

# THE RELEVANCE ULRICH'S CRITICAL SYSTEMS: HEURISTICS FOR SOCIAL PLANNING AND EVALUATION\*

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## ABSTRACT

This article proposes a new methodological approach for evaluating the effects current health policies and programs have on social justice in Colombia. From a post structuralist and systemic perspective, the methodology promotes equal access and use of health services, as well as freedom and autonomy for individuals and groups. Its critical and pluralistic contents are expressed in two ways: firstly, the effects that political rationality limitations—involving in the design of health policies, programs and services—can have on individuals by preventing them from expressing their aspirations or from fully satisfying their health needs. Secondly, the suggestion of using and combining several research methods, techniques and instruments, and establishing an inter-active relationship between researchers and research topics. From a systemic perspective, health, health services and users are seen as taking part in a wide, inclusive, and inter-acting relationship. The methodology involves three moments that may iterate with each other according to the evaluation process requirements: critical thought, construction of ethical and cognitive subjectivity of the subjects involved in the evaluation, and participatory design of action plans aimed at changing or improving the policies and programs under evaluation.

**Key Words:** Critical systems thinking, systemic evaluation, pluralist evaluation, health programs evaluation, power and rationality.

## RESUMEN

Este artículo propone un enfoque metodológico novedoso de evaluación de los efectos en justicia social de las actuales políticas y programas de salud en Colombia. La metodología denota una perspectiva pos-estructuralista y sistémica que promueve la igualdad en el acceso y uso de los servicios de salud, al tiempo que la libertad y autonomía de las personas y grupos sociales frente a los mismos. Su contenido crítico y pluralista se expresa en dos sentidos: primero, frente a los efectos que los límites de las racionalidades políticas entran en el diseño de las políticas, programas y servicios de salud, puedan generar en los sujetos sociales al clausurar la expresión de sus aspiraciones o negarles la satisfacción plena de sus necesidades de salud. Segundo, propone el uso y combinación de múltiples métodos, técnicas e instrumentos de investigación, y una relación interactiva entre el investigador y lo investigado. El enfoque sistémico permite pensar la relación entre salud, servicios de salud, y usuarios de una manera amplia, inclusiva e interactuante. El enfoque metodológico incluye tres momentos que pueden iterar el uno en el otro según las exigencias del proceso de evaluación: reflexión crítica, construcción de la subjetividad ética y cognoscitiva de los sujetos involucrados en la evaluación, y delineación participativa de planes de acción orientados a cambiar o mejorar las políticas o programas evaluados.

**Palabras clave:** Teoría crítica de sistemas, evaluación sistemática, evaluación pluralista, evaluación de programas de salud, poder y racionalidad.

## Introduction

In my Ph.D. Thesis (Vega-Romero, 1999), I demonstrated the relevance of taking into account the analysis of knowledge and power and their relationships as the foundation for evaluating social justice in health programs and policies from a perspective that encourages equality and plurality. I described how the recent reforms in Colombian health services, health policies and health programs are deeply embedded in the modernizing tenets of neo-liberal rationality and practices as far as social justice is concerned. I also showed that the specific rationalities shaping the reforms of Colombian health services, its health programs, and approaches to evaluation have resulted from the use of certain domains of knowledge and techniques when governing the health of the population and health services. I have outlined how these rationalities and practices are connected to neo-liberalism, and to the national and international elite and their respective institutions of power. At the same time, I suggested the negative implications that those rationalities and practices have for the development of a concept of social justice that respects diversity and encourages equality.

I also emphasized that modern concepts of social justice, such as equality and their evaluation, have generally been based on foundational and universal approaches that deny plurality, or on relativist concepts that threaten equality. Moreover, I underlined how those approaches failed to take into account the relationships of power and knowledge in the processes of judging and valuing. Thus, the importance of designing a methodological approach to the evaluation of social justice that encourages equality and plurality has come to the forefront.

In trying to find a way out of relying on the traditionally-accepted universal foundations of social justice and of universalizing conceptions of evaluation, I have seized Foucault's thought. After exploring the Foucauldian criticism of the modern ways of judging and evaluating, and after discovering the reinforcing relationships between power and knowledge, I concluded that Foucault provides a philosophical basis for underpinning methodological ways of judging and valuing without universal foundation and compatible with the encouragement of equality and plurality.

Foucault's philosophy can be useful not only in resisting oppression and the negative effects of power and knowledge embodied in the rationalities and practices of health programs and policies, but also in providing a theoretical perspective for a decentralized (non-foundational and non-universal) rethinking of social justice that reconciles equality and plurality. In the same way, it opens up avenues for an active, horizontal, and contextualized involvement of individuals, experts, communities and social groups in the process of evaluation. Thus, Foucault has set forth two philosophical elements —problematization and the promotion of subjectivity (aesthetics of existence)— which can be used to support a non-foundational, non-universal, critical systems perspective of evaluation that encourages equality and plurality. This is the work that I shall undertake in the present article by dealing with the method-

ological developments of Critical Systems Thinking.<sup>1</sup>

I will consider the possibility of using Foucault's thought for developing a non-foundational, non-universal Critical Systems perspective for the evaluation of social justice in the Colombian Health Service. I acknowledge that Foucault's concepts have not been ignored in Critical Systems Thinking. Paraphrasing Brocklesby and Cummings (1996, p. 741), it can be said that "a number of authors: Flood (1990), Jackson (1991a), Mingers (1992, 1994), Taket and White (1993), White and Taket (1994), Valero-Silva (1994, 1995)," and others such as Flood and Romm (1996), and Midgley (1997), "have begun to introduce (Foucault's) ideas into the Operational Research (OR) and systems literature."

Jackson (1997), for instance, maintains that there are two branches of critical systems thinking in existence that have never learned to live harmoniously together. The first emanates from the work of Churchman and has been fully developed by Ulrich (1983) as "critical systems heuristics." Its concern is to realize the critical potential crucial to systems thinking in the concept of "boundary." The second type of critical systems thinking that can trace its origins to the critique of soft systems thinking<sup>2</sup> is a development

that took place in the United Kingdom (UK) (Mingers, 1980; Jackson, 1982). Some positions in this second branch have shown more concern for founding a pluralist, non-foundationalist perspective within critical systems thinking. I have undertaken the task of reviewing Ulrich's work and the UK branch of critical systems thinking while trying to find, in both traditions, elements able to help in putting Foucault's philosophy into practice for the purpose of evaluating issues of social justice in the Colombian health service. I will start by reviewing Ulrich's work, particularly his approach to evaluation. I will also subject it to a critique on Foucauldian grounds, thereby clarifying which aspects of Ulrich's work will be useful for my purpose, and which must be set aside.

### 1. Ulrich's Approach to Evaluation

According to Ulrich (1988), a systemic and critical evaluation could be a critically normative, self-reflective and discursive procedure aimed at unmasking the normative content of a social program and the social implications of its application. Ulrich's procedure for evaluation deals with the context of justification (the value judgments that flow into the definition of a problem and proposals for a solution within social programs), and the context of application (the normative implications for those affected by the implementation of social programs) of a social program.

He starts with the view that a social program reflects the interplay between moral judgments and expertise, that is, of boundary judgments accomplished in different

<sup>1</sup> Critical Systems Thinking is a trend of thought in management and systems sciences characterised by promoting, at the methodological level, three interrelated intentions: complementarism, emancipation and critical reflection. It has been grounded in the tenets of normative critical sciences, and more recently, on Foucauldian philosophy.

<sup>2</sup> Soft Systems Thinking is an interpretive, qualitative approach of systems thinking.

stages of its elaboration: the definition of the problem, policy formation, and implementation. Thus, a critical evaluation involves challenging those boundary judgments by uncovering them for everybody concerned. This should be done through a “process of unfolding” —a procedure that helps people think about the total relevant system (the totality of relevant conditions) of its context of justification and about the “whole-systems implications” of its context of application. From this perspective, to unfold means to create a “moral” knowledge tending towards universality in so far as it requires us to ask “boundary questions” in the “is” (expert, empirical and theoretical knowledge) and “ought” (moral judgment) modes, that refer, respectively, to the actual, imperfect reality and to its ideal. That is, this procedure allows us to compare the achievements of actual plans to their ideal standards of performance (improvement). Without this requirement it would be impossible to achieve, at the same time, generalization and boundedness, that is, to include the concern of everyone implied. This could be developed through a procedure in which the participation of all stakeholders is required. Paraphrasing Midgley (1996), according to this perspective, evaluating would also demand from the evaluator thinking carefully about the kind of knowledge (expertise) and people’s participation (moral dimension) to be included or excluded in the analysis.

