

Methodology of Coyuntural Analysis

Notebook # 3: Epistemological Barriers

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 to 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 plants in a difficult theme, but essential for those who carry out a labor of education and accompaniment to social processes and the reality of our country.

These materials are aimed at contributing to all of those people from the ngo's, promoters, 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 over this subject. There is a lot still to be said, proposed, and written over it. For many, the approaches and concepts can be debatable, questionable and anachronistic. We are in agreement over 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 more deep and focused discussion on the theme, or it can be used as a tool for consulting. It does 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 of it. That is why in *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.

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Introduction

A few days ago, several social protests took place, several reactions and analyses as well. Some called them a subversion, others a demonstration, others “the awakening of civil society”, others called it disorder, others said that they impeded the right to free mobilization, others mentioned that that was true freedom of movement, some mentioned that the State of Law, other paranoids said that it was social chaos, some mentioned the “ignobility”, others shouted: “lazy bums, get to work!” some rejoiced because the statistics went up, others were revived in the hope of the “proletariat”, others... what did you say?

Social actions are seen with different lenses, according to our education and interests that we defend, we represent or look for at times consciously or unconsciously. The lack of self-critique of our own deceptions impede our knowing what, at first sight, does not show us reality.

In this notebook, fourteen typologies of barriers that impede understanding/knowledge are put forward. In which one do we see ourselves? These barriers are not the only ones, neither are they chemically pure, rather that they can combine some of them in a given moment. It will be interesting to reflect on which barrier with which we identify or that occur in the organizations or spaces in which we move. This will achieve that the nomads stand still and question their schemas with those that measure reality, and that the sedentary move their drowsy foundations and begin to walk.

If we achieve a serious job of self-critique in individual and group reflection of these barriers, we will be able to remove the obstacles that will impede us from doing an adequate coyuntural analysis. To do coyuntural analysis it is necessary to start by taking off our shackles to understand the apprehended reality. This is the anteroom for our analysis.

EPISTEMOLOGICAL BARRIERS IN COYUNTURAL ANALYSIS

A. Uncritiqued Preconceptions and Appraisals

In this notebook we will not see all the barriers that we encounter in the understanding of social process in general.

We will only see those that have to do with one type of social knowledge: the so-called coyuntural analysis.

Here we are interested in seeing that which we consider barriers or obstacles to elaborate a methodology of coyuntural analysis.

If we want to elaborate a coyuntural analysis we need to define or make explicit, among them, the following aspects. Read the questions slowly and stop a few seconds on each one:

1. Which is the social structure (economic, political, cultural) in which the coyuntura that we want to analyze is developed?
2. In this coyuntura, how are the mentioned structural levels related?
3. What has been the history of this structure?
4. How has the logic of the accumulation in this structure been transforming?
5. What is the economic form that subordinates the others?
6. How has the logic of domination-hegemony been transforming?
7. How do these elements of domination-hegemony interrelate?
8. What is the relationship between the logic of accumulation with that of domination-hegemony?
9. How have these cultural, religious visions been transforming?
10. Which ones are hegemonic? Which ones do they hegemonize?
11. How do all these social aspects intertwine?
12. How have forces that try to change that structure been transforming?
13. What are the possible logics of a social revolution in that structure?
14. What are the social agents of this transformation?

Although consciously we have never set out to answer these questions, through our personal history we have been accumulating a series of suppositions about the elements that compose a social structure. Although we have never studied the theories about social change in a classroom, every person has suppositions.

It still happens more with the specialist in coyuntural analysis. Since s/he has been accumulating preconceptions as well as conceptions.

Examples. Let us revisit the idea of possible logics of a social revolution.

1. FROM those of us who suppose that things will never change or that people will forever be “ground up”, TO those of us who suppose that the only thing necessary for a just social change is the will of the people or that the proletariat (workers) will be the one and only group to bring about revolution.
2. FROM those that suppose that just social change will only be conquered through “models” of new society that might serve as an example, like the cooperatives or groups of collective promotion of production enterprises and self-consumption, etc. TO those who suppose that the revolution will happen only through education, through individual or personal transformation or conversion; or destroying the religious “myths” of the people like the idea that in heaven is the reward for suffering, that God will come to change everything, that God wants that there be poor and rich and that in the final judgment the guilty will be punished, etc.

