government had taken. Perhaps it is incompatible with any approach to building socialism. Perhaps. Perhaps not.

Let us look at what happened in 1972 in Chile. Private investment was zero. But production actually went up in 1972. Partly it went up because public investment increased to take up the slack. Partly it went up because a redistribution of purchasing power in favor of the people led to increased utilization of existing plant capacity, which made it possible to increase production without investment in new capacity. For most of 1972 the socialists succeeded in circumventing the dynamic of capitalism.

It was during 1973 that it became evident that the dynamic of capitalism had almost completely stopped working, and that the government was unable to compensate for its failure to function by mobilizing other dynamics to replace it. Inflation was out of control at over 300% per year. People were standing in long lines to buy bread, matches, toilet paper, diapers, and other common commodities. Food was in short supply and had to be channeled to the economically weak through neighborhood councils. The socialist government of Salvador Allende, specifically in the person of the Minister of The Economy Pedro Vuskovic, acknowledged that the capitalist dynamic was inoperative but was still required to make the economy go. It made desperate attempts to resuscitate shattered investor confidence. I do not mean to say that it was only the normal operation of the laws of economics that stopped production in Chile. The lack of the secure expectation of profits postulated by those laws was a factor, but there were also the additional two factors of a bitter class struggle and deliberate foreign intervention. These two other factors led people with economic power to refrain from productive activity, and to sabotage the economy by doing such things as refusing to supply spare parts for vehicles, even when they might have made profits by doing business as usual. The idea of “dynamic of capitalism” refers to all three factors. It refers to the fact that capitalism goes forward whenever those who control the means of

production, for whatever reason, choose to make it go forward; and that it stops whenever those who control the means of production, for whatever reason, choose to make it stop. The dynamic normally operates according to the logic of accumulation analyzed by Marx, but the term can be used as a name for whatever motive drives capitalists to produce or not produce.

The book Sweet Country (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1979) shows in detail how the frustration of socialism in Chile was not just due to military officers with neoliberal ideas having more military power than the left could muster.

Reader: What you are claiming is that to make it possible to preserve the biosphere and to stop endless war, and generally to make ethical, rational, and democratic processes effective, the basic structures of the modern world need to be transformed. Humanity needs to find a way out of the structural traps that appear to make social justice incompatible with production.

Writer: I am looking for a way out of the cycle of limited social progress followed by repression. I believe that to find a way out we need to ask how to modify and supplement the logic of accumulation. In Chile in 1973 for example the short run interests of the upper classes coincided with imposing military rule to impose the conditions required for capital accumulation. Just looking at what was happening in the streets of Santiago in 1973, without any theoretical discussion, anyone could see that there was disorder, rising prices, falling production, unemployment, and other symptoms of a capitalist system that was not working in an environment where a socialist system to replace it was not in working order either. Now in 2006 in Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, Bolivia, and Venezuela, and to a lesser extent in some other Latin American countries, moderately progressive governments are at a rhetorical level rejecting neoliberalism. The continent has another chance. My question is whether the structures can be transformed. If they cannot be transformed I think the cycle will continue. Trying to meet the needs of everybody in the society will conflict with the systemic imperatives, with the logic of accumulation, with the dynamic of capitalism. Production will fall. Repression will follow.

Reader: So humanity's basic problem is to find ways out of the structural traps inherent in the basic structures, in other words to transform them.

Writer: To find practical ways out, ways that really work.

Reader: Why is your view different from the “totalizing” and “essentializing” view that there is one and only one “basic contradiction of capitalism,” which is so basic and so key that it puts all other issues, including women’s issues, human rights issues, gay and lesbian and transgender issues, multicultural issues, racism issues, ecology issues, and anything else on the back burner ?

