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**ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF LIFE: AN APPROACH
FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF THE
REPRODUCTION/CHANGE THEORY**

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I. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

A prerequisite for the capacity of alternative ways of life (AWL) theory to adequately express the pluralism of AWL practice is its epistemological and axiological comprehensiveness but not eclecticism. Due to the important contributions of various scholars with different ideological and scientific backgrounds we have already a set of theoretical basic assumptions on AWL but not yet a real theory. In my view we need an *integrative dialectical system* of concepts about ways of life generally and about alternative ways of life especially — one which could embrace the real complexity of facts, values, and processes.

One possible way to realize such a scientific "construct" is to make more explicit the implicit assumptions already at work in the existing theory. Analysing some main contributions to the subject, I want to underline an approach pertaining to the *social reproduction versus social change* theory.

1. Monica Wemegah begins the paper "Alternative Ways of Life: A Theoretical Approach" with the following synthetical idea:

"Where have we gone wrong — and what can we do about it?" are the two central interrogations around which evolves the current worldwide debate on Another Development. Although the theme of Alternative Ways of Life (AWL) relates essentially to the second of these two questions, the issue of Alternative Life Styles, as it is often called, cannot be properly understood unless it is discussed with a minimum reference to "what has gone wrong" with the prevailing, dominant way of life in our societies.¹

Obviously, AWL are alternative to something, i.e., to dominant ways of life (SWL): it is "one way . . . of challenging the prevailing economic, social and political structures."² Implicitly, the author defines AWL

as a way of changing (non-reproducing) the DWL.

2. Andrzej Sicinski, in the paper "Dominant and Alternative Life Styles in Poland: An Outline," writes:

The label "alternative ways of life" could mean, at least, two different kinds of reflection. The first would be an analysis of differences and similarities *existing* between ways of life of groups and strata in a society, and between societies or cultures. In the second sense, we could discuss possibilities of changes and modifications of existing ways of life, or possibilities to create *new*, not yet existing, ways of life. And exactly the second meaning we have in mind in this report.³

The reproduction versus change theoretical orientation becomes evident.

3. Ian Miles, in the paper "Notes on Typologies of Alternative Ways of Life," stresses:

We would argue that ways of life are alternative to the extent that they are non-reproductive — or even counter-reproductive of the DWL. . . . For not only are AWL non-reproductive of the DWL. They should also be at least minimally self-reproductive in order to qualify as ways of life at all.⁴

The reproduction versus social change approach is not only obvious but *explicit*.

4. Last, but not least, we may find the theoretical grounds of such an approach in Johan Galtung's *The True Worlds*, where, developing a previous, similar thesis (see, for instance, chapter III in *Methodology and Ideology*), the author underlines the "self-transcending nature of culture as well as structure," and the fact that "human society is capable of considerable discontinuity with the past," and writes:

If man and society were closed systems, the forms of human life would not have changed so much through history. Each generation would have unfolded itself, but one generation would not differ from the next. Human society would have resembled termite society, the implementation of an immutable imprint to be carried out in the same way from one generation to the next. Human beings are different. We are capable of changing our program, of giving new directions to our lives, individually as well as collectively. We are capable of developing new values, in the form of explicit goals, or implicit interests. We are even capable, to a large extent, of changing the "laws" of our change.⁵

Here, the implicit concept of AWL as opposed to DWL is explicitly considered in the framework of a reproduction/change theory centred on individual and societal *self-transcending* nature.

I do not assume that we may find the same theory of reproduction/change processes underlying all these approaches, or the same degree of acceptance of this theory by the mentioned authors. I think only that these (and many other) contributions offer some rationale for considering that one main point of the AWL problématique is *the understanding of dominant and alternative ways of life from the viewpoint of the reproduction/change theory*.

II. WAY OF LIFE: A TENTATIVE GLOBAL MODEL

But, before explaining our interpretation of AWL from the point of view of the reproduction/change theory, we have, even in a tentative approach, to design from the same point of view a global model for ways of life in general.