However, it seems to me that Ulrich’s approach reveals only one face of the coin. In so far as Ulrich departs from a process of unfolding and limits his analysis to finding an answer to the gap between the relations of truth, error, and moral judgment within

the boundaries of a totalizing way of reasoning,<sup>3</sup> he does not emphasize the role of force relationships as a factor implied in the generalization of truth. That is, he does not take into account the connections between formulations of truth and falsehood and force relations. Moreover, insofar as he seeks to transcend subjectivism, he embraces the idea of a quasi-universal subject who universalizes his moral judgment through discourse. In this way, he overlooks the role of a decentralized subject in both resisting the effects of power and knowledge relationships, and in displaying her/his truth, her/his right, and her/his ethical position to others.

Taking this argument further, I shall first explore Ulrich’s approach to social planning. I think that here are contained all the elements of his concept of evaluation in depth. Secondly, I shall critically analyze his approach in an attempt to find the elements in the analysis through which my approach could be brought to bear. Finally, I shall describe that which, from my point of view, could be a pluralistic and systemic approach to evaluation. In the background of my position flashes of Foucault’s critical theory will appear.

## 2. Ulrich’s Approach to Social Planning

According to Ulrich (1983), all processes of social planning imply the interaction be-

<sup>3</sup> He does this by using the principles of reason and, in particular, the systems idea in the form of a principle of generalisation or unfolding, based on the concept of a universal (quasi-transcendental) subject.

tween empirical or theoretical scientific knowledge and values. He identifies this as the relationship between, on the one hand, theoretical and practical reason and, on the other, the interaction between their relays, the involved (the enquirer, the planner, the decision-maker, and the client) and the affected (also represented by “witnesses”). However, given that the definition of the normative content of a social plan is mediated by the values of the involved, the risk of deception and the development of conflicts of interest can be brought to bear in situations of “dogmatically asserted assumptions.” According to him, it is necessary to solve these situations by using the means that he finds appropriate to the conditions of a civilized and democratic society: a heuristic procedure and a dialogue between the involved and the affected whose aim is to enhance self-reflection and self-responsibility, thereby generalizing a “moral” knowledge.

Thus, discourse is the means through which an agreement between parties can be achieved. Consensus cannot be grounded either in the assumptions of scientism that denies the influence of values, or in the undertaking of a monological, practical reasoning that excludes the other, or in the utopian supposition of a common structure of language, or in the conditions of an “ideal speech situation” that pretends to make discourse unveiled and free of constraining relations of power. A new dialogical approach has to be brought to bear which, by endorsing the influence of values, aims to supersede the dogmatically asserted propositions of the involved by using self-reflection in a process mediated by a critically

heuristic use of reason. What this procedure purports to obtain is the widening of the boundary judgments of the involved by encouraging the participation of the affected, and to discipline the affected, as well as the involved, by unmasking the normative content and error of their discourses through critical questioning.

This approach differentiates the involved from the affected in terms of their type of reason. Whereas the former becomes the typical representative of theoretical knowledge (expert knowledge, or theoretical reason), the latter is the personification of practice (intuitive knowledge). Moreover, each of them has the common quality of depicting her/his position with characteristic value assumptions. It is this common quality, in which each one is a layman that not only explains the existence of boundary judgments, but also allows them to speak a “common” language capable of forging agreements about the moral boundaries of knowledge. Two elements facilitate this process: on the one hand, a critically heuristic turn, seeking to widen and give unity to the field of the categories of truth to be included within the boundaries of the system and, on the other, a dialectical turn aiming to reconcile the affected and the involved by way of morally validating theoretical or empirical assumptions.

It seems to me that this approach has the advantage of putting face to face the involved and the affected, that is, of enhancing the participation of citizens in the process of decision-making concerning social planning. Similarly, it lets us use a set of immanent categories of knowledge in order to establish the boundaries of what is to be consid-

ered the system. However, it also seems to me that this approach does not allow a pluralist concept of criticism. Ulrich, in spite of his commitment to citizen participation, still maintains a universalistic view of the subject that, together with his unitarian conception of reason (specifically theoretical reason), limits participation to serving the purpose of the unification of scientific discourse and to widening the boundaries of a moral knowledge that subsumes the diverse viewpoints of the involved and the affected. This, instead of being an advantage, is an obstacle in the path towards a pluralist evaluation of social justice.

### ***2.1 The emergence of the heuristic approach to social planning***

As has been said, Ulrich undertook two main tasks in creating a critical heuristic approach to social planning: first, to rescue the process of social planning from the influence of scientism by making it self-reflective about its normative content. Second, to find a way of solving, by means of reason, the disagreements and the conflicts of interests between the involved and the affected. It implied, on the one hand, to make both the involved and the affected self-reflective and self-responsible and, on the other, to rescue them from deception by revealing the value assumptions underlying their judgments. Ulrich proposed critical systems heuristics as the tool which, enhancing self-reflection, might support the process of dialogue, discursive will formation, and consensus between them. In that sense, it might be said that Ulrich's critically heuristic approach to social planning acts as a mediator or arbiter between the involved and the affected. That

is, it serves as an instrument of reconciliation between them: "of making reason practicable and practice reasonable" (Ulrich, 1983).

Ulrich (1983) starts by rejecting the discursive solutions proposed by the scientists (neo-positivists) and dialecticians (constructivist and critical theorists) for the problems of reason in order to achieve universality in normative matters. For him, neo-positivists do not distinguish between theoretical and practical reason (practical reason being understood as the interconnections between discourse about facts and discourse about norms), but between theory and practice, relegating practical reason to the realm of the subjective. Thus, for them, practice becomes rational only when it is guided by theoretical, scientific knowledge. The solution for dialecticians, on their part, to the problems of universality also departed from differentiating between theory and practice, but they solved the opposition between them by means of a synthesis in a third higher rationality: practical reason. The means for achieving this in both positions is rational discussion. But while the neopositivists base it on a critical procedure designed to test the truth of propositions and theories, the dialecticians do so by disciplining opinions and will formation by means of building a common language or by unmasking communication, without external (power) or internal (structure of discourse) constraints. All these positions see the need to transcend subjectivism. However, Ulrich (1983) argues that they can neither close the gap between reason and practice nor solve the problem of the deceptiveness of knowledge. Ulrich undertakes the task of superseding these

difficulties by creating a conception of dealing with deception and argumentation while basing them on a critical heuristic approach to knowledge and a dialectical approach to argumentation.

Ulrich recognizes that the actual subject of knowledge (for instance, social planners) is no longer the abstract and transcendental subject of Kantian philosophy but one that is embodied in the “subjective, social and historic context in which real-world planning takes place” (1983, pp. 25-26). As a consequence, the judgment of this subject is not free of deception; that is, it cannot be immediately universal. It is, firstly, a bounded judgment. Ulrich assumes that to achieve universality implies putting the normative assumptions of social planning beyond the limited interest and particular values of the involved. This should be achieved by animating a dialogue with the affected leading to a higher level of self-reflection and consensus.

Ulrich (1983) makes it clear that he and Habermas have worked in the direction of constituting a transformed transcendental philosophy, a true weapon of rational criticism. It was with this purpose that Habermas dealt with the problems of knowledge (*a priori* of experience) and discourse (*a priori* of argumentation). However, Ulrich (1983) criticized Habermas because he concentrated his energies on the *a priori* of argumentation (justification or criticism of the validity of statements), in creating a model of practical discourse that really did not mediate between theory and practice but that substituted the former for the latter (a theory on the conditions of

discourse). According to Ulrich, Habermas’ work on the *a priori* of experience seems to be limited to cognitive interests (sensorial experience, communicative experience and inner experience), useful only against the claim of a unity of science and against the transgressive use of the object domains (boundaries) of statements. However, there is no elaboration of knowledge-constitutive categories useful for the purpose of rational social criticism. Thus, Ulrich believes that constituting a transformed transcendental philosophy implies working in the direction both of the *a priori* of experience and of the *a priori* of argumentation. Ulrich abandoned Habermas’ quasi-transcendental conception of *a priori* of experience and *a priori* of argumentation and substituted for them a critical reflection constituted, respectively, by a “critically-heuristic turn” and a “dialectical turn.”