All of us, having studied or not, have ideas of what the possible or impossible road or roads can be in order to change our society. And the same for all the other aspects treated above.

But, moreover, in all these suppositions there is a mix of a series of appraisals that we generally don't question, but that occasionally are already formalized and explicit. (Habermas 1978:88; Goldman 1972:70).

Example. For some researchers it is valuable to direct their work toward a type of social change that they want. But, for others, on the contrary, toward the elimination of the social changes that are possible, since the current one is a good, real world that is not necessary to change.

With this we can come to a conclusion: every exercise of coyuntural analysis—that tries to see the structural movement in a determined time and space and that also seeks to revolutionize or maintain it—means putting on the table the suppositions and appraisals that are held about the social totality.

This is one of the most valuable and important aspects of every exercise of coyuntural analysis, but also one of the most difficult.

Valuable because it becomes a socialization of the social suppositions (conscious and unconscious conceptions, preconceptions, appraisals) and a possibility to discuss them, confront them, critique them and break from them or transform them.

Complex because analysis of a conjuncture increasingly implies that these suppositions remain clear along with the socialization of the social theories, including even the most general and abstract.

With all of this, coyuntural analysis practiced among researchers and popular workshops becomes a vehicle of theoretical enrichment starting from practice and for practice.

It is transformed into a school of sociopolitical transformation and a space of epistemological ruptures and creations.

Questions:

1. Could you try to respond briefly to the questions mentioned at the beginning of this section?
2. Could you give examples of your own uncritiqued appraisals or concepts?

B. Some Epistemological Barriers in Coyuntural Analysis

Here we propose 14 barriers or obstacles that seem to us to be the most common to adequately know reality by means of coyuntural analysis. These barriers we divide into 4 different blocks to characterize them. We first present them schematically so as not to get lost.

A. Theoretical or Dogmatic Barriers

1. Theoretical barrier.
2. Academic barrier.
3. Structural barrier.

4. Theological barrier.
5. Economic barrier.
6. Conflicted or radical barrier.
7. Pacifist barrier.

B. Empirical Barriers

8. Coyuntural barrier.
9. Pragmatic barrier.
10. Informational barrier.

C. Partial Barriers.

11. Socio-centric barrier.
12. Partial information barrier.
 - a) leftist
 - b) popular
 - c) elitist
 - d) academic

D. Sensational Barriers

13. Yellow journalism barrier.
14. Maquiavellian barrier.

Let's look at them one by one...

A. Theoretical or Dogmatic Barriers

I. Theoretical barrier.

This educational tradition is very common in schools and universities, when knowledge is reduced to memorizing history as they tell us as it was, memorizing words, content, etc. We are still influenced by this pedagogical school.

Characteristics:

- a. To learn it is only necessary to memorize theories and dogmas.
- b. Learn definitions and complete theoretical frameworks.
- c. Theoretical frameworks are interpreted as closed and definitive groupings and they offer security to the student since s/he has only to apply them and that's it.
- d. The theoretical framework is the problem already resolved and there is no need to think more about it.
- e. Reality has to conform itself to the theoretical frameworks.
- f. The research process is reduced to the search to adapt reality to the concept. This means a blind faith: that's the way reality is.
- g. If something of reality comes to contradict the concept, it is taken as an accident.

Consequences:

- a. Eliminate or limit the creativity of people in order to elaborate and reformulate new theories.

- b. It is possible for us to diagnose the dynamism of the correlation of forces is only a static and closed theory (without change).
- c. This idea of theory as a prefabricated, closed and definitive body impedes analysis.
- d. It impedes us formulating new conceptions because the dogma already has it all.

This school is particularly dangerous for coyuntural analysis because analysis implies the approach and understanding of new social phenomena, of local processes and of the movement of reality, among other questions.

This barrier includes a way to understand the relationship between concept and reality. Here it avoids the concept constituting a theoretical reconstruction of the object and least of all that it be proven.

In particular, coyuntural analysis confronts a barrier called orthodox Marxism that consists of making a dogmatic assertion out of the analysis, concepts and theoretical framework that Marx proposed.

The schematic relationship that we can conclude here would be:

Closed and complete theory + Reducing analysis to the application of the concept + Faith in the theory without the need to verify it + Blindness in light of new phenomena.

