

NOTEBOOK NO. 2

[September 2006]

METHODOLOGY OF COYUNTURAL ANALYSIS EPISTEMOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF COYUNTURAL ANALYSIS

GENERAL PRESENTATION OF THE SERIES

This material that you have in your hands is the product of a practice and reflection of many years of work. As a product of this process, we in SIPRO arrived at this systemization with the contribution of many people and with the valuable collaboration of Enrique Valencia who made the basic text of this edition possible. From his document we try to be loyal to the methodological process he places in a difficult subject, but essential for those who carry out a labor of education and accompaniment with social processes and the reality of our country.

These materials are aimed at contributing to all of those people from the NGO's, activists, advisors, students, professionals, educators who accompany processes of popular education and of social organizations, and for those intellectuals who produce coyuntural analysis.

The notebooks we present here are a basic text, a contribution that does not signify the last word on this subject. There is a lot still to be said, proposed, and written about it. For many, the approaches and concepts can be debatable, questionable and anachronistic. We are in agreement with that and that is what it is about: generate a reflection and understanding that begins to find new roads and horizons in this galloping reality.

The content of these notebooks can be used in multiple forms depending on the interest. It can easily be part of an extensive course, used for a deeper and focused discussion on the subject, or it can be used as a tool for consulting. It does not exempt its readers from the task of going into depth, questioning, criticizing, connecting, proposing changes and even less so of the challenge of sharing in a more accessible way if the theme is deeply comprehended. This would be the central objective of our proposal.

In the face of the disordered reality in which we live, we see the necessity of stopping to analyze it with the objective of accompanying the historical process of change and be participants in it. That is why in Servicios Jesuita Refugiados-México y Servicios Informativos Procesados, A.C., we revisit this document and we retransmit it for those actors who want to be an active part of their own history.

We hope that the systemization of these notebooks can be a modest contribution and useful for the best development of the analysis of coyuntura.

Gustavo E. Castro Soto

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PRESENTATION

The fundamental point of this chapter is key to understanding the essence of coyuntural analysis. Social reality, while complex and chaotic in appearance, is within the reach of our understanding. The characteristics of this reality breaks with many of the prejudices that permeate society: “it has always been this way.”

In this chapter we will realize that reality is open, in its contradictions and continual movement, that it is historical and unfinished.

The practice of coyuntural analysis will permit us to understand the dynamics of all aspects of society, the barriers that inhibit that awareness, and allow us to realize that we can interpret, foresee, and transform society.

We can be active subjects and know our own history, to recreate it and transform it for the full realization of man. Nevertheless, the challenges to our mental outlines, the theories and amulets of survival, the fear of change-to the movement, to reality-becomes much more apparent when we are confronted with an open reality and the risk that we may become lost in it.

We invite the readers to examine this adventure that we call **open reality**.

Gustavo Castro Soto

THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF COYUNTURAL ANALYSIS

The concept of “**analysis,**” a form of knowing, takes us to the discussion of the **conditions** of the possibilities of the social sciences, that is to say, **to epistemology**.

There is much to say about epistemology but we will address the basic elements of the **methodology** of **coyuntural analysis**.

A. THE TENSION BETWEEN QUOTIDIAN REPRESENTATION AND COYUNTURAL ANALYSIS

Any occurrence, either an act or object of study, does not at first appear to us as it really is. At first it presents itself as a field in which a person “exercises her practical sensitivity” or “practical utilitarianism” of daily life.¹

This means that in daily living our own representations of things are seen with a practical lens that satisfies our immediate needs. It is in this way that a conscience “is dominated by pragmatic impulses.”²

Here are some examples:

We strike for our personal grievances or those of a group, and we don’t ask ourselves about the needs of other sectors.

We spend money without knowing what money is.

We vote in elections without knowing for whom, for what, or what are the repercussions of our votes.

We conduct transactions with government functionaries without asking about the political role of bureaucracy.

We go to the doctor and receive treatments, even if we never ask about the process of national healthcare.

In daily life, “reality establishes itself as reality” and we don’t require major explanations.³ Money has practical utility; the government official is simply an official, and the doctor, a doctor.

If we stay at this level of daily life for understanding reality, knowing is limited to “self-comprehensions of our vital primary world,” or **common sense**.⁴

¹ Kosik, 1981: 25.

² Berger and Luckman, 1972: 40.