### 2.1.1 The ‘critically-heuristic’ turn

Two key points of Ulrich’s discussion of the heuristic turn seem important to me: first, his demonstration that a social plan is delimited by boundary judgments, that is, that it becomes a kind of rationality shaped by the interlacement of the normative and speculative contents of reason. Given the conditioned, limited, dependent, and selective nature of the assumptions of the involved, plans have inevitable social implications for the affected non-participant in the process of their elaboration. Ulrich has put the problem in terms of both theoretical and practical reason, or in terms of the interplay between expertise and moral judgment (1988). He emphasizes that the possibilities of error in the content of a social plan, and



of its social consequences for the affected, are the effect of the influence of the values of the involved, and that this limits their possibilities of generalization. Second, he proposed a solution to this problem by pointing out the possibilities for widening the boundary judgments of the involved through opening up an opportunity for thinking about the totality of relevant conditions (total relevant system) of the knowledge included in its formulation. In this sense, it is by subjecting the purposive and speculative rationality of the involved to the pure activity of reason, but from a heuristic and critical perspective, that boundary judgments may be expanded. This can be achieved by taking into account the "true concern of all the stakeholders" (1988, p. 422). He calls this the process of unfolding (the principle of generalization of the moral knowledge). This process can be monological (self-reflective) or dialogical (discursive), as in the case of the dialectical turn (see Ulrich 1988).

The tool for doing this job is a heuristic and critical framework created by way of bringing together, in a quasi-transcendental fashion, the unifying, totalizing, and teleological functions of the Kantian *a priori* components of knowledge: the pure concepts of reason (the three transcendental ideas) and of the understanding (the categories) and the pure forms of intuition (space and time). By using Churchman's work (1971 and 1979), Ulrich (1983) transforms these Kantian *a priori* components of knowledge into three sets of *a priori* concepts with a critical and heuristic function: first, a pragmatic mapping dimension; second, a set of pragmatic mapping categories; and third, the three ideas of critical heuristics (further explanation fol-

lows). The essence of his critical heuristic turn is to establish a framework of critically heuristic categories that can help the planner to uncover the assumptions of the rational argument of the involved, and to reflect critically on its sources of deception and on its normative implications in social reality (Ulrich, 1983). He (1983) defines two functions for these categories: on the one hand, a heuristic role designed to discover questions or problems and to reconstruct basic frameworks for enquiry; and, on the other hand, a critical function whose role is to reflect on the sources of possible deception in enquiry, design, or discourse.

Firstly, the pragmatic mapping dimension corresponds, on the one hand, to the phenomenal, empirical or observational component of knowledge and, on the other, to the notion of human intentionality or purpose (that which appears in the spatiotemporality of social life) which is shaped by values and power.<sup>4</sup> It seems to me that Ulrich's use of this concept brings into consideration two dimensions: first, one that corresponds to the traditional Kantian view of phenomena (that which appears in space and time) which is the first synthesis of sensible empirical diversity. Second, a teleological dimension (connected to the notion of human intentionality or purpose), which is the second synthesis of empirical diversity, but, in this case, related to the complexity of values, interests and preferences of the social actors. Given that this latter dimension incorporates a purposive (means/end),

<sup>4</sup> Ulrich (1983, p. 254) defines power as the ability of a client to impose her/his purpose on another.

teleological rationality, it can help in the pursuit of unified ends or in the search for the notion of the Good (improvement) by regulating the dimension of power implied in it. It is this double dimension that can explain Ulrich's subsequent differentiation of "What is" and "What ought to be."<sup>5</sup>

Secondly, by applying a set of relative *a priori* concepts (the systems categories of Churchman, 1979) to the pragmatic dimension, Ulrich (1983) created a set of twelve pragmatic mapping categories<sup>6</sup> and boundary questions (see, Ulrich, 1991, pp. 108-109) whose practical function is to discover the sources (theoretical or empirical) from which the normative contents of boundary judgments (social plan or design) derive (see also Ulrich, 1983, pp. 244, 245, 258). Given that boundary judgments are "very strong *a priori* assumptions about what is to belong to the system in question and what is to belong to its environment" (Ulrich, 1983, p. 225),<sup>7</sup> they are necessarily limited (or selective), as the consequence of the exclusive value assumptions, interests and preferences

of the involved present in their purposive judgments. Thus, Ulrich (1983) demonstrated that the value assumptions of a social program (normative consequences) should not only be justified through the voluntary consent of the affected (by their witness), but that they should be made transparent and/or their sources revealed. It is this latter aspect that defines the importance of the "critically-heuristic" categories of a pragmatic mapping dimension from a critically-pluralist perspective of evaluation.

In this framework, the systems idea acts as a mediator for the application of categories to the pragmatic dimension (the purpose of the involved) aiming towards its generalization. The usefulness of this procedure is to give the planner the tools for solving the conflicts among the social actors by developing specific systems categories. These categories have two functions: on the one hand, they help to make the diverse purposes of the client universal through the pursuit of an ideal (common) goal materialized in universal standards of performance and, as a consequence, to allocate the appropriate resources or means (including expertise) to particular ends. On the other hand, they accommodate their different world-views into a kind of "moral consensus" about the social implications of the decisions to be made. The first function, which meets the characteristics of a teleological undertaking, tries, firstly, to solve the conflicts of values, interests, and preferences among the clients by means of a trade-off principle that finds its ideal expression in the establishment of measures of performance and improvement. Once the goal has been established, the next step should be to provide for the means of its fulfillment by

<sup>5</sup> Thus, he says that "true" does not mean the same thing in the "is" and the "ought" mode: in the "is" mode, empirical evidence and hence expertise are required to establish the correctness of a map, whereas in the "ought" mode there are no experts: only moral judgments (i.e., responsibility) that can establish the rightness of ideal maps (1988; see also 1983, p. 243).

<sup>6</sup> The categories are organized in four groups headed by the concepts client, decision maker, planner, affected (witness), and are generally known under the labels "the involved" and "the affected" (see Ulrich, 1983, p. 258)

<sup>7</sup> That is, boundary judgment is the conjunction of the purposive rationality of the involved (their mapping dimensions), their systems concepts (or any other categories), and their values.

differentiating the components of the system to be controlled by the decision-makers from those others that belong to the environment. It is also a part of this means-to-end relation to guarantee the source of expertise as a different resource from those under the control of the decision-maker (the components). The second function (the accommodation of world-views) is also organized in a teleological fashion, but it explains how far Ulrich stands from a merely functional concept of systems. It refers to the solution of the differences of world-views (*Weltanschauungen*) between the involved and the affected in terms of a "moral consensus" that may be the result of a process of "self-reflection on the part of the affected" and of the awareness of the involved regarding their moral responsibility (see Ulrich, 1983, pp. 246-257).

This part of the critically-heuristic framework is built by using a reconstructed systems concept that recreates the Kantian cosmological idea (World) in terms of the Systems idea. This idea should account for the totality of conditions (total relevant system) of rational knowledge in a relative rather than transcendental sense; that is, this 'totality of conditions' is considered by Ulrich (1983) to be a projected theoretical or thinkable unity that is dependent on the ability of the planner to include the claims of the affected by means of widening the moral boundaries of knowledge. In that sense, it can help to produce a new boundary judgment (whole system judgment) that goes beyond the limitations of the previous boundary judgment of the involved. It performs its function by totalizing, by making the previous boundary judgment more com-

prehensive. This new framework helps the inquirer to question the difficulties of knowledge that have been found in the boundary judgments of the involved.

Finally, whereas the mapping dimension rests on the notion of purposiveness, and pragmatic mapping categories rest on the application of the systems categories to the mapping dimension, the three ideas of critical systems heuristics ultimately rest on a reinterpretation of the transcendental Kantian conception of the principle of reason, that is to say, its transformation into "critical standards for reflection on the normative content and potential deceptiveness of his (the planner's) maps of social reality" (Ulrich, 1983, p. 259). He (1983) associates the three Kantian principles of reason (World, Man, God) to the three Kantian basic questions (What can I know? What should I do? What may I hope?), and redefines them in terms of the agreement between theoretical and practical reason: knowledge (Truth), morality (Good) and world-views (*Weltanschauung*). They were translated into the language of social planning as the "planner's interest in mapping social reality," the "planner's interest in designing a better social reality," and the planner's interest in providing the sources for guaranteeing "adequate social mapping" and its "successful implementation," respectively. These three principles give the planner the role of a universal subject who, by using the systems idea as the transformer of the Kantian transcendental principles of reason into their immanent application to social planning, obtains the ability to think critically about the totality of the relevant conditions of his social maps, the moral

perfection of his designs, and about guarantees for improvement. In this way, the planner places theoretical and practical reason under the command of thought and creates a “moral” knowledge. This judgment is reflective because it is based on the free agreement of the three principles of reason. However, this is a kind of judgment that reminds us of the characteristics of the Kantian teleological judgment. In contrast with aesthetic judgment, which is subjective, teleological judgment is universal, objective, material, and implies ends (see Deleuze, 1983, pp. 61-67).

