APPLIED PHRONESIS

The term "phronetic social science" was coined in *Making Social Science Matter* (Flyvbjerg 2001). However, as pointed out in that volume and by Schram (2006), phronetic social science existed well before this particular articulation of the concept, but it was just not organized, recognized, or named as such. Rather, it occurred here and there as scholars had adopted phronesis-like methods for their own purposes. The present title is the first organized volume of empirical-practical work in phronetic social science. Before *Making Social Science Matter*, phronesis, as a critical term of Aristotelian philosophy, had been theorized and its continuing importance as a key concept in Western thought had been convincingly argued by distinguished philosophers like Hans Georg Gadamer, Hannah Arendt, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Richard J. Bernstein, among others. But no one had developed the theory and philosophy of phronesis into a practical methodology that could be applied by researchers interested in actually practicing a phronetic social science. *Making Social Science Matter* developed such a methodology. Its implications were discussed and developed further in *Making Political Science Matter* (Schram and Caterino 2006). After these two theoretical-methodological contributions, it was evident that an important next step in demonstrating the usefulness of phronetic social science would be to illustrate, with concrete examples, how applied phronesis works in practical, empirical social science research. The contributions on applied phronesis contained in the present volume make clear that this next step has now been taken.

We use the term "applied" in this book with some reluctance and in a different meaning than is usual in the natural and social sciences, where it typically means applying theory that has been developed a priori. The conventional view holds that theory precedes action in a top-down movement where one
arrives at the right action by first choosing the right theory and then applying that theory properly to the practical question at hand, for example, like engineers applying the laws of physics to construct a bridge. Phronetic social scientists are skeptical of this view, at least as it pertains to social and political action, as such action requires a knowledge of context that is simply not accessible through theory alone. In phronetic social science, "applied" means thinking about practice and action with a point of departure not in top-down, decontextualized theory and rules but in "bottom-up" contextual and action-oriented knowledge, teased out from the context and actions under study by asking and answering the value-rational questions that stand at the core of phronetic social science (Schram 1995). What is applied is not theory but a philosophy of engagement that recognizes that phronesis is a skill and that having phronesis is iteratively dependent on practicing phronesis, as emphasized by Frank in Chapter 4.

Phronetic social scientists are also skeptical of the type of expert-based, social engineering that typically follows from the practice-as-applied-theory point of view. Phronetic social scientists see such social engineering as not only problematic but as dangerous, since historically it has led to massive human suffering, especially when applied to large-scale social phenomena and ignoring what Scott (1998) calls métis – local, practical knowledge. Instead of relying on social engineering and experts for social action, phronetic social scientists rely on public deliberation and the public sphere, not because these setups are perfect, but because they are the best we have for collective decision making. From a phronetic perspective, social science works best not when it tries to give us the unrealizable perfection of expert knowledge, such as that which comes from abstract models, but instead when it strives for the "adequation" of what works for any collective as it struggles to decide things for itself. In the public sphere, expert testimony – including the research results of phronetic social scientists – is explicitly seen as only one voice among many and as being balanced by other voices and other knowledge in deliberating about and acting on the specific social and political issues at hand.