Writer: Mine is a nuanced view like Pierre Bourdieu’s, which Cecilia Flachsland summarizes as follows: “In modern societies life is reproduced in fields (the economic, the scientific, the political, the artistic, the religious, sports, fashion, etc.) that do not have a single logic, nor a central conflict, nor an authority that unifies them. They are a set of spheres of play, relatively autonomous, which cannot be reduced to a single logic (although in more than one passage Bourdieu recognizes the primacy of the logic of accumulation of capital).” (Flachsland 2003, p.48) I agree with Bourdieu that the logic of accumulation of capital is not the only logic at work in the world, but it is nonetheless a very important one. I also claim to avoid being totalizing and essentializing by agreeing in some respects with Karl Popper, with whom I expressed some disagreement earlier. I agree with Popper that whatever present institutions may be, the most precious and indispensable principle to preserve and defend, is the principle that the people have the right to change them, to tinker with them, to modify them, to study them, to revise them, to supplement them, to periodically reinvent them. We do not know the final answer, but we do not need to know the final answer. We need what Popper called an open society just because we need to preserve a process of never-ending institutional improvement that in principle never arrives at final answers. (Popper 1966)

Reader: Reader: I see what you are saying. You are saying that the basic problem, the basic challenge facing humanity, is to create operational alternatives to the logic of accumulation, not because some one size fits all theory gives the final answer to every question, but just because such operational alternatives are needed to make the never ending process of institutional improvement a viable process. Whatever issue we talk about, ecology or poverty or something else, there is another dimension to the

problem. There is a meta-issue. The meta-issue is whether we humans have any choices to make. The meta-issue is whether there is any way to grow rational and ethical institutional arrangements, or whether in each case we must do what the systemic imperatives command us to do. You are saying that if a society did not have to do whatever needs to be done to maintain its competitiveness and to keep investors investing, then it could seriously pursue not just ecological sustainability but also social justice, women's issues, human rights issues, gay and lesbian and transgender issues, multicultural issues, racism issues, and anything.

Writer: And this purpose, this purpose of finding practical ways to be transformative, leads to an adjustment of my method. It gives a certain structure to the following chapters. The next chapter, the second one, outlines reasons why today there seems to be no possible way to transform the basic structures. The structural traps seem to be firmly in place. In Arundhati Roy's phrase, "they are closing off the exits." The next chapter, the third, outlines some of the new approaches being taken in Latin America which might have a chance of achieving social transformation in spite of the apparent impossibility of escaping the systemic imperatives of the global economy. This sets the tone for the following chapters. The method used is necessarily philosophical as well as empirical for the reason Herbert Marcuse gave in One-Dimensional Man. An empirical study can only document what is. Philosophy is needed to engage in dialogue about what might be, what can be. (Marcuse 1964) For example, in the fourth chapter, which is about health care, the initial problem is that it seems to be conceptually impossible to improve health care in a world where the basic structures of the capitalist world-system require cuts in health budgets. The systemic imperatives to cut costs and to make the Argentine economy internationally competitive seem to be incompatible in principle with spending more money on hospitals and clinics. In a dialogue with Monica Fein, the medical doctor who coordinates Rosario's health care system, and with others, we first explore how it is conceptually possible to improve the health of Rosario's citizens, and in the process to contribute to the transformation of basic structures. The philosophical and conceptual inquiry that shows another world to be possible comes before the empirical data showing what health workers have in fact accomplished by doing medicine with a different paradigm.

Reader: I take it that you choose Rosario as a research site because you expect to find there operational alternatives to the logic of accumulation.

But your own analysis of Chilean experience shows that putting a non-capitalist ideal straight into practice is asking for trouble.

Writer: The socialists in Rosario are not asking for trouble. They are not romantic revolutionaries. They know perfectly well that to transform capitalism they must first successfully manage it. Socialists elected to public office cannot allow themselves the luxury of picking fights with the powers that be -- the army, the capitalists, the media, the church. And they know it. They know that a process of social transformation is first and foremost an educational process. The first thing a visitor to Rosario notices is that there is no disorder. There is no tear gas. There is no looting of supermarkets, no empty shelves, no long lines of people queuing for scarce goods, no rationing. There are no demagogues haranguing mass meetings of the dispossessed. There are no troops in the streets. Indeed one sees in the streets the red berets of the Urban Municipal Guard, an unarmed constabulary trained in peaceful conflict resolution. It supplements the work of the armed police provided by the Province of Santa Fe.

Reader: So your question is, "How can a political and social movement be transformative and practical at the same time?"

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