We have of course different approaches to the issue. Among them is Johan Galtung's inspiring idea that "a way of life is a question of what to do when and where and how and with whom and why,"⁶ and the implications of this statement spelled out by Monica Wemegah, who thinks that the above questions can be related to a specific variable or dimension that helps to define the concept "way of life": *praxis* (what), *time* (when), *geographical space* (where), *method* (how), *social space* (with whom), and *finality* (why);⁷ or Sicinski's work; or many other authors' tentatives.

Our own interest is to propose an integrative model (structural and dynamic), mainly to stress the importance of one specific concept, i.e., *habitus* in the perspective of an approach from the reproduction/change process theory. In this light, let us consider figure 1.

Structural Model

From the bottom to the top of the figure we can see the following component parts of the way of life:

- the *social structure* with its different levels: inner, micro, meso, macro, regional, global, outer;
- the *life opportunities* (material, inter-personal, spiritual).

Then, separated in three columns, come some of the main components

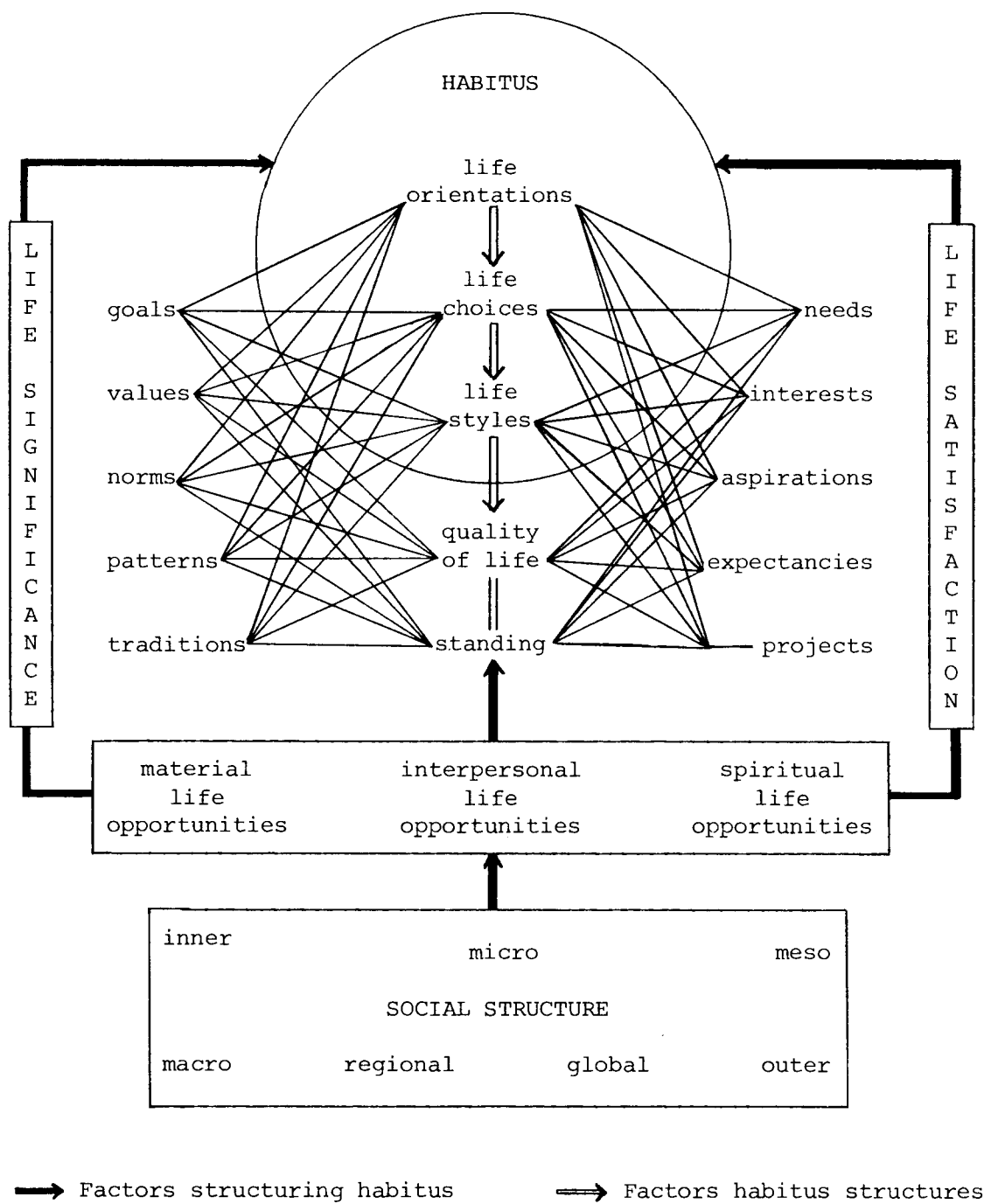


FIG. 1. Way of Life (Tentative Global Model)

of the way of life itself:

- left: *life significance* indicators as goals, values, norms, patterns, traditions;
- centre: *direct way of life* indicators - standing, quality of life,

life styles, life choices, life orientations;
– right: *life satisfaction* indicators – needs, interests, aspirations,
expectations, projects.

Finally, we include life orientations, choices, and styles in the
global concept of *habitus* (see below).

Dynamic Model

The main determinant of an actual way of life is the social structure
(considered at its different levels which themselves determine one
another), which obviously includes social and production relations,
capital and power, economics, level of development, culture and
cosmology, and so on. But this is an intermediate determination,
because the way of life depends more directly on some concrete conditions
which we call material, interpersonal, and spiritual or cultural life
opportunities.

Thus the way of life of a specific social actor (person or group) is
determined *ultimately* by the social structure but only *mediately* by
the life opportunities specific to time, place, and actor.

But there is no total or univocal determination of this kind: we may
and do have really different ways of life corresponding to the same
social structure and/or life opportunities, or we may and do find really
the same or very similar way of life patterns corresponding to
different social structures and/or life opportunities. That happens
for at least two main reasons: (a) the ways of life are not only post-
determined but also *ante-determined* (see below concerning *teleonomical
determinism* and *anticipatory socialization*), and (b), if we analyse
the dynamics of the ways of life in emergence and spreading off from
the viewpoint of the reproduction/change theory, we also have to take
into account the influence of the *habitus* (see below).

Let us continue to examine the figure: the socio-structural and life
opportunities ultimately determine the standing (objective level of
living), which represents the material bases of a certain quality of

life. In accordance with other scholars⁸ we do not define the quality of life as the mechanical shape of the life standing: the quality of life is at the same time both material and non-material, and it depends not only on what is possible but on what is desired; that is the reason for which the figure points to the *double determination* of the quality of life by the *standing* (and mediately by the life opportunities and the social structure) but also (and we would say mainly) by the *life style*, which represents a chosen alternative following the life orientations.

Figure 1 points also to two main chains of determinants of life orientations, choices, and styles: (a) *life significance*, in which we include goals, values, norms, patterns, and traditions, and (b) *life satisfaction*, in which we include needs,⁹ interests, aspirations, expectancies, and projects.

Many other analyses of the dynamics of the way of life stress the fact that a specific way of life, to which specific quality of life and style of life correspond, is determined not only by the objective conditions but also by the complex influences of, on the one hand, the indicators of life significance and, on the other hand, the indicators of life satisfaction.

It seems that the crucial element is the one included in the moment of *life choices*:¹⁰ the social (individual and/or group) actor, existing under some specific structural conditions, has a limited but real possibility of choice in his or her specific style of living; this freedom of choice may be conscious or not, but in any case it determines the specific answer that any social actor gives to the existing opportunities and value orientations. Thus, the life choices are not fatalistically predetermined for all and for always; they may be and are rather soon the result of a conscious process of self-determining his or her own way of life in accordance or in contrast with the dominant way of life. Such a process includes the contradictory relationship between the objective structural conditions and, on the one hand, life significance elements and, on the other hand, life

satisfaction elements; in other words, the social actor's life choices (LC) are the result of the complex relations between the structural objective opportunities (SOO), life significance factors (LSF), and life satisfaction factors (lsf), expressed by the following equation:

$$LC = SOO \times LSF \times lsf$$

From the point of view of the reproduction/change theory it becomes obvious that we may find the determinants for a status quo or for a transcendence of the existing way of life in every factor considered: the structural conditions, the life significance elements, and the life satisfaction factors, separately or simultaneously, are responsible for the reproduction by the social actor of the existing way of life or, on the contrary, for the production of a new way of life, alternative to the dominant or other existing ways of life.