The sign, +, that we will present from here onward in the named relationships and schemas do not assume the sense of a formula. In these relationships or schemas some element of the relationship can be lacking or can be added, with the exception of the fundamental traits of the four indicated families: theoretical-dogmatic (A), empirical (B), partial information or self-complacent (C), and sensationalism (D).

II. Academic Barrier.

Characteristics:

- a. The theoretical aspect or even better deskwork is overvalued.
- b. Generally, the academic is accused of activism at every practice of militants or of social promoters.
- c. Coyuntural analyses or information that militants or social promoters produce will easily identify them as second-rate analytical materials of little importance.

Consequences:

- a. Believe that there is more objectivity by being at a “distance” from the daily political and pragmatic interests that influence us in order to make a “true analysis”.
- b. This way of understanding the analytical distancing causes that the sources of information be reduced to those that circulate most in the region or country: those of the dominant groups that have money and the means to do it.
- c. There will continually be surprises in the analyses: they say this or that social movement was “unexpected”.

- d. If we agree that the information of the “activist” serves no one but the intellectuals at their desk, we fall into supporting a discourse of power: the desktop intellectuals are those that analyze correctly, they are the “agents of conscience”.

As if the role of the intellectual was to be situated somewhat at the margin and isolated from the events so as to “say the pure truth”! (Foucault 1979:79).

Curiously along with not valuing the knowledge of the “militant”, in some occasions certain desktop intellectuals approach social movements only when there is a socio-political effervescence in order to teach them their analyses and attempt to direct or “give direction” as we say.

And while everyday militants and mass sectors, who build with small actions and explain large mobilizations, will continue to be criticized by the desktop intellectual as activists unconscious of where they’re going.

With all of this we can abstract the following relationship:

Overvaluing office work as the necessary distance for analysis + Undervaluing militant practices + Preferred use of the information of the dominant sectors + Self-attribution of the most objectivity and clarity in the social direction.

III. Structural Barrier

Characteristics:

- a. The person that analyzes makes a simplistic and mechanical imposition of the basic categories of national to international structural analysis or of the general structural theory to the local reality and also of this theory to the national situation.
- b. Constant repetition of theories, concepts or formulas taken from some book or even a popular pamphlet about the social theories or of national or international analysis.

Consequences:

- a. Neither a local or national analysis, nor a recollection of information is done, or if it is done it is interpreted in a mechanical way.
- b. “Theory” and macrosocial conception are converted into a barrier, instead of being an instrument for knowledge and transformation of concrete things and realities.

Examples.

1. If you talk about that at the level of capitalism of a certain country the most dynamic sectors to accumulate capital (money, property, etc.) are those of the branches of point (?) technology destined preferably for exportation.

Here, the barrier is in repeating exactly the same phrases for the local analysis, when in the locality, let's say indigenous *campesinos*, its most dynamic sectors can be the monopolizers of internal commerce, for example.

2. Those who take some of the most simple and abstract concepts of a general theory and try to apply them directly to a microsocial or national reality. It may be the case of the concepts: social class and mode of production.

In this barrier we can reproduce the following schemas:

National structural analysis = local coyuntural analysis

General theory = coyuntural analysis

IV. Theological Barrier

This barrier often presents itself among those who profess protestant, fundamentalist religions and even among the religious, of the secular clergy, Christian and lay people close to a naïve, Christian spirituality, among others.

Characteristics:

- a. The person who analyzes makes a transposition of theological concepts or even simply of the religion to the sociological or analytical concepts.
- b. With theological concepts or those of religion an analysis in the context of a sociopolitical strategy is attempted.
- c. Biblical phrases are translated literally into action.

Consequences:

- a. Analysis remains trapped in ambiguity.
- b. The actions that flow from this analysis turn out to be naïve, contradictory, imprudent or dangerous.

Examples.

1. The concept of "poor" is synonymous with the popular classes. Or the popular classes are even reduced to the "poorest of the poor".

In this last case populism can go further and turn into a political adoration and sanctification of the poorest of the poor. In this way their place within the social structure is not considered.

The following equation is practiced in this way:

Theological concepts = sociological concepts.

2. Upon assuming a biblical phrase as analysis or means of action: “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth”.

Here we can highlight this equation:

Biblical phrase = socio-political analysis.