³ Ibid. p. 41.

⁴ Habermas, 1986: 164.

Nevertheless to explain an occurrence, an act or object of study, it requires a detour.⁵ We can understand this as:

To surpass common sense, immediate perception or mere opinion, through a special activity:

scientific knowledge!

With words or **concepts**, people theoretically reproduce reality and acquire the capacity for transformation.

For the most part, in order to apply ourselves to that reality, there are **TWO KINDS OF KNOWING**.

1. that of **daily living**, or **common sense**
2. **scientific knowledge**

Coyuntural analysis studies the present and wants to act in it. For that reason it finds itself in the middle of that tension between these two modes.

Time and again researches of conjunctures are conducted using the **scientific method**,⁶ which presents alternatives of action, opinion, and interpretation. These studies are done by university researchers working as intellectuals connected with political, social, popular, organizations, political parties, etc., regarding models of analysis and correlation of variables.

In spite of this, the object of study of this **analysis**, the **present**, continues to be and will continue to present epistemological difficulties.

For example:

1. The analysis is done in the heat of the moment of the events, with the pressure of new developments and new results before the end of the study. With these follow others that also demand a thorough and careful analysis, but it does not happen.
2. On many occasions an analysis must be done with urgency, in which an elaboration of action or reaction to unexpected events or adverse situations is needed. For example “Caso Colosio:” they announce the immediate capture of the assassin, the politician is very nervous, the next day they catch him, the stock market crashes, the EZLN launches a communique, there is electoral fraud in a certain district, a strike arises, ...what to do?

⁵ Kosik, 1981: 39.

⁶ Luengo, 1982: 269. Osorio, 1987: 15-16.

If we let ourselves be taken away by this pressure, when the time comes to formulate plans for the future, our **hypotheses** or **tendencies** will contain the following errors:

They will be constructed without the level of precision of conceptualization that is necessary.

The theorization and reflection will be very weak.

The analysis will be reduced to the mere sum of acts that are considered relevant.

It will be a simple chronological recollection of information.

This is where the concepts of daily life hang easily without our noticing how they affect the methodology we use to analyze reality.

The separation between **common sense** and **scientific discourse** is more imprecise in the social sciences than in other fields.⁷ It is because of this that we say that this imprecision is more serious in the case of **coyuntural analysis**.

Let us emphasize **two concepts** of **daily life**:

- A. Pragmatism**
- B. Uncritical Supposition**

Let us look at each one:

A. PRAGMATISM

With **pragmatism** “the angle with which to observe the real” is defined by the shortest possible road.⁸ A very common **example** of this are the ways protesting for specific grievances or demands.

We will understand this better if we observe the following **6 CHARACTERISTICS**:

1. It is easy to compartmentalize a problem and neither understand it within the totality of the contradictions of forces nor within its historical context.
2. One addresses social reality, compartmentalizing obsessively and only in relation to a specific grievance, at the same time, one tends not to give sufficient weight to precision or theoretical reflection about what is happening and what can be done.

⁷ Bourdieu, 1975: 27.

⁸ Zemelman, 1987b: 212.

3. Both this compartmentalization and the under appreciation for conceptualization meet easily with **spontaneity**, or reacting without thinking.
4. In **pragmatism**, activism dominates, because many believe that pure “action” is the only way to get to where one wants to go. Some consider it unnecessary to take proper time for reflection.
5. This is different from “**praxis**,” because in it there is a moment of action and then of reflection about that action and the experience.
6. For this **pragmatism or activism**, when taken to extremes, the important thing is to acquire the basic “information” and make decisions about the march, and this is what makes up the typical uncritical characteristics made in daily life.

B. UNCRITICAL SUPPOSITIONS

Here we will speak about **common sense** and its two modalities: **intuition** and **objectivity** in coyuntural analysis.

common sense:

In **daily life** our understanding is based on characteristics (socially constructed) that help us make sense of the world in a pragmatic way⁹ and that, moreover, include values.¹⁰

In addition, in common sense, the knowledge of the social structure is converted to the simple sum of characteristics. In this way, daily problems are seen through this lens and reality is then lived as if it is a constant structure, a given.¹¹

Let us see through some examples how in **daily life** we live with characteristics that are acquired and loaded with sentiment or with judgments of value.