Concerning the critically-heuristic turn, I find differences between Foucault’s analysis of discourse and Ulrich’s heuristic approach. Ulrich’s approach not only lacks a clear analysis of the connections between power and knowledge, statements and visibilities, discursive and non-discursive formations, the role of relations of force and of the multiplicity that pervades them, but Ulrich also transforms the planner (and the evaluator) into a quasi-transcendental subject which, through a teleological, dialectical, and critical undertaking, becomes a true universal one, capable of guaranteeing the universality of the judgments implied in the process of social planning or evaluation. It should be noticed that Ulrich strengthens the teleological and comprehensive character of this judgment by subordinating the mapping dimension to the pragmatic mapping category, and these to the quasi-transcendental ideas of critical heuristics, in a more and more embracing form each time.

Furthermore, it seems to me that Ulrich’s assertion that “we can determine the bound-

ary judgments that are constitutive of social maps and designs if we can give a systematic list of the social actors to whom the planner must refer in order to understand the normative content of his maps and designs” (1983, p. 245) supposes that the greater the participation of the social actors, the more universal and perfect the social plan is in terms of its ends, nearer to the notion of the Good (see also, Ulrich, 1988, p. 422). This excludes thinking about the strategic implications of the conditions of the production of knowledge contained in the practices of the involved (the experts), and the effects of power relationships. Thus, not only the lack of participation of the affected should be questioned, but also the whole strategic rationality of a plan and its effects of domination and objectivation. Ulrich’s approach defines the subject (the social actors involved and affected) as an independent variable of a social plan. However, in my view, in this case, the subject should be regarded mainly as a correlative dependent variable of the strategic positions of knowledge (of its discursive and non-discursive formations).

The role of the systems idea may also be considered from the perspective of a decentralized subject rather than from that of a quasi-transcendental (universal) one. In this sense, it could help more as a tool for locally analyzing the effects of the true and false formulations of a discourse on social planning, and the historical conditions of the emergence and choice of specific statements in the discursive frame of reference constitutive of the social maps and designs (See Deleuze, 1988, pp. 55-57). On this matter a new conceptualization is required: I find that the Foucauldian notions of the regimen of rationality and the

regimen of practice can help to clarify these aspects (I will refer to them in section 4.2 —The rationality of a social program— of this article). For instance, the use of these notions can help to reconceptualize boundary judgments as something more complex and multiple (historically and structurally influenced) instead of simply reflecting the purposiveness (intentionality) of the social actors (see also Midgley, 1992, who discusses judgments in this manner).

### 2.1.2 *The dialectical turn*

It seems to me that the idea behind the dialectical turn is to lay the foundation for a critically-heuristic tool that reconciles reason with practice, or the involved (the planner, the expert) with the affected (the citizen), or what Churchman (1979) called “systems rationality” with “its enemies.” This is a reconciliation at the level of the normative content of both reason and practice in so far as Ulrich clearly stresses that “a truly dialectical approach will seek to mediate between conceptualized systems rationality and experienced social practice by understanding the former as a source of *a priori* concepts of practical reason only” (1983, p. 266). It is in this perspective that the *a priori* of argumentation (discourse) is to be taken into account. This may suppose an ethical dialogue between the involved and the affected. However, Ulrich proposes that this is to be a dialectical dialogue mediated by a “process of unfolding” (1983, p. 266) of the three heuristic ideas (the Systems idea, the Moral idea, and the Guarantor idea). The aim of this process is to validate or legitimize the content of practical reason through the interplay between the ordinary language of the affected (through

the witnesses) and the expert (bounded) language of the involved. It should encourage a kind of self-reflective, dialectical judgment between the involved and the affected, looking for a solution of their differences at a higher level than that of the teleological judgment of monological reasoning. Ulrich (1983, p. 266) describes this clearly when he says:

We need to conceive of an institutional arrangement in which planners and witnesses become mutually dependent for realizing their goals, so that they can mutually challenge one another to reflect on the normative content of their viewpoints, their maps and designs of social reality, and particularly the underlying boundary judgments (whole systems judgments). We call this dialectical interplay between planners (‘systems rationality’) and witnesses (experienced social practice) the process of unfolding.

This process is explained as the interplay of three “critically-heuristic” principles:

- i) The principle of “dialectics”
- ii) The polemical employment of reason
- iii) The democratic principle of the sovereignty and equality of all citizens.

Firstly, the principle of dialectics is conceived as the argumentative relationship between *a posteriori* (social practice) and *a priori* (systems or theory) concepts of practical reason. Ulrich (1983, p. 299) clearly defines this dialectic by saying that

(System rationality) is at its best when the task is to find rational questions, i.e., to make intelligible the normative content and potential deceptiveness of social designs, while

the other (social rationality) serves an essential critical purpose in questioning the rational, i.e., in opening up the given understanding of rationality.

This process mediates between reason and practice. What results from these dialectics is a higher level of comprehension of reason, a level that defines a holistic truth (“moral” truth) which is not the result of theoretical justifications or rational consensus but of the validation of the assumptions of the involved through the *a posteriori*, normative concepts of the affected. This validation is based on a certain “ethics” of self-responsibility and awareness. Thus, the content of this dialectic seems to be one that at once enhances both enlightenment and openness. However, from the perspective of knowledge, this dialectic is one-sided. Ulrich (1983, p. 278), for instance, defines the crucial idea as a position in which

one side serves as the source of theoretical (*a priori*) concepts of rationality for the other, while the latter serves as the sources of practical (*a posteriori*) concepts of rationality for the former. In this sense we should speak of a dialectic between ‘systems rationality’ and ‘social rationality.’

In this sense, the “dialectics” seems to encourage complementarity<sup>8</sup> instead of a

<sup>8</sup> Criticizing the lack of plurality of some critical systems writers (for example, Flood and Jackson 1991) in their complementary use of more than one methodological approach, Gregory (1992) defines complementarity by using the metaphor of a “force-field.” Thus, complementarity, as used by these critical systems writers, is a force-

conception of pluralism<sup>9</sup> based on promoting diversity. It maintains the interplay between multiple rationalities (empirical-speculative and practical reason), but unifies them, at a higher level, by means of critical reflection, that is, by means of the pure activity of reason (practical reason) although in a dialogical way. Moreover, it reduces the opposition between ‘rationalities’ to that between theoretical, instrumental reason, and practical reason, or between system rationality (theory) and social rationality (practice), thus neglecting the possibility of the existence of a broader constellation of diverse rationalities.

It also seems to me that witnesses are used as a means for validating and legitimizing, and for making even more “comprehensive,” the rationality (systems rationality) of the involved. Furthermore, it seems to be clear that practical reason is the field in which systems rationality and the rationality of the affected can broaden their boundaries. Ulrich (1983) achieves this by calling into this field the context of meaning, which is formed by the moral, political, aesthetic, and religious points of view—that is, the field of the “enemies of the systems approach.”

field or framework that “exerts a powerful organizing influence over others” (p. 425) - subsuming them within its imposed order.

<sup>9</sup> Gregory (1992), for instance, defines plurality by using the metaphor of a “constellation” (pp. 434-439). In this view, different “paradigms, traditions, perspectives, (and) value-systems” (p. 431) cannot be finally reconciled, given their antagonistic underpinnings, but communicated in a transitory, contingent and historical way. Communication is informed through a model of critical appreciation that allows the participants to reach local consensus and to make ethical decisions. I refer to this conception of pluralism in my PhD Thesis (Vega-Romero, 1999)

On the side of theoretical reason, Ulrich does not allow social rationality to challenge systems rationality; that is to say, the field of theoretical truth should remain sacred. What is brought into question is only the kind and quality of expertise (see, for instance, Ulrich, 1991, pp. 108-110) and the acceptability, by the affected, of the comprehensiveness of systems rationality. This is part of the role of the polemical employment of boundary judgments by the affected. Thus, systems rationality can only work on the side of the involved (the role of the affected is limited to criticizing the involved, and does not extend itself to creating their own plan), and from the perspective of universality. It is the task of the affected to validate systems rationality by questioning the comprehensiveness of quasi-transcendental ideas. Consequently, the dialectical and critically-heuristic principle does not break with universality. It is reinforced through the application of the systems idea (the process of unfolding) to the expert knowledge of the planner who, in this way, appears to play the role of a universal subject. The dialectic between the planner and the affected is a dialogical-reflective procedure in which the net output of their mutual normative challenge is the unfolding of the totality of relevant conditions that should make the intentionality of the client and the claim of the affected more extensive and unified.

Secondly, the polemical employment of boundary judgments is the means by which Ulrich seeks to empower the witness in his normative criticism of “the dogmatically asserted boundary judgments underlying the expert’s validity claims” (1983, p. 305). It really does not imply helping to develop al-

ternative theoretical and normative rationalities to that of the planner, but to “discipline the employment of boundary judgments on the part of the involved” (1983, p. 303), that is, to uncover its normative assumptions and errors and, again, in this way, to supersede its entrenched boundary judgments, and to ensure its extension and universality. It seems to me that this is a significant limitation of the application of the notion of the polemical employment of boundary judgment from the viewpoint of a pluralist perspective.