3. Upon assuming the theological concepts as sociological, the categories of sin-grace are involved.

This provokes that unconsciously a central role is given to individual will in social struggles and inasmuch it becomes a social morality.

This social morality means that a good part of the time dedicated to analysis is invested in critiquing the conduct and attitudes of the militants, businessmen or, in general, of the individual subjects of public opinion.

We do not want to say with this that it is necessary to avoid ethics at all costs in its sociopolitical aspect. We simply affirm that ethical reflection (about what is good and bad) is situated in a social context.

The social context is not characterized only by individual will!

We also want to clarify that the same place of this ethical reflection is not in the center of sociopolitical analysis.

The new relationship that we can conclude is:

The use of theological concepts in social analysis + individual will + morality.

V. Economic Barrier.

Characteristics:

- a. The economic aspect is overvalued.
- b. Its origin arises in a mechanical understanding of classical Marxist theory about the determination of the infrastructure (the economical) about the superstructure (the political and ideological).
- c. All that takes place in the superstructure has its immediate causes in the infrastructure.
- d. In every political or cultural event an immediate cause is sought in the economic structure (economic causes). Or, a direct representation of the interests of a certain class in every political organization.
- e. The instrumentalist conception of the State, where it is the direct arm of the bourgeoisie.

Consequences:

- a. Being guided by this mechanism impedes concrete coyuntural analysis and it falls into commonplaces that do not permit the reconstruction of the complexity of the social totality and the dynamic interrelationships between economic, political and cultural aspects.
- b. Undervaluing the political actions as generators of social change.
- c. The budget of simplistic totality is the direct path for lineal explanations and also for the construction of insufficiently developed future scenarios.

Examples.

1. Supposing that from an “economic crisis” (a standstill of the production, commercialization and distribution of productions, plant closures, inflation, high rise in unemployment, etc.), a “crisis of consensus” necessarily arises (that many stop believing in a determined political party that sustains power, in the government, in the president, in that now everything is going wrong, etc.).

2. The opposite: supposing that in a period of economic growth and expansion of employment sources, a “political crisis” is not possible.

In order to better understand this infrastructure and superstructure let’s imagine the structure of a building or a house. The structure of this construction consists of the foundation under the ground that sustains the building and the same construction on top of it.

What is built on top of the foundation would be the superstructure: the floors of the building and the radio and television antennas or satellite dishes on the roof (that is, what is on top of the structure), in this case, politics and ideology.

Well then, the foundations would be the infrastructure (that is, what is underneath the structure), in this case, the economy.

We could say the same thing with the famous “social tree” where the root is the economy, the trunk is the political and the branches are ideology.

The picture can be drawn like this:

Simplistic conception of the social totality + economism + linear and mechanical explanations + mechanical construction of possible scenarios.

VI. Conflict or Radical Barrier.

Characteristics:

- a. The proposal is that the only possibility to arrive at some correct conclusions in coyuntural analysis is to put forward “more radical” hypotheses.

- b. These are understood as the most conflictive actions in any given moment, place and correlation of forces. Even if the most conflictive is added to the violent, one arrives at the most radical hypotheses.
- c. It is also allowing yourself to be seduced by the constant need for violence. (Sánchez Vásquez, 1973:313).
- d. Violence is understood as the fundamental, inherent, indispensable, substantial motor in society.
- e. The concept of contradiction (two realities that can not live together) is reduced to the most conflictive. The main supposition is that only conflict (violent, if possible) and in any circumstance, is the conductor of a popular strategy.
- f. This barrier of conflict does not accept categorizations that are different to those of the bipolar schema: rich-poor, bourgeoisie-proletariat, etc.

Consequences:

- a. At this position, analysis is in surplus: you only have to look for the application of conflict and violence.
- b. Upon analyzing the conjuncture with this supposition one then thinks that non-radical, popular actions (in the sense that we have said) will be mistaken.
- c. One feels, then, disenchantment because of the conjunctures in the ones that the popular sectors choose pacifist forms of struggle or they choose reform or vindications (like the way the struggle for public services, etc.), or they look for negotiations.
- d. At the core, the disenchantment is because what is non-violent is considered reformism.
- e. Reformism is understood as: those superficial changes that do not touch the root or the fundamental source from where the problems originate.
- f. Consequently, completing a complex analysis of the correlation of forces would be an impossible task.