The phronetic conception of social research returns social science to society and its politics, to concern itself with society's improvement and to enter into public dialogue and praxis, as observed by Schatzki (2006: 133). Each of the eight case studies presented above is an example of how this return to praxis may be carried out in actual research. Each study contains the type of grounded, contextual knowledge that may be used for making better decisions in the policy areas concerned, where "better" is defined as being more inclusive of values and groups that are legitimate and pertinent to the issues at hand, but that may have been marginalized by other more powerful values and groups, had the former not achieved a voice through phronetic research.
Simmons writes in Chapter 12 above, "What is not as clear is the extent to which [Making Social Science Matter] is calling on social scientists to get involved and do politics in lieu of merely studying politics ... To what extent is Flyvbjerg urging social scientists to be social and political beings, to strive to be, in Bourdieu’s terms, virtuoso social actors?" (Emphasis in original). Simmons rightly points out that for Aristotle phronesis as an intellectual virtue is not obtained by stepping back and contemplating reality from an objective distance, but comes from getting one’s hands dirty by actively confronting the problems of the day. Aristotle's definition of phronesis as "reason capable of action" means that phronetic research results ("reason") are results only to the extent they have an impact on practice ("action"). Reason is made capable of action by effectively having reason enter practice, for instance via the work on "tension points" described below. The unequivocal answer to Simmons's question is therefore that the phronetic call to social scientists is exactly to become virtuoso social actors in their chosen field of study and do politics with their research, as Bourdieu recommended and himself did, instead of writing yet another paper or book with little or no practical import. Phronetic social science challenges the current metric approach of measuring the impact of academic work by its citations in other academic work. Phronetic social science offers a way forward by showing that a more important type of impact exists for social science, namely its impact on policy and practice. The case studies above demonstrate in detail how such impact may be achieved in practical phronetic research.

WHAT THE CASE STUDIES SHOW
Each case study is summarized in Chapter 1 and will not be further summarized here. Instead we observe that seen as a whole the case studies show that:

- Claims made by theoreticians of phronetic social science that applied phronetic research is well-suited for effectively influencing policy and practice are verified by the case studies.

- Phronetic research and phronetic impact are replicable across different problematics, geographies, and time periods. If properly adapted to context the phronetic approach may therefore be used across the social sciences, in different countries, and covering both contemporary and historical studies.

- Phronetic social science scales well. It is suitable both for the type of community study reported in Chapter 8 by Sandercock and Attili on racism in rural Canada and for more global concerns like those covered in Chapter 10 by Olsen, Payne, and Reiter in their worldwide
study of transitional justice in emerging democracies. The focus on power in phronetic research also requires a scaling up from local micropractices to the structural level, as pointed out by Eubanks in Chapter 11.

- Local problems have global import, when seen through the lens of phronetic social science, be they the fight over London Heathrow's third runway as analyzed by Griggs and Howarth in Chapter 9 that pinpoints a growing global concern over economic growth versus the environment, or the design of a new curriculum for social justice and human rights at Arizona State University as described by Simmons in Chapter 12 that deals with the problem of how elitist university education may help empower disadvantaged groups.

- Phronetic research adds a "bottom up" perspective that can tilt a policy process most often dominated by experts toward alternative policy responses that are neglected, as described by Schram, Shdaimah, and Stahl in Chapter 7 about the development of the Philadelphia Housing Trust Fund and an unexpected focus on low-income home repair.

- In societies governed by less than democratic institutions, phronesis is a way to make empirical research subversive in producing "inconvenient" truths that challenge existing power relations as seen in Chapter 3 by Landman on narrative analysis and Chapter 12 by Simmons on teaching social justice, in particular the attention to the complexities of the US-Mexican border.

- Problematization of "tension points" is emerging from the case studies as a particularly important theme for phronetic research, as a focus on tension points appears to be especially effective in generating the type of change in policy and practice that is the hallmark of phronetic social science. We therefore conclude the book by taking a closer look at what tension points are and how researchers may work with them in phronetic social science.

TENSION POINTS IN PHRONETIC SOCIAL SCIENCE
The last finding is perhaps the most politically suggestive of our survey of current phronetic research projects. In phronetic research, tension points are power relations that are particularly susceptible to problematization and thus to change, because they are fraught with dubious practices, contestable knowledge, and potential conflict. Thus even a small challenge – like problematization from scholars – may tip the scales and trigger change in a tension point. It is interesting to note that each of the case
studies presented above identifies important tension points and problematizes them in attempts to influence social and political action. The focus on tension points was not orchestrated by the editors of the book or otherwise coordinated. We take this to mean that such a focus is intrinsic to applied phronetic social science. We explain the focus on tension points by the attention paid by phronetic researchers to issues of power and especially researchers' commitment to challenge the abuse of power.