Furthermore, it does not require the use, by the affected (or the witnesses), of any kind of “expertise” or theoretical knowledge, but only their intuitive argumentation. In my view, this reduction of the role of the affected to the production of intuitive, subjective and normative knowledge helps to maintain an asymmetric relationship with the involved (the planner). There is no room for the affected (through the witnesses) to question the conditions of production and use of speculative knowledge, of what is to be considered the truth. Clearly, the involved have a connection with theoretical knowledge through their values, when forming their judgments. But this possibility is at the same time denied to the affected or their witnesses in so far as they are reduced to intuitive knowledge and, at the same time, their erudite capabilities are neglected. Thus, an opposition is created between theory and intuition rather than between centralized knowledge and subjugated knowledge. However, the polemical employment of boundary judgments *can* help to open a way of resisting the effects of knowledge and power relations by placing the affected face to face with the involved in the role of criticizing

their boundary judgments. Ulrich (1983) illustrates this point, although from a holistic perspective, when analyzing his case on “Health Systems Planning” (pp. 372-392). Therefore, rather than abandon critical systems heuristics as hopelessly universalizing, I suggest there is room for a constructive reinterpretation of it.

### 3. A Reinterpretation of Critical Systems Heuristics?

Despite their obvious differences (touched on above), I find that Ulrich’s work has a strong connection to Foucault’s: both are grounded in a Kantian perspective (Ulrich, 1983, and Foucault, 1984). However, whereas Ulrich still maintains his universalistic and quasi-transcendental flavor, Foucault turns his work towards an immanent perspective and towards a decentralized conception of the subject. Of course, there are enormous differences between the two authors concerning the analysis of knowledge. Also, the roles of power and of the self are absent in Ulrich’s approach. However, I think that it should be possible to engage in a re-interpretation of Ulrich’s work from a Foucauldian perspective. It would mean to express key aspects of his approach differently, for instance, his notion of boundary judgment, the teleological and dialectical reflection that tries to supersede it, and the concept of unfolding. I propose understanding a social plan as being the result of the emergence of a dominant regimen of rationality and practices that come from the struggle between a plurality of decentralized boundary judgments instead of Ulrich’s notion of a widened boundary judgment leading to a universal ‘moral’ knowl-

edge. I also propose to revise the concept of unfolding and to put the notion of “ethical and political unfolding” in its place, and to introduce the concepts of “folding” and “unfolding in reverse”; to revise Ulrich’s notion of the polemical employment of boundary judgments using Foucault’s conception of problematization; and to replace Ulrich’s teleological and dialectical judgment with the concept of a reflective aesthetic judgment, in the form of the Foucauldian notion of the aesthetics of existence.

#### 3.1 *Boundary judgment as a plurality*

Ulrich shows through his notion of boundary judgment that it is impossible for a judgment (truth) to exist, when dealing with the context of the justification of a social plan, which is not permeated by value assumptions. He finds that values become interlocked with knowledge by means of the application of the categories of understanding (see the section 3.1.1 on the “critically-heuristic turn”, in this article) to the purposive rationality of the involved (that is value-loaded). His proposal is to widen the boundaries of (expert) judgment by universalizing its moral content through a process of unfolding (generalization) as a dialogical and self-reflective reasoning. This procedure should reach consensus or agreement, and each time it is engaged in, a more universal truth emerges which is, at the same time, practical and theoretical. I have found that Ulrich makes a distinction between theory (expertise) and practice (experienced social reality), but, at the same time, he unifies theoretical discourse (categories) and empirical knowledge (mapping dimension). That is to say, he opens the



door to a discourse (universal moral knowledge) that finally unifies the different purposive, theoretical and moral rationalities. He, therefore, finds the combination of the categories and the purpose of the clients isomorphic in the pragmatic mapping categories in so far as the object of the pragmatic mapping dimension is the same object as that of the categories.

However, according to Foucault's concept of knowledge (see section 6.4 on "Knowledge as the Relation of Forms", in chapter 6 of my Ph.D. Thesis), empirical and theoretical knowledge may have different objects. Moreover, not only do they have different objects —the form of the visible (mapping dimension) and the form of the expressible (theoretical discourse) are a dispersion subjected to the arrangement of different fields of force— but they can also interlock them in different ways. Thus, the dualism between systems rationality (knowledge) and social rationality can be seen as reducing knowledge to the field of the involved and, even, as reducing knowledge to homogeneous (ideal) pragmatic mapping categories. Likewise, given the irreducibility of the two forms of knowledge (the form of the visible and the form of the expressible), their combination can only be possible as the result of force relationships. This explains why for Foucault there is no common intentionality of a consciousness directed towards an object. For him this 'common intentionality' collapses in the gap between the visible and the articulable, and in the strategies that set up the relationship between them. Furthermore, for him, everything is knowledge, and this is the reason why he does not differentiate between

theory and practice (intuition) (see Deleuze, 1988), but rather between dominant and subjugated knowledge, rationalities and practices (ways of doing things). This means that making a truth universal is the result of the effects of power on the conditions governing knowledge (the *a priori* of statements and visibilities).

The above assumptions lead me to believe that Ulrich's search for an ideal (boundary) judgment based on the totality of relevant conditions determining the development of a social plan, seems to be utopian. I find, for instance, Ulrich's (1988) allusions to the fact that "health planners traditionally plan hospital beds, but find it difficult to define health goals" (p. 426) very suggestive. Hospitals and health seem to represent two practices. The hospital (beds) is the place of multiple technical procedures used to see the content of a substance (the sick body), whereas health seems to be the dispersed and changing object of multiple discourses such as clinical medicine, preventive medicine, hygiene, epidemiology, human ecology, social engineering, health economics and so on (see, for instance, Ashton and Howard, 1988, and Beattie, 1993). Each practice has different governing, historical conditions that determine the use of different (boundary) judgments: not only are visibilities, non-discursive formations, and the *a priori* conditions (light) that make them visible different, but also the statements and the *a priori* conditions (language) that make them articulable. The history of the hospital is different from the history of the discourse on health. How could they interlink in a single judgment if it is not by recourse to a third strategic element different from them but

common to them? What emerges in this argument is the need to reconsider the conditions of the duality of knowledge (pragmatic dimension and categories), and the separation between systems rationality and social rationality. It seems to be necessary to recognize the character of knowledge in both, even though they involve different forms of knowledge. Furthermore, each form in itself is a multiplicity, and the multiplicity of these forms and the forms themselves can constitute a broadened rationality only as the result of the struggle between complex and strategic force relations.

### ***3.2 The rationality of a social program***

I find that the notion of social program might be redefined as that of a regimen of rationality that has as its foundation two main elements: first, a domain of historical conditions or rationalities that account for the patterns and means of knowledge (methods, techniques, procedures, institutions, statements, and so on) and power (technologies of power), and of the relationship between them. Second, a strategic rationality defined by the values and interests of specific forces that determine the modes of connection between knowledge and power and their functioning. These latter rationalities are the result of the struggle between different forces and of the constitution of a dominant, strategic relation that crystallizes its values as general principles and specific regulations. Once the regimen of rationality is solidified and transformed into a dominant force, it becomes possible to create laws, to formulate policies and social plans, to delineate administrative guidelines, to reorganize institutions, to regulate behav-

iors, to define measures of performance and standards of improvement (see Foucault, 1988a, pp. 28-29; 1988b, pp. 74-77; and 1991, pp. 78-79).

The dominant forms of rationality of a social program operate by constituting practices of government and of knowledge that appear as universal, unitarian, self-evident and necessary regulations of the conduct of the self and others (Foucault, 1991). Thus, they constitute, in the first place, a strategic regimen of rationality that implies the interplay between two pivot points: on the one hand, the point of true/false formulations and, on the other, the point of codification/prescription. The former articulates strategies through theoretical or scientific discourse. The latter codifies what is to be known and prescribes what is to be done. Regimens of practices are the “places where what is said and what is done, the rules imposed and the reason given, the planned and the taken for granted meet and interconnect” (Foucault, 1991, p. 75). They have two effects: first, the effects of veridicality, or codifying effects that define what is to be known; second, the effects of jurisdiction, prescriptive effects that define what is to be done. Thus, regimens of practices define the specific logic for knowing and analyzing the objects of social programs (for instance, the population, the rich and the poor, the healthy, the sick), or for implementing them, in the name of theoretical and/or scientific knowledge. They also define the rules, procedures, and the relations between the means and ends of a social program.