Examples.

1. A very mechanical, simplistic and schematic way of thinking is added to this barrier that also has been inherited from an orthodox Marxism: it is either bourgeois or it is proletariat. This radical posture will be accepted as the true proletariat.

2. It also implies a mechanical application of a simple (the most abstract) concept to concrete reality. It is an obsessive search of cataloguing: it is either bourgeois or proletariat, there is no other! With difficulty it makes another type of distinctions, for example between class position, class origin and class option.

Class position: I am poor, middle class, rich, etc.

Class origin: I come from popular, middle or rich extraction, etc.

Class option: I identify with and struggle for the interests of the poor, middle class or rich, etc.

3. Upon analyzing the *campesino* sectors we can encounter a wide gamut of actors: landowners, *caciques*, small and large *ejidatarios*; small, medium and large producers, etc., but through this barrier only two will be seen, for example: poor *campesinos*—rich landowners. Another example: How shall the named “new social movements” be understood with this bipolarity?

4. Think that only through the exclusive use of arms will political, economic, and social change will be achieved.

The implicit schema is:

Overvaluing of conflict + preference for non-theorized violence + bipolar schema for social understanding + mechanical application of concepts + theory as dogma.

VII. Pacifist Barrier.

This barrier can be discovered especially among Christians that analyze reality with an exaggeration for the search for social reconciliation at every moment or for reducing conflict or violent hypotheses to nothing. Armed conflict is not understood exclusively as violence, but any confrontation or belligerent attitude.

Characteristics:

- a. This is the other extreme of the conflict barrier.
- b. This obstacle comes from a basic value: fear of violent postures.
- c. Forgetting the dominant sociopolitical conditions (as institutionalized violence) and the given correlation of forces.
- d. In this posture what is peaceful has to be the basic, necessary, social attitude inherent to society.
- e. Violence and/or conflict are considered as human accidents or sins.
- f. Instead of the bipolar schema (problems and opposing interests among two social classes), dilutes in the thinking in a volunteerist way, the real political and class contradictions that take place at a given moment.
- g. The non-critical presence of a utopia of a society without classes and without violence dominates, as a conceptual instrument in the thinking for a coyuntural analysis.

Consequences:

- a. Through this proposed value, coyuntural analyses will be questioned and blocked in light of the presence of serious conflicts that arise in society.
- b. This barrier acquires a special dimension when the conflict is considered that crosses a popular organization or against some hegemonic (dominant) group.
- c. Through the mere exercise of will tries to avoid every conflict and the analyst easily makes calls to a unity without real bases.

We can abstract the following elements that form this barrier:

Pacifist and anti-conflict overvaluing + volunteerism [free will] + theoretical, unconscious dilution of social contradictions + transposition of utopia as a category of analysis + theory as dogma

B. Empirical Barriers

VIII. Coyuntural Barrier

Characteristics:

- a. Every coyuntura tends to be overvalued. Any act is considered as transcendental and important for survival or radical transformation of the totality of society.
- b. Any conflict and its correlation of forces are characterized as decisive, novel and explicable in and of themselves.
- c. It entails a compulsive attitude toward novelty and the desire to participate in apparently decisive social situations.

Consequences:

- a. A lack of historical structural analysis or general theory.
- b. At the foundation, part of the problem is in the concept of contradictory totality. There is no precise characterization of the antagonism in the concrete, analyzed contradiction.
- c. All contradictions are practically reduced to antagonisms and the historical dimension of analysis is lost.
- d. With this barrier the analyst is lost in the confusion of so many “important” and diverse coyunturas, without managing to comprehend the contradictory unity in its historical perspective.
- e. As there is no complex analysis of the social totality in its genesis and therefore in its future, possible scenarios, coyuntural analysis is lost and is historically dislocated.
- f. The absence of a more global, systematic theoretical conception and of the historical-genetic elements, facilitate that the ways of thinking of daily life occupy the place of critique or that even a vulgar, empiricist prevails: the “data” of the coyuntura speaks for itself.

The schema in this barrier is the following:

Coyuntural partiality + imprecision of the characterization of contradictions + empiricism + ways of thinking of daily life + adherence to what is new and decisive

IX. Pragmatic Barrier

This obstacle can be found with ease, in the discourse of those people in diverse promotional or educational teams: “why the analysis? It doesn’t have to do with concrete practice”.