Examples:

The “elections are...,” “the priests,” “the Church,” “the Americans,” “the Argentines,” “the Mexicans,” “the friends,” “the enemies,” “the *panistas*,” “the *priistas*,” “the communists,” “the Cubans,” “the Catholics,” “the Protestants,” “the sects,” “the police,” “the good,” “the bad,” “the liberation theology,” etcetera.

Complete the phrases and you will see how you encounter definitions, opinions, and reactions that are loaded with sympathy, hate, doubt, suspicion, security, etc.

⁹ Ibid, p. 221. See also, Berger, 1972: 41; 49.

¹⁰ Zemelman, 1987b: 215.

¹¹ Berger, 1972: 52.

If we don't critically analyze the contents of these presuppositions or very generalized assertions, we fall into thinking that people operate in an economic framework to secure pragmatic objectives.

In this way, we are confronted with new situations and do not reflect on what is behind them due to laziness of intellect or because of the lack of elements to describe the deception of our too general assertions.

These new situations are cataloged in the world of the:

Obvious or evident
Good and bad
Practical and impractical
White and black

The "information" is understood here as a simple instrument of confirmation of evidence or of moral judgments.

Examples:

Do you see now how there is no crisis?
Do you see now how they are communists?
Do you see now how they are bad?
Do you see now how they are guerillas?
Do you see now how they have helped us?, etc.

Or, "information" is also conceived as a bag of facts that need to be ordered or accommodated into the world of preconceived categorizations.

One **example** of the uncritical presence of these typologies in **daily life** within coyuntural analysis is the tendency toward judgments decorated with apparent evidence.

Examples:

That is why you hear, "All refugees are guerrillas."
"After ten years, all refugees are self-sufficient."
"It is evident: the economic crisis was the fault of the EZLN."
"It is obvious: all the *panistas* are middle-class."
"All priests look out for the common good."
"All Protestants and the sects are pro-American."
"All politics is dirty."
"All the *perredistas* incite violence."
"All the *priistas* are fraudulent."
"All are crooked, voting doesn't make a difference."

Common sense contains many presuppositions that we don't criticize and that function to give us a "recipe" to confront daily life.

But these "recipes" of words, concepts, and assertions become a **barrier to scientific knowledge**. It also impedes our ability to overcome **appearances** and separate incidental elements from the essential elements.

These presuppositions that have certain appearances and affirm our generalities are inculcated by our parents, by the television, by conversations we hear in different places, by the education we receive in lecture halls, by those interests that defend the status quo, etc.

Within these **presuppositions**, constructed throughout society by a person or a group of people, the subject agrees with some elements taken from scientific progress, only they are transformed from concepts to imprecise common locations or merely intellectual customs that cannot withstand the smallest critique.¹²

Example:

Let us consider the daily use of these concepts: "democracy," "poverty," "the State of law," "legality," "justice," etc.

For all the above, a continued **epistemological vigilance**¹³ is required that will permit us to overcome this basic **obstacle**:

Common knowledge used in daily life is "beyond and above criticism."¹⁴

The most direct way to exercise this vigilance is to DOUBT, to question, or to problematize¹⁵ the common locations or acquired categorizations about the values they carry and the body of knowledge (or assumptions) that lay behind them.

Common sense is a form of knowing that is fundamental for human life: without it there would be no possible survival of the human species.¹⁶ **Common sense** has some modalities, that when critiqued and used in a good way, are very important for analysis. Let us see two of them:

1a. Modality:

Intuition in Coyuntural Analysis

We understand **intuition** to be:

¹² Bachelard, 1974: 16-17.

¹³ Ibid, especially, pp. 15-26; 281-297.

¹⁴ Ibid. p.27.

¹⁵ Zemelman, 1987b: 37.

¹⁶ Foucault, 1983: 128-130.

The “capacity of human mental structures”¹⁷ to recognize new phenomenon in order to avoid problematic aspects and to see the “interrelated” elements that determine a constructed totality.

This is not an invitation to rely on “intuition” out of laziness and to save ourselves a methodological study.¹⁸ Thanks to **intuition**, politicians can perpetuate “acts apparently outside of themselves.”¹⁹

Example:

Carlos Salinas de Gortari-Raul Salinas de Gortari-OMC-businesses-narcotrafic-stock market-Colosio-Posadas-EZLN-Televisa-Zabludovski-*compadrazgos*-friendship-Ruiz Massieu-NAFTA-Madrazo-Robledo-etc., etc.