Specifically, the following tension points were identified by the eight case studies:

- **Flyvbjerg**: More and larger megaprojects are being built versus the poor performance of projects.
- **Schram, Shdaimah, and Stahl**: The American homeownership dream versus homeownership reality for low-income owners.
- **Sandercock and Attili**: First Nations (indigenous) Canadians versus modern settler society.
- **Griggs and Howarth**: Economic growth versus environmental protection in aviation.
- **Olsen, Payne, and Reiter**: Transitional justice versus stability in emerging democracies.
- **Eubanks**: Oppressive versus liberating uses of information technology for poor, working-class women.
- **Simmons**: Elite university education versus the needs of marginalized communities.
- **Basu**: How techniques of social policy generate the very problems they were designed to solve.

As examples of dubious practices found in these tension points, consider Flyvbjerg's uncovering of the routine use of deceptive cost-benefit analyses, with falsely inflated benefits and falsely deflated costs, used to get megaprojects approved and funded (Chapter 6); or the attempt by the UK government to launch the concept "sustainable aviation" – a godsend of an oxymoron for phronetic problematization – to justify airport expansions, as recounted by Griggs and Howarth (Chapter 9); or the overselling by the US federal government of the homeownership dream to low-income households, problematized by the research project in which Shdaimah and Stahl participated long before society at large caught on to just how destabilizing this policy would turn out to be for the global economy when the housing bubble burst in 2007-08 and the dream resurfaced as a nightmare of bad debt and foreclosures (Chapter 7).

As mentioned by Flyvbjerg in Chapter 6, problematizing tension points may be compared to hitting a rock with a hammer. If you hit the rock at random it seems unbreakable, even if you hit it hard. If you strategically hit the rock at the small, near-invisible fault lines that most rocks have, the rock will fracture, even if you hit it gently. Tension points are the fault lines that phronetic researchers seek out;
that's where researchers hit existing practices to make them come apart and create space for new and better ones, where "better" is defined by the values of phronetic researchers and their reference groups (see below). Michel Foucault was a master at identifying and problematizing tension points, most notably in psychiatry, prisons, and sexuality, but also in social welfare, architecture, and urban planning. Foucault said the purpose of problematizing the dubious social and political practices found in tension points is:

"precisely to bring it about that practitioners no longer know what to do, so that the acts, gestures, discourses that up until then had seemed to go without saying become problematic, difficult, dangerous" (Michel Foucault quoted in Miller 1993: 235).

In phronetic social science, and in the case studies above, the following three-step procedure is involved in working with tension points. For their specific field of interest, researchers strive to:

1. Actively identify dubious practices within policy and social action;
2. Undermine these practices through problematization;
3. Constructively help develop new and better practices.

As an example, consider the case study by Sandercock and Attili in Chapter 8. Here tension, problematization, and action are evident already in the felicitous title of their study, "Unsettling a Settler Society." The dubious practice identified by the authors is the treatment of First Nations (indigenous) Canadians by non-native Canadians, the latter constituting modern settler society. The case study kicks off by describing an incident in 2000, when the municipality of Burns Lake shut off water and sewer services to a local First Nations reservation as part of a dispute over land and taxation. The authors show that such attempts by settler society at disenfranchising and disciplining First Nations is nothing new, it has been going on for almost two centuries of colonization and is happening in many places in Canada. It is mainly about expropriating land and it effectively undercuts the lives of First Nations and violates their human rights. The authors do not mince words when they describe settler practices as "blatant racism" and the outcome of such practices as "pure cultural genocide." They then up the ante – and increase tension in an already highly tense tension point – by pointing out that Canada has a first-rate record of defending human rights abroad, but is evidently not very good at doing so at home for its own First Nations. We might add that the dubious practices pointed to by Sandercock and Attili are pertinent not only to Canada, but also to the USA, Australia, Brazil, Denmark (Greenland), China (Tibet), and other societies that marginalize and violate the rights of indigenous people.
Next – after having identified and documented the dubious practices of settler society – Sandercock and Attili decided to try and undermine these practices through problematization. They resolved to present their research as a "story which would hopefully unsettle the settler society." For impact, their chosen medium was film used as digital ethnography, in addition to more conventional scholarly media like their chapter in the present book. The first showing of their film was for audiences at Burns Lake. The result was exactly as described by Foucault above, that "the acts, gestures, discourses that up until then [the showing of the film] had seemed to go without saying became problematic, difficult, dangerous." The non-native mayor of Burns Lake described the film as "difficult to watch" but "important." One of the native chiefs said that the film "is not sugar coated [but] we need a film like this to make the truth plain to see." After the practices of settler society were exposed on the silver screen for all to see, it became clear that such practices could not be justified in 21st Century Canada. The film triggered the mayor to acknowledge past mistakes and there was general agreement that the community now had to move on to a different modus operandi.