Characteristics:

- a. The individual overvalues “practice” and theoretical or analytical forces are conceived as outside reality or for desktop academics.
- b. Generally, they show that practice does not permit them discussion or permanent analysis of their local or national reality.
- c. Proper theoretical moments are labeled as “academic”, as reflection and study that are necessary to analyze reality and propose actions and adequate steps.
- d. This barrier can be a companion to an absence of a very clear and permanent strategy that guides tactical actions.
- e. It is often accompanied by an empiricist conception of sociopolitical or educational-promotional practice.
- f. The basic epistemological supposition, generally unconscious, is that practice speaks for itself, that the “data” that collective action provide us show an “always open spirit”, clear, clean and directly reality (Bachelard 1974:27).
- g. It is a photographic conception of knowledge (Arroyo s/f(b):2), prisoner of the illusion of transparency: facts and data speak for themselves (Bourdieu 1975:33).

Consequences:

- a. Practice easily is converted into pragmatism or activism and not into a reflexive, critical practice.
- b. The conception of praxis is incomplete: the active part is given more importance, but reflection on practice and theoretical contribution is disdained.
- c. It can favor opportunistic or tactical attitudes without a reflexive, strategic referent.
- d. It eases free and, moreover, legitimate transit of the accumulated typologies in daily life. Although a typology with a negative value is the most aided in this barrier: that of the “intellectuals”.
- e. The fundamental element of this barrier is the absence of analysis. Moreover, theoretical work remains in what Bachelard calls “phenomenology of work” or description (Giménez 1978:16).

The schema can be the following:

Activism + empiricism + tactics + ways of thinking of daily life

X. Information Barrier

This is one of the most recurrent, especially in the military and marketing field. It can also take place in the centers or NGOs that process and systematize press information.

Characteristics:

- a. Analysis work is conceived as mere compilation and classification of information (Osborio 1987:16-17). More accumulate better!
- b. The analyst is easily confused with the one who is well informed.
- c. One confides in the power of the accumulation of information and especially in the “mythic triad: archives, data and computers” (Bourdieu 1975:56).

- d. It is believed that with classified informational data, its content will supposedly be shown with clarity.

Consequences:

- a. Behind this epistemological barrier we can discover a relatively empiricist posture.
- b. Explicit theoretical reconstruction is renounced and falls into the prison of insufficiently explained conceptions: cases previously shown in every classification result from a theory of the relevant and accidental, of the whole and of its parts.
- c. One can trust dangerously in the conceptualizations of the informative media to those who have access to it.
- d. Their own theoretical reconstruction is saved but implicitly or naively someone else's is drunk (ibid:57).
- e. In the best of the hypotheses analytical work is reduced to "proving" information (ibid:56).
- f. When several sources of information are manipulated for one event, for example a demonstration, different data will arise about the number of participants: analysis is reduced here to confirm which one was the more precise piece of information.

Certainly, an analyst should be the most informed possible, but this is not enough. Information is a requirement, but it is not analysis. Neither does the computer speak for itself.

Confirmation is important, but it does not replace analysis. With a group of verified information one can come to putting forward a useful description, primary material for theoretical reconstruction. But, again, description is not sufficient; it requires theoretical work.

We encounter a new relationship:

Reducing analysis to the sum of information + not overcoming the description + empiricism + non-explicit theories (one's own and/or someone else's)

C. Partial Barriers

Characteristics:

- a. The analyst is attributed with having true objectivity of things.
- b. S/he doesn't put her/his "objectivity" to the test.
- c. Only one source of information is valued to an exaggerated extent.

Consequences:

- a. One falls into a dogmatic and empiricist attitude.
- b. One loses objectivity and swallows only one opinion, point of view and reading of events.
- c. It becomes difficult to perform a balanced reading of the correlation of forces and one gives them a force that they don't have.

XI. Socio-centric Barrier

Characteristics:

- a. A local or regional reality is overvalued as a strategy in the national and international situation.
- b. The entire national territory then becomes strategic for geopolitics.