Is there some relation between these elements? Do you intuit other elements that are beneath the surface and not contemplated?

Intuition permits:

The articulation of events and facts that appear to be unrelated

The development of the capacity to understand the situations of a conjuncture, to foresee phenomena in the future

A breaking away from the categorized structures.

2a. Modality:

Objectivity in Coyuntural Analysis

Another mode is **common sense** understood as the least common of the senses, that is to say:

The mental position in time and space or in the sense of proportion.

It is the sense of reality and what can be in the present spatial-temporal situation, knowledge acquired by experiences one has had. It is what we may call:

“**objectivity**” in daily life.

Potentially this intuition will allow us to achieve an adequate mediation of the **correlation of forces** in its specific historical context. Without this, a person could come

¹⁷ Zemelman, 1987b: 215.

¹⁸ Bourdieu, 1975.

¹⁹ Gramsci, 1975: 122.

to conclusions that were disproportionate to the real strength of the actors involved and/or take the situation out of its historical context.

We will devote more space to this theme of the correlation of forces in NOTEBOOK No. 7.

Example:

There are those that believe that revolution and structural change lies within the total conjuncture:

a dramatic march or popular mobilization and afterward “the palace will be taken,”

a massive layoff of workers and the reaction of “the revolutionary vanguard,”

an economic crisis that will “awaken the popular classes from their lethargy,”

the assassination of some personality that will “create disorder and topple the political system,”

an armed uprising that will provoke “others to rise up in the country and throughout Latin America,” etc.

Here is the absence of **common sense**: that of the awareness of historical proportionality acquired from the experiences of daily life.

If we don’t critique and analyze “**the least common of the senses**,” we will attend solely to the perception of daily life, that which at first glance seems possible. For that, there is the danger of falling into two extremes:

And taken to these extremes they are,

Pessimism
 (“there is no way out”)

Conservatism
 (“nothing can change”).

Intuition, on the other hand, is the opening for change, for something new.

Together these modes of **common sense** give us **epistemological tools** fundamental for intellectual work and critical analysis.

QUESTIONS

1. What are the two kinds of knowing?

2. Can you explain in your own words what you understand about pragmatism? Can you give some examples?
3. Explain in your own words what it means to make a “detour.”
4. Can you give some examples of common categorizations that you use?
5. Can you explain the difference between common sense, intuition, and objectivity? Can you give some examples?

B. THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL LENS OF TOTALITY

If we do not want to continue to be hindered by the curtain that keeps us from seeing reality well, we must conduct **analysis**.

By “**analysis**” we propose to understand, firstly, what is meant by the root of the word:

Deconstruction or theoretical separation of something into its fundamental elements.

Example:

Granola: At first, the little bag of granola contains a mix of many things that we cannot distinguish at first glance.

It is a complex whole that appears to be a complete mixture. It is chaos.

If we get closer and begin to analyze and distinguish what it contains, we will realize that in its structure, that mix we call granola, has pieces of peanut, almonds, chocolate, wheat, and that it was mixed with orange juice. In addition we will realize that opposite flavors are mixed: sweet and salty, bitter and sour, etc.

But we do not end there. We ask for the recipe to make it and add more ingredients (construct and change the structure).

It is in this way that the **object** (the granola) is considered a unified form with different elements, a **totality**.

So that we avoid confusion, the terms (concepts) **totality** and **structure** are for us the same thing.

Then, it is not difficult to understand that reality and society are a complex totality with many dimensions and elements.

Let us pursue a small parenthetical point to explain 3 THEORIES that attempt to explain for us this totality.²⁰

1. **Functionalist:**

The function is what makes important an element for the organization of the whole. Every aspect of society serves a vital function. It searches for the equilibrium of the social system. When there are alterations or dysfunctions, it adapts or adjusts individuals or institutions so that they can comply with their

²⁰ Gimenez, 1978: 11-23. We also suggest the characterization of the social structure by Arroyo, n.d.. See also, Morales, 1990: 57-62.

functions. A functionalist analysis describes the function and seeks to maintain itself.

2. Structuralist:

The joining of elements in social totality that are independent, interrelated, simultaneous, internally coherent, stable, and permanent. Change is a result of innovation. If there is a disjuncture they apply “sectoral programs,” “pacts,” “programs of amortiguamiento, or economic readjustment.” (Example: Pronasol, Procampo, etc.) Structural analysis calls this structural change.