At this moment of our approach we have to explain more fully the concept of *habitus* and its specific place in the tentative global model of the way of life system of concepts.

III. HABITUS AND THE PROCESS OF REPRODUCTION/CHANGE OF THE WAY OF LIFE

Without attempting to realize here an historical overview of this issue, I would like to remember here the important place of this concept in Aristotelian theory. In his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle defines habitus as a *stable disposition* contrasting with transient dispositions or accidents.¹¹ But in his ethical treatise we find a more substantial definition of the concept; as is well known, in Aristotle's view virtue may be understood as the result of intelligence (and thus it can be taught and learned) or as the result of customs (mores). Because virtue is generated by habits, it is named ethics:

Puisque la vertu peut être envisagée sous deux points de vue: comme résultat de l'intelligence, et comme produit des moeurs; on voit que sous le premier rapport, elle peut le plus souvent être enseignée . . . mais, sous le second rapport, elle naît de l'*habitude*, et c'est de là que lui vient son nom de *morale*.¹²

Habitus could then be seen as defining essential behaviours: a relatively stable, settled tendency or practice, a customary mode of action, resulting from conformity to norms and rules learned in the practical social existence of people. As the philosopher stresses, it is not the direct product of nature, nor its contrary: instead, it is the result of the social praxis.

Centuries of development in the social sciences gave rise to many new enlightenments on the concept: it characterizes in the field of psychology the interest in the study of habits as learned settled answers for the individual fulfilling a specific role in human behaviour; in those of social psychology, sociology, and anthropology, the interest in the study of customs as settled modes of action of

collectivities produced by historical material and cultural conditions and themselves influencing social development. Most of these theories stress the homeostatic role of habits in individual or group behaviour based on unconscious, spontaneous mechanisms located in the "deeper self" (at the individual level) or in the "collective unconsciousness" (at the social level); all these positions have as a common denominator the underlining of the *static* and even *conservative* character of the individual and social habitus and of its functional role in the maintenance (and reproduction) of the existing structures and of their behaviour in accordance mainly with past orientations such as traditions, customs, internalized values, modes of action, and so on; they generally reject the possibility of changing habitus and of a transcending function of the latter.

Newer contributions to the issue try to modify such a position; we will quote in this respect the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu: attempting to build an "anti-theoretical theory of practice" he develops a comprehensive and systematic approach on habitus issues. This is his definition:

Pour échapper au *réalisme de la structure* qui hypostasie des systèmes de relations objectives en les convertissant en totalités déjà constituées en dehors de l'histoire de l'individu et de l'histoire du groupe, il faut et il suffit d'aller de l'*opus operatum* au *modus operandi*, de la régularité statistique ou de la structure algébrique au principe de production de cet ordre observé et de construire la théorie de la pratique ou, plus exactement, du mode de génération des pratiques, qui est la condition de la construction d'une science expérimentale *de la dialectique de l'intériorité et de l'extériorité*, c'est-à-dire de *l'intériorisation de l'extériorité* et de *l'extériorisation de l'intériorité*: les structures qui sont constitutives d'un type particulier d'environnement (e.g. les conditions matérielles d'existence caractéristiques d'une condition de classe) et qui peuvent être saisies empiriquement sous la forme de régularités associées à un environnement socialement structuré, produisent des *habitus*, systèmes de *dispositions* durables, structures structurées prédisposées à fonctionner comme structures structurantes, c'est-à-dire en tant que principe de génération et de structuration de pratiques et de représentations qui peuvent être objectivement "réglées" et "régulières" sans être en rien le produit de l'obéissance à des règles, objectivement adaptées à leur but sans supposer la visée consciente des fins et la maîtrise expresse des

opérations nécessaires pour les atteindre, et, étant tout cela, collectivement orchestrées sans être le produit de l'action organisatrice d'un chef d'orchestre.¹³

Such a long quotation is necessary partly in order to give a general idea about the specific and substantive contribution of the author to the theory of practice (see also the development of habitus theory in the context of the empirical analysis of life styles in his book *La distinction*¹⁴) but mainly to incorporate his definition of habitus in our context. Limiting myself to this issue I stress that for Bourdieu habitus continues to have a mainly reproductive function. Another quotation seems to be necessary here:

Lors même qu'elles apparaissent comme déterminées par le futur, c'est-à-dire par les fins explicites et explicitement posées d'un projet ou d'un plan, les pratiques que produit l'habitus en tant que principe générateur de stratégies permettant de faire face à des situations imprévues et sans cesse renouvelées, sont déterminées par l'anticipation implicite de leur conséquences, c'est-à-dire par les conditions passées de la production de leur principe de production, en sorte qu'elles tendent toujours à reproduire les structures objectives dont elles sont en dernière analyse le produit.¹⁵

Only in his more recent book, *Le sens pratique*, do we find an attempt to analyse the "limited and conditional freedom" of habitus, giving it the possibility to be more than a mere mechanical reproduction of the initial imprinting (*conditionnement initial*); but he stresses once more that, even considered from the point of view of this "limited and conditional freedom," habitus cannot have a real innovative role.¹⁶

In my own view habitus is a *complex element of the social praxis characterized as society as a whole by the tensions, contradictions, and conflicts between past, present, and future*. Including (see figure 1) life orientations, choices, and styles, habitus is *one of the main social fields of the reproduction/change processes*. This — not habitus as such but some specific habitus, and certain life orientations, choices, and styles — is reproductive, expressing the continuity and even the inertia of value orientations and behaviours; but habitus is a social field in which there also occurs the emergence of new values and behaviours in accordance with new needs, interests, aspirations, projects

and ideals, innovative life orientations, choices, and styles different from and/or opposite to the dominant and/or existing ones.

It is obvious that the way of life, like any social fact, has to be understood not only as a *reproductive* but, at the same time, as a change process, not only as *continuity* but also as *discontinuity*, not only as *maintenance* but as *innovation*. Generally, public opinion and social scientists underline only the static, conservative, continuity aspect and avoid the dynamic, innovative one. That is also the case for the understanding of styles of living and more generally of *habitus*. I think there are two reasons for this: (a) the predominance, in past and present societies and cultures, of mainly reproductive ways and styles of life; and (b) a specific theoretical understanding of the socialization process and of social determinism generally.

On the first point it is quite clear that such a fact should not blur the emergence of new ways and styles of living (and I have to add that, due to the GPID project, the reality and importance of alternative ways of life in contemporary societies are becoming more and more recognized).

Let us say a few more words on the second point. In some previous papers¹⁷ I have stressed the importance, from a Marxist, non-dogmatic approach to social processes, of re-elaborating both social determinism theory and socialization theory. Besides the classical causal model, new theories on social determinism are in different ways recognizing what we may call *teleonomical* determinism: human action is determined not only by *past* pressures but also by *future* demands; not only by established rules and norms but by desirable values and ideals; not only by traditional constraints but by innovative challenges. The most specific trait of the human person is his or her possibility to build a new future diverse from and superior to the past and the present and to conduct his or her behaviour in such a way as to make a real contribution to such a permanent social change.

We can elaborate no further on the subject here; but it seems to me that this is quite enough to explain what should, in my opinion, be the

relationship between the teleonomical approach to social determinism, anticipatory socialization, and a new understanding of the way of life reproduction/change processes focused on the habitus concept.

If we accept the importance of the *ex ante* explanation (teleonomic determinism) as complementary to the *ex post* explanation (classical determinism), we may easily recognize that socialization could and should be understood not only in a reproductive way (as the internalization of already established norms and socially approved values) but also in a new way, as *anticipatory socialization*, i.e., the internalization of the future role performance prerequisites and the moulding of the capacities, skills, and commitments necessary for adapting or creating new social realities and changing one's own personality in accordance with them.¹⁸