We already understand that knowledge and power not only have ulterior motives and are uncertain, but that they reinforce each

other. Thus, according to Foucault (1997, p. 17),

no knowledge is formed without a system of communication, registration, accumulation, and displacement that is in itself a form of power, linked in its existence and its functioning to other forms of power. No power, on the other hand, is exercised without the extraction, appropriation, distribution, or restraint of a knowledge.

Consequently, the regimen of rationality and of practice of a social program should not be understood as something derived from universal truths or from absolute principles of reason. On the contrary, it should be recognized as the result of a detailed process of calculations, experiments, exchanges and reflections concerning the imperative of multiple and historical demands, problems and interests. Thus, the forces constituting a social program do not act in a blind way. They base their aspirations and strategic calculations on the possibilities that knowledge and power allow them to. That is the reason why a social program can be understood as the result of the interplay between general and historical forms of rationality, and of strategic choices that can be made in the theoretical and empirical domains of disciplines like economics, medicine, epidemiology, public health, biology, management, and public administration. It is also the result of complex and localized techniques and legal forms of government operating, for instance, as different ways of organizing systems of social security, of cost containment, of knowing and managing health risks, of providing health services, and so on. In any case, the assemblage among these gen-

eral domains and localized techniques of power and knowledge articulate the passions, desires, and interests of specific subjects, and respond to economic, social and political demands and difficulties. Thus, from this point of view, there is no way of conceiving a social plan as the work of a quasi-transcendental subject or consciousness. Power and knowledge relationships articulate the subjects (enquirers, planners, decision-makers, clients, affected, witnesses) with specific strategic positions within discourse (theories, themes) and visibilities (specific techniques and legal forms, institutions). Foucault (1972) calls these strategic positions the points of choice, or the room for maneuver, or the field of possible options for different world-views and interests. Thus, we have to think about a multiplicity of boundary judgments and their interconnections through relationships of force. It is perhaps in this way that Ulrich's notion of boundary judgment should be considered again.

If a social plan is the result of a regimen of rationality and the expression of a regimen of practices, then there is no possibility of thinking of it as the result of a universalizing, teleological and dialectical judgment. A social plan is inevitably bound to the pursuits of a dominant relation of forces. In these conditions, the questions to be asked from the perspective of a critical and pluralist evaluation have to take into account the effects of veridicality (truth) and jurisdiction (rights) of a social plan; that is, its effects concerning subjection (domination and objectivation). However, this form of evaluation should not overlook situations of oppression and exploitation (for instance,

economic exploitation or military oppression) because these situations can make it difficult to be critical of the effects of subjection of power and knowledge relations (see Foucault, 1982, 1997a).

The above argumentation causes new elements to emerge: 1) The subject appears as decentralized and historical. 2) The notion of judgment becomes plural, and boundary judgments, the expression of this plurality. 3) “Folding” emerges as a new notion connected to a new, ethical and political view about unfolding (to be explained shortly). 4) The systems concept is put at the service of a decentralized subject. 5) Dialogue displays a new character. 6) The polemical use of boundary judgments finds a new meaning in the idea of problematization. 7) Standards of improvement find a double expression as the goal of a decentralized subject and as the more general ethical and strategic aim of a relationship of forces. I will further develop some of these elements: folding, unfolding, and dialogue, among others.

### 3.3 *Unfolding and folding*

I have found that the three Kantian principles of reason and his three basic questions concerning the totality of relevant conditions can be re-interpreted from a non-transcendental perspective. Foucault’s work shows, for instance, that the three Kantian categories World, Man, and God, can be replaced by Knowledge, Power, and Self (see Deleuze, 1988). Furthermore, the three basic Kantian questions can be asked by a decentralized subject that problematizes the particular historical conditions governing knowledge, power, and the self. Thus, they can take the

form of “What do I know? What can I do? What am I?” or, more explicitly,

What can I know or see and articulate in such and such a condition of light and language? What can I do, what power can I claim and what resistances may I counter? What can I be, with what folds can I surround myself or how can I produce myself as a subject? (Deleuze, 1988, pp. 114-115).

In this way, the transcendental, Kantian universality can be superseded by a way of reasoning in which problems are historic, and the questioning itself also becomes historic and decentralized.

Unfolding has been used by Ulrich (1983) as the principle leading to the generalization of a “moral” knowledge. This principle takes for granted the existence of a quasi-transcendental consciousness (the expert), capable of generalization by taking into account the totality of relevant conditions (total relevant system). In that sense it could be used as a tool for universalizing truth and morality. But generalization cannot work in unlimited conditions of comprehensiveness. So, Ulrich’s unfolding process limits the “endless quest for comprehensiveness” (1983, p. 423) by taking into account “the true concern of all the stakeholders.” Thus, unfolding can constitute a new boundary judgment, insofar as it becomes a “wider” one, a judgment representing the concern of “all” the stakeholders. In reality it becomes the effect of an outside force (a “moral” knowledge) on another force or subject. In the best scenario, it becomes the ethical principle of a force or relationship of forces for governing others. In that sense it

might be said that unfolding can be used as a principle of self-regulation for the purpose of governing others.

However, it has to be remembered that when an individual or social group is “coded or recoded within a “moral” knowledge, and above all, becomes the stake in a power struggle and is diagrammatized” (Deleuze, 1988, p. 103), he/she/it becomes subjected. So, unfolding (a moral knowledge) also might be turned into a relationship of subjection (objectification and domination). Therefore, it might be said that unfolding can be interpreted in two ways: first, as Ulrich’s (1983, 1988) principle of the generalization of knowledge (the totality of relevant conditions for universalizing knowledge) against deceptiveness that, given the effects of power relations, can be turned into a source of subjection. Second, as a political and ethical principle of decentralized subjects<sup>10</sup> concerning their relation to others. In this latter sense it means openness and inclusion, but not from the perspective of the universality (comprehensiveness) of a “moral” knowledge, but from the perspective of a political and ethical attitude towards others resulting from our own ethical self-regulation and self-knowledge. This ethical self-regulation and self-knowledge is what Foucault has called the aesthetics of existence (Foucault, 1992b, 1997b, 1997c) and Deleuze has named folding (see Deleuze, 1988).

<sup>10</sup> According to Foucault (1982) “there are two meanings of the word subject: subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to” (p. 212).

Folding (to bend or bend back) or the principle of subjectivation, has been formulated as another source of truth, but a truth constituted from the perspective of a decentralized subject.<sup>11</sup> That is to say, it is the effect of the struggle against subjection (the effect of an outside force) and, at the same time, of our own self-knowledge and self-government (see Deleuze, 1988). This means that it can be explained as a relationship to oneself not mediated by an outside force.

According to Deleuze’s (1988) interpretation of Foucault’s philosophy, folding is the effect of self on self or of a force on itself in order to reject the outside, the negative effect of another force upon the self. Therefore, it can be understood as a relation of the subject (the self) with power and knowledge (as external forces) without being dependent on them. In folding, the mind (thought) affects itself in its struggle with power and knowledge. It is an act of reflection that leads the subject (or the subjects) to choose between what is good or bad for her/himself in a free and judicial way. In contrast with unfolding, in which the mind is affected by something else (an outside power and knowledge), folding implies an act of reflection concerning time, or memory (historical, political or cultural knowledge), for instance, the memory of the battles of a fighting subject. But it is a reflection in which thought is placed in the interstice (the gap) of the forms of knowl-

<sup>11</sup> Foucault (1992a) has said that “it is by pertaining to a field - to a decentralized position- that truth can be deciphered and deceptiveness and error denounced” (p. 61, my translation).

edge (visibilities and statements) and in the interstice of the relationships of power and knowledge. This reflection takes the form of an aesthetic judgment (aesthetic of existence) in which (by means of practices of self-government and self-knowledge) the subject resists the effects of subjection by external power and knowledge. Moreover, as a principle of self-regulation, it makes the subject capable of ethically governing him/herself and others (See Deleuze, 1988).

In these conditions, the relationship of unfolding and folding can be assumed to be a relationship between a dominant (general), centralized knowledge, and a plurality of local, decentralized ones. It is a relation between subjection (objectification and domination) and subjectivation (practices of liberty through self-knowledge and self-government). This relation should be seen as a battle, a struggle between forces. As such, it is a relation of resistance-struggle and composition-difference/variation (see Deleuze, 1988). It is neither a relation between enlightenment and alienation, as is supposed in the dialectical opposition between systems rationality (theory) and social rationality (practice), nor the expression of the hidden intentionality of the social actors, as is seen by phenomenology. It is the struggle between different “moral knowledge” or boundary judgments, but from the perspective of the opposition between a centralized knowledge and a plurality of decentralized, local knowledges.