3. Genetic-Structural or Critical-Dialectical:

Asks about the causes of phenomena, their interrelation, their histories, processes of change, movement, and contradictions. Analyzes the mode of production of concrete society, within specific conditions.

Let us close these parenthesis and return to the object or the thing that we want to know.

Let us look at these steps:

1. A person confronts a **real whole** (object or event) and he first understands it in his thinking like a chaotic whole, not comprehended. It is when we say: “this is chaos, I don’t understand anything.”
2. Critical thinking reconstructs it (separates) by means of analysis (totality conceptualized) of the different elements.

Let us not forget to make this distinction:

Conceptualized Totality
(what we construct in our minds)

Real Totality
(what exists outside of ourselves)

To analyze is the following:

to **detour** to surpass appearances, by way of abstraction or the separation in our thinking, of the things²¹ that compose an object of study.

In coyuntural analysis we have to take a circuitous **epistemological path** with **3 STEPS**:

1. **Separate** (in our thinking or theoretically) the different forces (parts, actors) that are in contradiction to each other.

²¹ Marx, 1977: 57-58.

2. **Understand** the articulation²² or, said in another way, “the relation between processes.”²³ That is to say, detect the unity that is made between the diversity of elements.

To add: the best way to understand one part of the **whole** is in its relation-contradiction to the other parts.

3. **Realize a balance of forces** and explain it. Conclude with how they confront each other.

One does not try to isolate the different aspects to study them in isolation from each other. One attempts to understand the fundamental elements of the whole, in their relation-contradiction.

This way of understanding **analysis** is based on the concept of the **concrete whole**.²⁴ In order to theoretically reconstruct a real object (knowledge) we are required to break from appearances and arrive at “the internal connections and necessities.”²⁵

Example:

a. Remember some repressive event: of peasant colonists, students, etc. You see much movement and you don’t know what is happening. Let us depart from mere appearances:

b. Analyze: separate and identify the intervening actors: the police, the army, students, motorists, citizens in transit, political parties, etc.

c. Balance of forces: why did it happen? What interests were represented by each actor that intervened? Who benefited? Between which forces was the principal problem? And the rest? etc.

In summary, like the thing we wish to understand, the **concrete**, “the unity of diversity,”²⁶ we must establish:

1st. what are the elements of this diversity.

2nd. how are they related, in what manner do they constitute a contradictory whole?

²² Souza, n.d.: 9-12; Gallardo, 1988: 14-17; Delich, 1979: 18; Zemelman, 1987a: 21-22, 27, 130-132, 161-166; 1987b: 18-20, 26-28; Fossaert, 1981: 66.

²³ Zemelman, 1987b: 18.

²⁴ See Kosik, 1981: 53-77.

²⁵ Ibid. p. 53.

²⁶ Marx, 1977: 58.

The object of study should be understood under the lens of a complex totality (or rich totality)²⁷ made up of different elements articulated within it.

It deals with an “**epistemological lens**” that permits a reconstruction of an object of study from an outline of reality:

That of the totality²⁸

Let us set up a diagram:

The Subject Faces An Object (Real Whole) ----->
It Captures It Initially as a Chaotic Whole----->
It Reconstructs a Conceptual Whole (Unity in Diversity) ----->
It Makes it Possible to Transform the Real Whole

Questions

1. What do we understand by analysis?
2. Can you explain in your own words the 3 steps of the epistemological detour of coyuntural analysis?
3. Explain in your own words the characteristics of the totality.
4. Explain in your own words the 3 theories to explain reality.

²⁷ Marx, 1977: 57.

²⁸ Zemelman, 1987a: 18.

C. THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL LENS OF THE POTENTIALITIES OF THE TOTALITY

Totality does not mean all acts, but a **whole** that:

Has STRUCTURE

It DEVELOPS

It is BEING CREATED

It is HISTORIC

It is CONTRADICTORY

So that:

It is not something chaotic.

It is not something that is immutable or that cannot change or that is given one time for always.

It is not perfectly finished and it does not mean that it varies only in its singular parts and their disposition.²⁹

It possesses its

1. origin or **past**
2. its **present** or conditioned praxis (for the given structure of society) and it transforms (the moment of the activation of the potentiality of the structure) and,³⁰
3. and its possible **futures**.