Consequences:

- a. This barrier impedes situating the region in its potentials and limitations for popular struggle and in its importance for the development of capital and State power.
- b. Generally with this obstacle for knowledge, we find again an absence of national and international analysis.

On the other hand, perhaps a psychosocial analysis of popular promotion or of popular organized labor might bring us to the conclusion that some blocks of these instances need “theoretical satisfactions”: to be on the border of social struggle.

Evidently, some regions are strategic, although few coyuntural research groups consider the analyzed region as fundamental for big capital and for the State or for the development of popular movement.

We can translate a schema:

Local or regional partiality + the psychological need to feel oneself situated on the border of social transformation

In this barrier we can find two other variants:

1. The self-complacent: considers her/his own work group or party as the one that has a more complete and less conditioned vision of the totality: be it by the level of information, by the type of developed formation, by assuming a type of neutrality or good social intentions.

This barrier can be found especially in the world of intellectuals: be they academics or teachers or priests or religious. Sánchez Vázquez finds theories that try to legitimate this pretension, as if the intellectuals were a social group “delicately conditioned” (Sánchez Vázquez 1976:297). These sectors easily resist explaining and formalizing their values and own interests.

With this we can construct a schema:

Sector partiality + self-attribution of objectivity

2. He who conceives of his organization, overestimating its force, as the decisive one in the conjuncture for social transformation or for the maintenance of the status quo. At times because s/he believes that s/he has a lot of power to pressure, is very conscious of “the bases”, has many members, etc.

This is what has happened in calling for “party patriotism”. With this attitude one can “precipitate a negative correlation of forces”, product of an hindered and partial analysis (Gallardo 1988:41).

Here, the relationship would be:

Sector partiality + overestimation of power

XII. Partial Information Barrier

Characteristics:

- a. Certain information is thought to be the only valid, true sort or that it contains seeds of the truth.
- b. At the root of these values we will discover a shameful empiricism: the real news is that which transmits the facts to us as they are. It’s enough to discover one valid source and the rest will come in good measure.

Consequences:

- a. There’s more than enough theorization, because information speaks for itself.
- b. Reality becomes partial with dangerous consequences in the elaboration of adequate strategies.

There is no way to accumulate all the available information since it tends to be infinite. In society there flows a great quantity of information and the analyst has to choose the medium and type of information. For this selection, it is necessary to construct explicit criteria. However, uncritical implicit criteria sneak in that makes the analysis mistakenly partial.

There is a wide gamut of unconscious partialities. We will point out only 4 of them:

A. Leftist

Characteristics:

1. The sources on the left are considered the only valid ones.
2. The manipulation of government information, the “bourgeois” or “commercial” press, and that of private groups is resisted. Nevertheless, other elements not considered are presented to us: for example, the projects of these groups or their ideological struggles, their inner contradictions and those with the State.

The first problem is, to which left are we referring? The second, what guarantees its validity?: dogma? The will to defend popular interests?

The implicit relationship can be schematized this way:

Partiality + dogmatism + leftist + empiricism

B. Populist

Characteristics:

1. It is believed that the only valid information that can be taken into account is that which comes “directly” from the people. All the rest does not inform, rather it “misinforms”, even that which comes from political organizations.
2. It is demonstrated that all the means of communication have hidden or confessed “interests”, except popular information that has the only “authentic” interest: that of the people.
3. A mythic, almost religious concept of the “people” and even an ahistorical category of what is popular: as if they always and at any place referred to the same thing, without taking into account the different sectors that can get stuck on this idea; it would seem that there could be no mistakes or pettiness among the people.
4. No critique is made of this category of the popular. As it takes place with every dogma, it is untouchable. Even more, critical proposals can be considered heresy.

It is easy to find a move from dogmatic, religious postures to populist, without the critical mediation of a theoretical and psychoanalytical construction. Categories like this one require in a special way a psychosocial analysis to question the values that impede critical practice.

We end up with this schema:

Partiality + populist dogmatism + empiricism

C. Elitist

Characteristics:

1. Information of the popular media and that of opposing political organizations does not reach the depth of reality; they do not know the fundamental, true problems that are discussed by a small, powerful elite.
2. It is believed that what the “poor” and the opposition manage is appearances; only those that make the decisions manage truth.
3. The information that comes from a direct source of power is the only one that can present the indispensable elements for analysis.