In this relation, the subject, at the same time that s/he/it is constituted or folded

(bent) by forces coming from outside, is folded (bent back) by his/her/its own forces, (his/her/its moral and intellectual subjective capacities, his/her/its erudite and lay knowledge). However, under the perspective of building a common strategy of government, a multiplicity of subjects can ethically and politically unfold a social program (for instance, a health program ensuring equality before the means of health) up to the historical limits of their network of forces. To be sure, a new “domination” comes along as the result of a victorious battle, or of an “ethical consensus,” rather than as the outcome of a theoretical, scientific, or moral truth claiming universality. However, the difference may be that this new “domination” can be one in which a new ethic of government appears, one in which the other is not overcome. Subjectivation, a practice which reinforces, in the subject, her/his/its ability to resist the effects of subjection and which encourages the choice of a conception of the good, continues to exist. Thus, *this interplay of forces could be defined* as the continuous oscillation between unfolding and folding (bending and bending back).

We can, in this way, put the problem of evaluation in terms of subjected knowledge, the knowledge of particular subjects (or of a field of forces) struggling against subjection and promoting self-subjectivation. Thus, we can speak about improvement in another way: for instance, as the aspiration of a relation of forces and of a particular subject. What “is” and what “ought to be” might give form to the perspective of a decentralized subject and of a field of forces.

### ***3.4 Dialogue, polemical use of boundary judgment and problematization***

In Foucault's work, dialogue finds a new meaning: it becomes historical. It is no longer the dual, dialectical relationship between systems rationality (theory) and social rationality (practice) that finds its final synthesis in a unified "moral" knowledge that is installed as the symbol of a reconciliation of reason. It becomes the struggle among multiple rationalities, strategies or force relations. From Foucault's (1997e) perspective we learn that this is not a dialogue based on the search for a cogent argumentation seeking "to redeem," in a practicable way, "disputed validity claims of justification break-offs" (Ulrich, 1991, p. 110; 1983, p. 310). It is a dialogue between decentralized, political and historic subjects who speak from a position in a field of force, and who propose truths and rightnesses without claiming universality. They speak of a right that is their particular claimed or conquered right. And they speak of a truth that is a perspectival and strategic truth. Then, dialogue reflects a mobile, historical interplay between forces, which comprises both the theoretical and normative aspects of boundary judgments. It has a direction that supposes the possibility of a reciprocal influence (the power to affect) and openness (the chance of being affected). In that sense, dialogue should be understood as an "open-ended interplay between ourselves and others" (Falzon, 1998, p. 42). But this is an interplay in which the hope is not the emergence of a rational consensus, or the forging of an agreement as a general "moral" truth, but the reordering or reorganization of social reality by a victorious force, in a way that is

never finished, that could remain open even though it can be closed. I find Falzon's (1998) description of dialogue very enlightening. He (p. 49) sees it as characterized by an overall movement between order and innovation. On the one hand, forces aim to organize, direct and harness other forces, and in so doing extend what is possible, but at the same time, they can also suppress otherness, arrest dialogue and become closed to the new. On the other hand, there is the ever-renewed pressure from these other forces for a reopening of dialogue through which these other forces transgress imposed limits and challenge the existing order, a process which, whilst unsettling, and destabilizing, also introduces new forms of life and makes the renewal and revitalization of the social order possible.

The fact that this conception of dialogue expresses the struggles between different forces or rationalities in the course of a historical process, and the fact that it might imply states of closure and disclosure, makes me think about the connections between Ulrich's notion of the "polemical employment of boundary judgments" and Foucault's conception of problematization. Ulrich (1996, p. 172) has said that the "critical employment of boundary judgments" appears as "a fruitful and systematic possibility to pragmatize the Foucauldian notion of 'problematization'" and of basing critical systems thinking in a more historical and non-universalistic perspective.

The polemical employment of boundary judgments serves the purpose of identifying the expert's invalid propositions included in their boundary judgments when these

judgments become dogmatic or cynical “in specific contexts of application” (Ulrich, 1983, p. 305; 1991, p. 112; and 1996, pp. 170-171). It might help to differentiate between valid and invalid propositions (Ulrich, 1996) by unmasking the normative contents of boundary judgments when they limit reason, that is, when they deny “reason’s quest for comprehensiveness” (Ulrich, 1983, p. 305). Moreover, Ulrich affirms that the critical argument (boundary critique) against dogmatism should be rational even though it may be posed in ordinary language or in a subjective manner. He also states that it does not require any kind of theoretical justification from the affected, but rather their consent about the extension of the “moral” knowledge of boundary judgments. Thus, the polemical employment of boundary judgments does not assist the creation or the strengthening of new or alternative rationalities, nor the questioning of the pretensions of universality of theoretical knowledge. On the contrary, it does challenge false claims to universality, not to undermine universality *per se*, however, but to enable a “better” universal judgment.

On the other hand, problematization looks for neither objective truth nor comprehensiveness of reason. On the contrary, it implies the critical questioning of the fields of knowledge (true and false formulations), of power (specific technologies of power), and of the self (the relation to oneself and to others), while searching for solutions to problems with respect to their effects on the subjects while departing from their perspectival and strategic, historical and political interests (Foucault, 1984; Deleuze, 1988; Foucault, 1992a). This is what defines the

usefulness of problematization in the search for truth and in understanding the relationship between truth and totality, that is, as a characteristic of criticism.<sup>12</sup> Foucault’s conception of problematization opens up a new way into truth supported not in universality (comprehensiveness), but in revealing the relationships between games of truth and force from the perspective of a subject that is historical and political, and non-universal. He also uncovers a new way of looking at and of thinking about totality that is not grounded in pure principles of reason (comprehensiveness), but in how that historical and political subject relates to the relationship between power and knowledge. Thus, we have here two elements (a new way of searching for truth and a new way of thinking about totality) that, it seems to me, are very important from the viewpoint of helping to formulate a critical, pluralistic and systemic, methodological approach to evaluating social justice in health services.

From the perspective of truth, Foucault (1988c, p. 257) defines problematization as “the totality of discursive or non-discursive practices that introduce something into the play of true and false and constitutes it as an object for thought (whether in the form of moral reflection, scientific knowledge,

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<sup>12</sup> According to Foucault (1997b), criticism has the following characteristics: generality (recurrence in time); systematicity (in terms of how we are constituted as subjects by knowledge, power, and ourselves); homogeneity (practical systems or practices concerning ways of doing things [technology] and the freedom with which we act [strategy]); and what is at stake (the relation between the growth of individual capabilities and the effects of the growth of power relations).



political analysis, etc.).” From a historical perspective, it is defined as the analysis of problems that reoccur over time, and find their expression in the fields of knowledge (objects), power (rules of action), and the self (modes of relation to oneself) (Foucault, 1997b). Thus, problematization is a critical and historical analysis about already existent discourses and non-discursive formations, and the problems that concern the constitution (in both senses) of a historical and political subject. It allows us to see the way in which these problems have been posed historically, how different solutions have been derived from them, and how new problems arise and are set forth as problems and can be solved (1984, pp. 389-390). Hence, we may say that problematization can be used as a useful tool for thinking or reflecting, in a critical way, about actual problems insofar as it can illuminate and articulate the different possible solutions.

However, the critical intent of problematization has a different foundation from that of the polemical employment of boundary judgments. Whereas the latter bases problematization on reflecting upon limits (unfolding) from the perspective of the claim for the universality of a practical reason constrained, in a contingent way, by its normative content (see Ulrich, 1983, and 1996), *the former bases it* also on reflecting upon limits, but from the perspective of a concept of knowledge and power that is integral and decentralized, and through an analysis that meets the conditions of being historical and experimental at the same time. It is historical in the sense that it investigates “the events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognize ourselves

as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, saying” (Foucault, 1997b, p. 315). It is experimental in the sense that historical analysis is set in the testing of contemporary reality. That is, it correlates historical enquiry and practical attitude. It seems to be a historical and pragmatic analysis in so far as it seeks “to grasp the points where change is possible and desirable, and to determine the precise form this change should take” (Foucault, 1997b, p. 316).

Moreover, it might be said that in Foucault’s approach to criticism, reflecting upon the limits of knowledge and power necessarily implies a procedure of *unfolding in reverse*,<sup>13</sup> that is, to start by questioning in this way: “In that which is given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory, what place is occupied by that which is singular, contingent, and the product of arbitrary constraints?” (Foucault, 1988d, p. 45).<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, in Ulrich’s concept of the polemical employment of boundary judgments, the criticisms of citizens are “catalysts” of the reconciliation of

<sup>13</sup> I take this concept from Churchman (1979, p. 94) who, in answering the question “Who should plan?”, stated that experts play an important role in perceiving the larger system (the ideal of well-being), but they are not able to choose the life that others (every subject) want to lead. In this latter aspect everyone is an expert. He arrives to that conclusion by unfolding in reverse, that is, by unfolding from the “ought to” into the “is.”