It is not static; it possesses movement.

The social **totality** has movement because it is **contradictory**. Opposition is the base of the movement:

The **fundamental contradictions**, antagonisms, can only be overcome by **structural change** or the transformation of the basic relations of the totality and its mechanisms of reproduction.³¹

This means that only the movement (the change) deactivates contradictions, but it also creates others, and in that way, social movement continues without interruptions.

Moreover, with an **analysis of contradictions** we describe possible movements or potentialities of **totality**, including that of radical transformation.

²⁹ Kosik, 1981: 56.

³⁰ Valencia, 1982. See the concept of potentiality of the present in Zemelman, ???

³¹ Arroyo, n.d. (?): 8-9.

Totality also has an “unstable” or deconstructive germ that allows the concrete possibility for transformation.³²

The unity in diversity does not mean that it dilutes the oppositions or antagonisms, or that every element should be considered only as a functional piece of a whole that claims to be balanced.

Example:

Just like a body in which every member or apparatus has a function and is complementary to the rest.³³

There are **contradictions** of different character between elements in the totality, and the movement that each element generates is distinct.

Moreover, if we say that social totality:

Then:

1. is equal to all elements of society

It would never be possible to exhaust the analysis and investigations of each element and we would propose an impossibility for knowledge.

2. is something chaotic, pure diversity in movement,

It would be impossible to know it. We would never understand the relationships or each of the elements.

3. is something finished and definitive, only given and not open to the future,

It would be impossible to understand the historical novelties and its potentialities. Knowledge would mean to determine the fixed unity of diversity and every act would accommodate that view.

4. is a totality that is functional, and not contradictory,

We would be unable to understand fundamental changes and even secondary ones.

On the other hand, if we say that there is a **contradictory totality** with different levels of opposition (from the smallest to the most antagonistic) we accept the idea of “the present

³² Gimenez, 1978: 21.

³³ Arroyo, 1977: 13; Gimenez, 1978: 13.

that contains the possibility of an evolution”³⁴ and of the capacity to anticipate the possible movements of the **totality**.

All of these aspects open us up to another **epistemological lens**:

Given totality has an origin and movement and includes diverse possibilities of transformation, the coyuntural analysis situates itself in the diagnosis of potentialities.

To sum up, **coyuntural analysis** implies **4 STEPS**:

1. **Separate** (in our thinking or theoretically) the different forces (parts, actors) that are in contradiction.
2. **Understand** the articulation, or said in another way, “the relation between processes.” This is to say: detect the unity that is in the diversity of elements.
3. **Realize a balance of forces** and explain it. Conclude how they confront each other. It is the inquiry of the **unity** already given of the **diversity** of or analysis of the **correlation of forces** existing in a determined **moment**.
4. **Anticipate (analysis of scenarios)** future possibilities of the social totality (**social structure**). It is based on the basic characteristic of the process of knowing: the capacity to foresee with anticipation what could happen.

According to the conditions that exist in a given moment, we can mentally anticipate **movement** and foresee possible horizons.

Because to **foresee** means “**to see well**” the **present** and the **past** in some movement.

For Gramsci, “**to see well**”

“the exact identification of the fundamental and permanent elements of the process.”³⁵

QUESTIONS

1. Explain in your own words the characteristics of totality.
2. What is the base of movement? Why?
3. Can you mention examples that show fundamental social contradictions?
4. Explain in your own words the steps of coyuntural analysis.

³⁴ Zemelman, 1987a: 27.

³⁵ Gramsci, 1975: 63.

D. THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL LENS OF PRAXIS

The method of **coyuntural analysis** is based on what is **for and in the practice**.

For practice because:

its objective is to modify the situation.

In practice because:

it is done from a specific position in the **social totality**.

In this way, another epistemological lens is opened for coyuntural analysis:

The study of **social totality (structure)** and its possible developments.

But still, it consists in something else:

It is the power of the possible and by consequence the **transformation of the totality**,³⁶ inconclusive, mutable, and open to new relations.

This possibility of transformation is the primary material to construct a new social direction. But to move and construct a different reality, to transform the **totality**, **2 fundamental elements** are required:

a. Social Subject

b. To empower all the elements that can deconstruct the **present totality**

To transform unjust structures in our society, action by a collective conscious³⁷ subject is necessary, that are part of existing conditions and not of mere volunteerism.