In this way we can understand social consciousness and behaviour not only as *structured* but also as *structuring* social reality, and habitus not only as *reproductive* but also as *innovative*. Of course, as our tentative global model (see figure 1) shows, habitus — i.e., life orientations, choices, and styles — is determined by the existing social structure and material, interpersonal, and spiritual opportunities, and standing is determined by the needs, interests, values, norms, and traditions; and that is of course the result of the reproduction of the dominant value and normative orientations through the socialization process which aims at the internalization of the socially approved and required pattern of the dominant way of life. But many theoretical insights and pieces of empirical research point out that the habitus is a complex set of different and even contradictory value orientations and behaviours and life orientations, choices, and styles, the field of a permanent conflict between new and old way of life patterns. Due to an *ex post* determination, some types of behaviour characteristic of a certain habitus express the value and normative orientations of the dominant way of life internalized in the subjects' consciousness and practice during previous learning and social experience; but besides such reproductive behaviours habitus includes the germs of new types of value and normative patterns of life, emergent behaviours having an *ex*

ante determination which, during the process, become incorporated into new styles of living (alternative to the dominant ones) and structure themselves in new customs and rules of life. Although these new behaviours may be and generally are more isolated, marginal, non-recognized, or even avoided by the existing system, they have a historical importance because their development and spread assures the genesis of one or more different, new ways of life, alternative to the previous one(s).

Of course, social practice is much more complex, and if we want to be more accurate we have to go deeper in this analysis. Let us examine briefly the following relationship between the structural aspect (dominant versus alternative) and the dynamic aspect (reproduction versus change) of the way of life:

		STRUCTURE	
		dominant	versus
PROCESS	reproduction	A reproduction of the dominant way of life	C reproduction of the alternative way of life
	versus	B change of the dominant way of life	D change of the alternative way of life
	change		

FIG. 2. Way of Life: Structural and Dynamic Aspects

Because the conditions under which we live and think are generally those of the dominance of a specific way of life, we are much more accustomed to type A being the predominant relationship between structure and process: it is easy to understand (though not always to legitimate) that the dominant way of life has the tendency (and generally the power and the means) to reproduce itself; because of the deep changes occurring in modern societies and the contradictions that the dominant way of life has to face, we are becoming more and more

aware of type B, which describes the AWL, or more exactly the genesis of a new way of life in the process of change of the dominant one; type C has already been analysed theoretically (see for instance Ian Miles's concept of the minimal "self-reproductive" characteristic of AWL), but there is little practical experience in this matter, and conclusions are missing about how and how much the alternative way of life could and should be self-reproductive; perhaps this is one (theoretical) explanation why we do not up to now have an awareness of type D or its problématique, i.e., the question whether any AWL has to become, sooner or later, a SWL and then be reproduced and/or changed as such or whether it is necessary to find a kind of *permanent alternative way of life* to the alternative way of life already in existence. Monica Wemegah has already given an answer:

In fact, there is no question of wanting to substitute one — possible ideal — alternative way to the prevailing life style and thus create one new — be it alternative — dominant way of life. Quite to the contrary, AWL is essentially a pluralistic concept pointing to a multitude of possible and/or desirable ways of life susceptible to bring about a more just, participatory and sustainable society.¹⁹

It seems that such an analysis (and there are others to be done later) gives fruitful insights into the issue and mainly stresses the importance of a specific, concrete, historical, social, and cultural understanding of the habitus in all four types. To conclude, let me describe, in a special framework, four types of habitus:

- A. Predominance of dominant, traditional life orientations, life choices, and life styles; reproductive function with regard to DWL and the established system generally.
- B. Genesis of alternative, innovative life orientations, life choices, and life styles challenging and opposing the dominant ones; changing function with regard to DWL and the existing society in general.
- C. Predominance of alternative, innovative life orientations, life choices, and life styles as recognized and legitimized by the system with possible ritualization and transformation in a new dominant way of life or with possible continual change; self-reproductive function of conservative or progressive character.

D. Genesis of new alternative orientations, choices, and styles of life different from the preceding alternative way of life but in full discontinuity if type C1 follows the first way (ritualization and transformation in new DWL) or in some continuity if habitus type C2 follows the second way; changing function of antagonistic (C1) or non-antagonistic (C2) character with regard to former way of life.

This is, obviously, an abstract model which has to be adapted to the real diversity of time and space and social, economical, political, and cultural realities. But it seems (to me at least) that it gives a certain input to the necessary common work to be continued and improved with the aim of constructing an integrative dialectical system of concepts about ways of life generally and about alternative ways of life especially. In order to study the complex structures and processes of the way of life from the point of view of the reproduction/change theory, I think we have to further develop theoretical and empirical research on habitus and its relationship with DWL and AWL.

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