<sup>14</sup> To unfold in reverse is a method that can apply to the games of truth of knowledge and power. Thus, Foucault (1997a) said that what he has tried to discover is “how the human subject fits into certain games of truth, whether they were truth games that take the form of a science or refer to a scientific model, or truth games such as those one may encounter in institutions or practices of control” (p. 281).

theoretical and practical reason through the effect of their assumptions in their dialectical synthesis. In Foucault's concept of problematization, the subject is thought of as an element of diversification by integrally relating knowledge, power, and the self in a decentralized way. This is the case due to the fact that in this perspective, the subject becomes a discourse, a historic-political discourse professing a truth, a right, and an ethical position, rather than a social actor divided between theory and practice and looking for her/his/its reunification in an expanded system. In Foucault's view the social actor (the historic-political subject) can also become the planner, the decision maker, the expert, or the citizen, because s/he/it is the relay of heterogeneous and bounded discursive and non-discursive formations.

In this sense, questions and their diverse solutions have a historic character in so far as they are posed and answered by decentralized subjects concerning the difficulties and uncertainties that reoccur over time from a domain of action —action on things, action on others, and action on ourselves— (Foucault, 1984). This would imply that closure (dogmatism) and disclosure might be thought of, not as exceptions, but as continual alternatives over time because of their connection with the almost random character of power relations, the uncertainty of knowledge, and the contingent character of the constitution of the subject. Ulrich's assertion that boundary judgments become dogmatic or cynical "in specific contexts of application" thus justified Jackson's (1991a) appreciation of the fact that Ulrich's systems thinking is only useful for coercive situations. Nevertheless, if the synthesis resulting from

the dialectic between systems rationality and practice becomes an expansion of boundary judgments (the truth of a dominant force relations), coercion should be thought of not as an exception, but as something enduring, as the enduring constraints of power and knowledge relations. In these conditions, disclosure could only be possible if a reconstructed notion of the polemical employment of boundary judgments (in this case, problematization) persuades us to think of those boundary judgments in terms of the relationships among the three domains of action: knowledge, power, and the self. Thus, disclosure can only be achieved through resisting and/or through the attitude that provides a basis for the possibility of an ethical dialogue or negotiation between contending rationalities: openness (see also Falzon, 1998).

### **Conclusion: The perspective of a critical, systemic and pluralist evaluation of health programs**

After analyzing Ulrich's concept of evaluation and offering a reinterpretation of his work from a Foucauldian perspective, I would like now to give an initial form to the elements of a critical and systemic, non-universal, methodological rationale for the evaluation of social justice in Colombian health services. To illustrate this perspective of analysis, I would like to start by quoting a paragraph showing how the Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia —ONIC— criticized, on 19 February 1999, the difficulties and effects of the present Colombian Health Social Security System on the Indian communities:

During the five years following the implementation of the Colombian Health Social Security System, Indian communities gained the benefits of Western Medicine. However, the age-old (millenary) Indian Health System and the organizing process of Indian communities have been affected because the imposed System has not yet taken into account their traditions, habits, and customs concerning their explanations of health and sickness, therapeutic procedures, use of medicinal plants and traditional practices, and the associated cultural elements of their concepts of well-being (ONIC, 1998 - My translation).

This paragraph shows that the struggles between competing narratives on health, health care and social justice are at the center of the debate in Colombian society. If we add these ethnic aspects to those respecting the multiplicity of discursive explanations and the influence of non-discursive formations concerning the problem of social justice, health, and medicine, it would be difficult to find a calm place of reconciliation for such diverse and contending positions. We have seen, for instance, that the Colombian model of health care and its dominant western medical knowledge are not the components of a pure science or of an ideal form of government, but of a historical order that has been interlocked, at the national and international levels, with the difficulties, demands, and endeavor of other economic, political, and social systems (see Chapter 2 of my PhD thesis). We already know, too, about the existence of divergent theoretical and political positions or doctrines concerning social justice. In spite of this, equality in relation to the means of health (the technologies of power

and the truths capable of carrying out health) could be introduced as the realization of a collective will, a right to be demanded or conquered by many social and political forces. However, this political possibility can inaugurate a new social reality only through a way of acting that takes into account the concrete historical conditions, rationalities and practices, for the organization of health care and the general improvement of public health. Moreover, we know that, as we see in the European historical experience, what could be required in order to accomplish the aspiration of equality could be influenced not only by the contingencies of what is meant by the “means of health” and the relationship between them, but also by the conflicting interpretations of what could be considered as equality, given the fact of human diversity (see, for instance, Sen, 1992).

So, to develop a methodological approach for a critical evaluation of social justice in health programs that embraces a commitment to plurality and equality, seems to be a difficult task. However, my Foucauldian interpretation of equality places this not only outside of the scope of universal theoretical, scientific, or moral interpretations, but beyond its reduction to the juridical notion of right, and endows it with the contingent character of forever-changeable historic and political rationalities and practices on the basis of the relationships between different domains of action (knowledge, power, and the self). In this order of ideas, my reinterpretation of Ulrich's approach to evaluation seems to be a plausible way for facilitating the development of this approach. I have emphasized above that the categories *unfolding in reverse*, *folding (bending back,*

*and to bend*), *and unfolding (revised)*, that is, problematization or critique, self-formation or the promotion of subjectivity, and political struggle and ethical dialogue, might help to open up an opportunity for analysis from the perspective of specific historic-political subjects, of the rationalities, practices, and social consequences of a health program, and to a kind of “micro-politics” of negotiation between contending discourses that could lead successfully to a critical and pluralistic evaluation of equality in health programs.

I am sympathetic to using Ulrich’s (1988) steps (context of justification and context of application) for evaluating a social plan. It seems to me that this division not only follows a similar scheme to those already considered in chapter 4 of my Ph.D. Thesis about the theory of social program evaluation (Shadish, Cook and Leviton, 1995), but also has the advantage of allowing for the inclusion in each one of its components (definition of the problem, proposals for solution, and the consequences of its implementation, respectively) of the core of Foucault’s concept concerning the critical analysis of the dominant rationalities and practices shaping a social program, their effects upon the subject, and the subject’s active self-constitution regarding the games of truth and technologies of power. We can organize this scheme by using the dimensions unfolding in reverse, folding, and political and ethical unfolding. Thus, the evaluation could be characterized as following these stages:

First, a stage of *unfolding in reverse* that analyzes the possible forms of exploitation and

oppression, and the effects of jurisdiction and veridiction (power and knowledge) of the regimens of rationality and practice of a health program upon a subject. This refers to the effects of domination on the subjects’ cultural traditions; the manifest expressions of economic exploitation; the ways in which the program constitutes the subjects, whether as subjects of rights, duties, economics or sciences in general; the relationships of dependence, control, marginalization, and participation among the subjects and the state, health authorities, experts, family, regions, the social security system and so on; the economic, political, and administrative techniques for the regulation of individuals and populations; how the subjects are objectified by and made dependents of the benefits of the program, and with respect to the program’s procedures and methods about what is to be known (for instance, the health situation, acknowledgement of the means of health; the population’s modes of totalization, individualization and analysis; forms of program evaluation and so on); furthermore, it refers to how the standards of improvement and the concrete social empirical effects of the programs relate to the subjects’ difficulties and to their expectations of improvement.

Second, a constitutive and creative stage of *folding* in which the subject (as truly decentralized) engages in thinking or reflecting systematically, historically, and experimentally, about the ways of bending back (resisting) the oppressive and subjecting, universalizing elements (formulations of truth and falsehood and the technologies of government, or the codifying and prescriptive effects) of a health program, or in changing and interpreting them in a way that suits their own circumstances

and interests (to bend) through practices of self-knowledge and self-government (subjectivation by self-formation). These practices should endow (self-empowerment and self-enlightenment) the subjects with the required autonomy (moral and intellectual capacity) to make strategic choices of their conception of good, and with the ability to think about and to choose their social, cultural, political, and ethical rules, in order to reinforce their self-creation and ethical relationship to others.

Third, a stage of *ethical and political unfolding* in which the subjects engage in a process of ethical dialogue, negotiation, ethical decision-making or open struggle with others about changing, renewing and revitalizing a health program to improve their health and the health of the population. This process can be conceived of as leading to the search for the historical and realizable conditions (technologies of power and games of truth and falsehood) of a pluralist concept of social justice as equality with significant influence upon the development of the subject's capability and autonomy with regards to satisfying their requirements concerning health. Thus, *diversity, autonomy and solidarity* can be the fundamental elements of a pluralist and egalitarian concept for the evaluation of social justice in health services.

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