At the same time, for some political pessimists the structure of today is destined or is a kind of historical fatalism, for others it is prime inherited material and open to possible roads of maneuver. It is transformable reality and is in reality, transforming.

This movement of a **social subject** to transform the **totality** is what we shall call PRAXIS.

We understand **praxis** to be:

The movement of action with reflection.

Praxis has these CHARACTERISTICS:

1. It has direction, an act that is conscious, a practice oriented toward an end³⁸ that includes at every moment the conscience.

³⁶ Zemelman, 1987a: 27.

³⁷ Gimenez, 1978: 22.

2. It is a union of moments more complex than mere “**action**”: it is theory and practice interrelated!

3. It is a transformer, but it is conditioned by the existence of this prime social material,³⁹ the social totality already constructed (form what already exists).

Because of that, **the lens of coyuntural analysis will center on the practical empowerment of the possible, anticipated in our thinking**.

In this moment, two totalities arrive at the tightest of relations:

1. The **conceptualized totality** (or the diagnosis of the **correlation of forces** and its possible movement), and

2. The **real social totality**, the thinking and the reality.

In the transformation of social relationships (such as that of the worker and the boss), the thought will verify or critique its theoretical anticipations and diagnoses.⁴⁰

Nevertheless, one must take notice of the following:

a. A concrete diagnosis of coyuntural analysis can coincide in time with some situations that were not foreseen or not noticed.

b. The diagnosis can be incorrect, but new situations could have given birth to changes in the correlation of forces in the appointed lines of analysis. This would be a historical cause-it exists, admittedly, and no analysis can be verified.

c. There is no possibility for absolute verification, persuasive nor immediately evident.

d. It is necessary to avoid purely empirical attitudes in coyuntural analysis.⁴¹ It implies a work of thought, of conscious interpretation.

As mentioned before, we cannot disassociate the theory from the practice. Practice, like acts, does not speak only about itself.⁴² It can be no other way: we are conscious beings.

Because of that, we set forth from the beginning that **coyuntural analysis is a reconstruction (diagnosis) of the object of study and the transformation of the real object**.

³⁸ Marx, 1980: 52-53, 223.

³⁹ See Valencia, 1982.

⁴⁰ Kosik, 1981: 245.

⁴¹ Sanchez Vazquez, 1973: 130.

⁴² Bourdieu, 1975: 53.

Also, the analyst (conscious **subject** or the knowing person) does not confront a foreign **object** of study.

There is no separation between **subject** and **object**.

The first (the **subject** or the person), independently of her will or conscience, forms part of the second (the **object** or the thing that is studied), the **social totality**.

The analyst has a place in it. Because we are immersed in reality.

That is why there is no possible neutrality!

This means that:

All of us (conscious subjects), consciously or unconsciously, set forth and promote actions (directionality) and values (we look for a good).

Even though we may wish to deny it, the analyst has a situation and a location in the social totality that stamps a directionality to his/her practices.⁴³

Nevertheless, one can easily confuse **neutrality** with **objectivity**.⁴⁴

That there is no neutrality does not say that:

A. the analyst can give herself airs of setting forth diagnoses totally outside real conditions.

B. at the base of interests that one wishes to defend, one is guided more by one's desires and converts the diagnoses of forces into "hopefully"!

Examples:

"The worker's movement is stronger than ever," "there are conditions for just and democratic elections," "it is the maximum expression of civil society," etc.

"Hopefully the civil society will continue to mobilize," "hopefully there will be an end to the division of the state," "hopefully the opposition will have the most weight," "hopefully the community will have more conscience," etc.

On the contrary:

Praxis is based on "cold calculation, precision, the objectivity that is almost impersonal, of the forces in struggle and their relationships."⁴⁵

⁴³ Mannheim, 1941: 259-260.

⁴⁴ Gallardo, 1988: 40-41.

⁴⁵ Gramsci, 1975: 190.

Because of that, an epistemological exercise would be fundamental for social analysis, and more so, for the call of coyuntura in which the categorizations of common sense interfere daily:

The specific recognition of directionality and its formulation.

QUESTIONS

1. Why is coyuntural analysis important for practice?
2. What do you understand by the term PRAXIS?
3. Explain in your own words the characteristics of Praxis.
4. Explain the two fundamental elements for the transformation of the totality.