4. The informative gathering of the latest “gossip” of the powerful groups is overvalued. There is a basic fascination with the towers of power and even an overestimation: they know everything or almost everything, they manage all information or the most important information and they control all the strings.

5. There is an assumed unilateral and centrist conception of power: the world can be divided into the powerful (only a few) and the not powerful (the majority) (Foucault 1979:83-84; 125-152; 1983:174-182; 1988:14-19).

6. The confrontation of micro-powers in society is undervalued, especially counter-hegemonic political struggles (political struggles against those that have control of the power) and the circulation of alternative information.

We suggest the following relationship:

Partiality + overestimation of the powerful elite + undervaluing counter-hegemonic struggle + empiricism

D. Academic

Characteristics:

1. It is concluded that the only complete, systematic and useful information for analysis is that which is found in “serious” studies.

2. A fascination with numbers is assumed: the more statistics the better.

3. The dominant sources of information are privileged.

4. They show that the information in the press is secondary for political analysis. It is not exact or formal.

5. Information from the popular media or from political organizations is considered in third place. The “people don’t know”.

6. There is a type of religion in populism, here is another: that of the academy, conscious elite of the conjuncture and proudly distant from the masses (Foucault 1979:131).

Lorenzo Meyer has recognized this attitude toward the written press: “Some academics continue with the prejudice that to write for a newspaper is a perversion of their “cubicle” life (*La Jornada*, 22 V.89:17-18).

We will not repeat the relationship that this barrier implies. We will only show that it is the least empiricist of those that we call partial.

D. Sensational Barriers

XIII. Yellow Journalism Barrier

Characteristics:

- a. The “most yellow note” is overvalued in coyuntural analysis, the sources of information as well as their conclusions.
- b. The most extreme options are accepted without any critique: those that present the greatest poverty, wealth, corruption, or repression possible.
- c. Testing the hypotheses is not accepted: the numbers say it all.
- d. It generally accompanies an agitating or alarmist interest.

Consequences:

- a. The analyst lets him/herself be carried away by the “social prophet” that we all carry inside (Bourdieu 1975:42-44).
- b. When methodological proof is demanded, it is considered a type of disrespect of popular interests and a defense of the dominant interests.
- c. There is an attempt to mobilize and form consciousness among the popular sectors with sensationalism.
- d. Conclusions are extreme: either the correlation of forces is absolutely contrary to the democratic and popular organizations, or they are absolutely favorable in the yellow self-complacent.

The proposed schema is the following:

Overvaluing yellow journalism + lack of proof + agitating interest

XIV. Machiavellian Barrier

Characteristics:

- a. The will of the actors in social battles is overvalued, especially those on the extremes that are clashing: those of the dominant groups or those of the counter-hegemonic sectors.
- b. Behind every act, conflict or economic, political or cultural situation, one can find a premeditated and necessarily calculated plan.
- c. Social contradictions are conceived as the reign of free will.
- d. The most complicated hypotheses are elaborated on “what will the group in power have wanted to achieve”, even the details of insignificant occasions.
- e. The analysts resist accepting that many conflicts are not the result of the planning of a certain group, rather that they are imposed and are the result of the clash of interests, independent of the will of the actors.
- f. If the yellow journalism barrier is joined with the Machiavellian, the analysts will always be attentive to finding the most sensational plan.
- g. One reaches a sensationalist volunteerism [free will].
- h. On occasion an overvaluing of power and of the planning capability of the dominant groups prevails.

Consequences:

- a. A sensationalist volunteerism that overestimates the power of an aspect of contradiction (even the planning of some named popular organization) and guarantees the terrain for defeats guided by a mistaken analysis.
- b. From here, there is no longer any distance to an immobile pessimism, the fruit of a diagnosis blocked from the correlation of forces.
- c. One is lost in the daily analysis of deciphering the plan that lurks behind every action or declaration of social actors.

The abstraction of the different elements produces the following picture:

Overvaluing free will + sensationalism + overestimation of the power of the dominant forces + immobile pessimism

Overvaluing free will + sensationalism + overestimation of the power of the analyzed and acting organization + dislocated optimism

Questions:

1. Briefly explain in your own words each one of the barriers.
2. Can you give other examples of each one of these barriers in your own environment?
3. Can you encounter any other barrier not mentioned here?