

Lecture 29
Sociology 621
May 7, 2008

Strategic Logics of Transformation: Ruptural, Interstitial, Symbiotic

I. The Problem

Early in the course I described emancipatory social science as facing three primary tasks: (1) diagnosis and critique of existing society; (2) envisioning viable alternatives; (3) a theory of transformation. Within the theory of transformation we have seen how the state and ideology contribute to reproducing capitalism and its class relations. The problem of strategies of transformation is to think about how our strategies can contribute to overcoming these mechanisms of reproduction and thus make possible the transformation of capitalism.

There are three broad logics of transformation that have dominated the history of anticapitalist politics and action. I refer to these as ruptural, interstitial and symbiotic logics of transformation. These logics of transformation differ both in what we can call their visions of the trajectory of systemic transformation and in their understanding of the nature of the strategies needed to move along that trajectory. These differences are summarized in this chart:

Vision of trajectory of systemic transformations beyond capitalism	Strategic logic with respect to the state	Strategic logic with respect to the capitalist class	Metaphors of success	Political Tradition most closely associated with logic of transformation
<i>Ruptural</i>	Attack the state	Confront the bourgeoisie	War (victories and defeats)	Revolutionary socialist/communist
<i>Interstitial metamorphosis</i>	Build alternatives outside of the state	Ignore the bourgeoisie	Ecological competition	Anarchist
<i>Symbiotic metamorphosis</i>	Use the state: struggle on the terrain of the state	Collaborate with the bourgeoisie	Evolutionary adaptations	Social democratic

1. Vision of trajectory of systemic transformation. The central distinction among visions of the trajectory of system-transformation is between those who believe that any trajectory beyond capitalism will necessarily involve a decisive rupture and those views which envision a trajectory of sustained metamorphosis without any system-wide moment of discontinuity. Within the metamorphosis conception of trajectory, there are two types: interstitial metamorphosis, which imagines institutions within which social power is dominant being built up within the niches and

spaces of the dominant system, and symbiotic metamorphosis, which imagines a process of gradual modification of dominant institutions and structures as they include more contexts in which social power plays an important role. These three visions correspond broadly to the revolutionary socialist, anarchist and social democratic traditions of anticapitalism.

2. Strategic logic with respect to the state. Ruptural strategies envision a political process that culminates in a frontal attack on the state. This is the characteristic idea of revolutionary political strategies. State power is essential for transcending capitalism, and state power can only be stably secured by anti-system forces through the destruction of the core institutions of the capitalist state. Interstitial strategies in contrast operate outside the state and try as much as possible to avoid confrontations with state power. The core idea is to build counterhegemonic institutions in society. There might be contexts in which struggles against the state could be needed to create these spaces, but the core of the strategy is to work around the state. Finally symbiotic strategies see the state itself as a terrain of struggle in which there exists a possibility of using the state to build social power both within the state itself and in other sites of power.

3. Strategic logic with respect to the capitalist class. Ruptural strategies envision class struggles with the capitalist class taking the form of sharp confrontations: capitalists must be forced to make concessions, and the only way such concessions can be sustained is through the continual capacity to threaten the use of force. Only through a confrontation class struggle is it possible to move along the trajectory of transformation to the point where ruptural break become historically possible. Interstitial strategies try to avoid confrontation. Ignore the bourgeoisie is the strategic goal: challenge capitalism through building the alternative, not by directly confronting it. Symbiotic strategies seek to create the conditions for positive collaboration – what I call positive class compromise. This may require confrontations, but they are in the service of creating conditions for positive cooperation by closing off certain alternatives for capitalists.

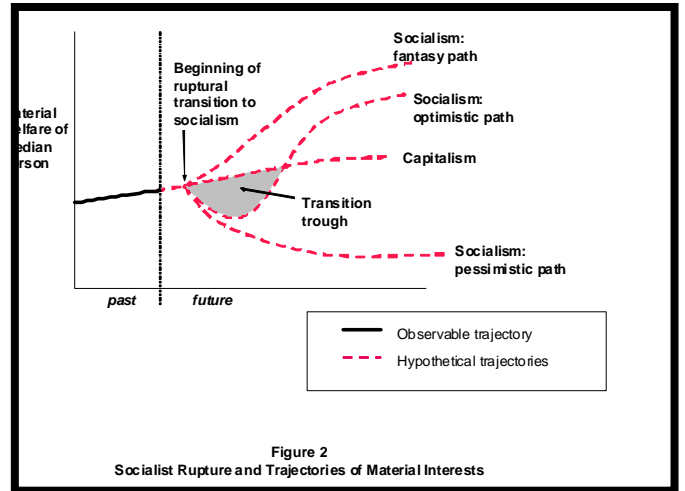
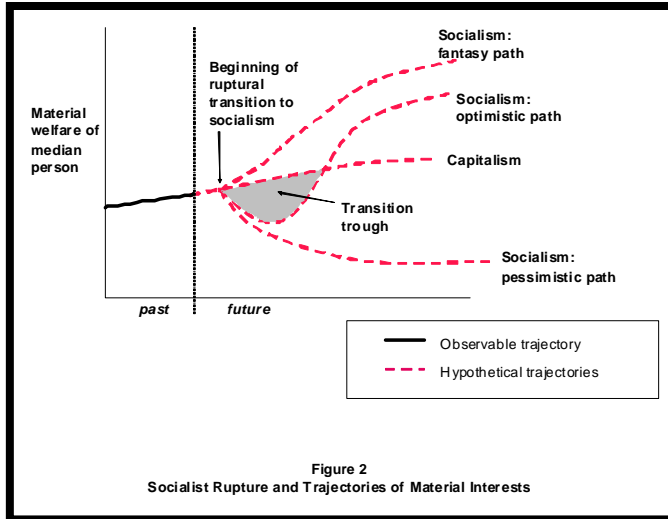
4. Metaphors of movement in the right direction. The central metaphor of ruptural strategies is war. Movement occurs through the uneven process of victories and defeats in the confrontations with capital and the attacks on the state. This is not a linear and cumulative process – there are reversals and stalemates. Still, successful movement along the trajectory depends upon victories in these struggles and building the capacity for more comprehensive victory. Interstitial success is more like a complex ecological system in which one kind of organism gains a foothold initially in a niche and eventually out-competes rivals for food sources and comes to dominate the environment. Symbiotic success is more like a process of evolution, in which structural properties are modified through adaptations which progressively enhance social power and make the system function better.

My general view is that none of these are plausible by themselves. The problem of transformation is the problem of thinking through the interactions and interdependencies among the three transformational logics.

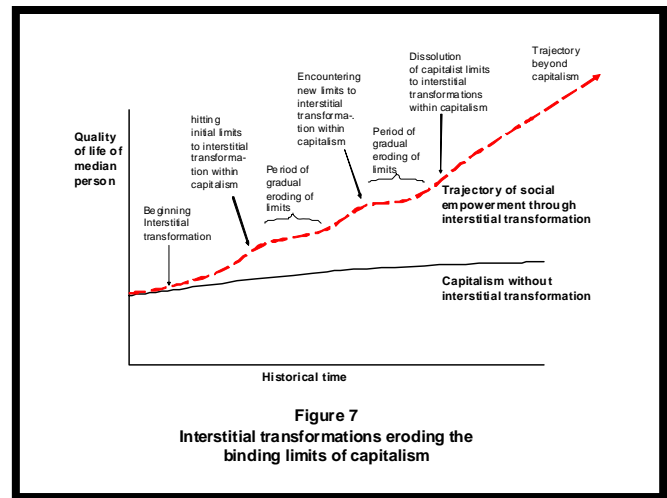
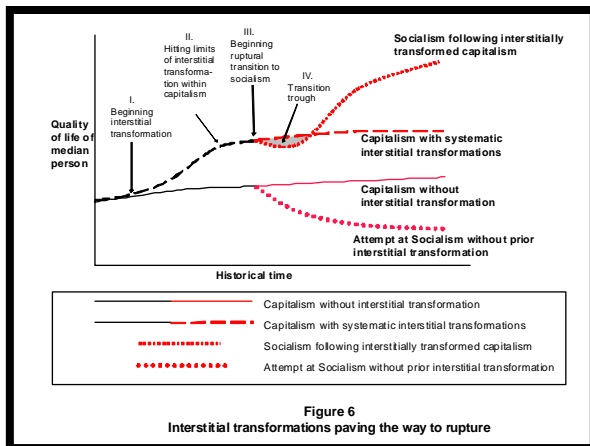
Let's look a little more closely at each of these.

II. Models of the Three Transformative logics

Ruptural transformation



Interstitial transformation



Symbiotic transformation