Third, and finally, Sandercock and Attili explicitly saw it as part of their research to help develop new and better practices constructively to replace the dubious ones uncovered through problematization. As phronetic researchers, they were not satisfied with simply identifying problems and analyzing them; they also wanted to help develop solutions and become "actors in the flow of history, rather than bystanders," as they put it. The authors are explicit that it was tempting, and would have been easier, to make a pure advocacy film on behalf of First Nations, given the scale of historic injustices. But they felt that such a film might exacerbate the existing polarization, which was the last thing Burns Lake needed. Instead, what was required was "healing across the cultural divide," in the words of the authors – across the tension point, in effect – and for this to happen dialogue was needed, not attack. How that dialogue was established and how it has affected people at Burns Lake – making one of the First Nations chiefs publicly bury his resentment, noting he had previously given up on the town but now was filled with hope again – is the most inspirational part of Sandercock and Attili’s study. In many ways, they provide Foucauldian problematization better than Foucault by infusing it with a healthy dose of compassion and proaction, setting a high and meaningful standard for other phronetic researchers to follow. At the same time Sandercock and Attili are clear that they must not delude themselves with the initial wave of enthusiasm and change they have triggered with their research. Lasting phronetic impact will likely take longer to establish and the authors are committed to such impact and plan to go back and evaluate the results of their research periodically to ensure a durable contribution.
Sandercock and Attili seem to trust dialogue and consensus a bit more than some of the other authors in the book, including Flyvbjerg in Chapter 6, who warns that tension points might bite back at researchers and that conflict may be more characteristic of phronetic research than consensus since phronetic research is power research. If phronetic research triggers change, it is likely to gain both friends and enemies for researchers, argues Flyvbjerg. If nobody is against a specific piece of phronetic research, it may be because the research is unimportant as regards its implications for practice. Consensus cannot be ruled out, Flyvbjerg concedes, but a priori it should be considered with caution, since power research shows that too often consensus is an illusion created by disregarding power, as in Habermasian discourse ethics, or by marginalizing groups who are inconvenient to the supposed consensus (Flyvbjerg 2001: 104-09). Nevertheless, phronetic social science is sufficiently accommodating and experimental – scientific – to allow different views to exist and to decide between them on the basis of empirical test instead of on account of a priori normative assumptions. Whether consensus or conflict is more characteristic for phronetic research – or in which types of situations each best apply – is thus an open empirical question to be decided by further research.

Above, we concluded that the phronetic approach can be used across different problematics and geographies. It should be remembered, however, that phronesis works on the basis of context-dependent knowledge and that therefore the approach must always be adapted to context. When a group of African scholars invited Flyvbjerg to teach them, on their home turf, how to do phronetic social science, he first used his Aalborg study as teaching material (Flyvbjerg 1998), because that was all he had available at the time. The reaction from his African colleagues was unequivocal: "We'd get killed if we did this kind of research here [in Africa]!" Similarly, Simmons, Landman, and their colleague Rhona Smith engaged in long-term human rights research methods training in China in which a cohort of Chinese academics identified substantive research questions that were in need of solid methodological solutions, well aware that "human rights" are politically a highly controversial subject in China. In cases like these you adapt, needless to say. Different cultures and political regimes have different tolerance levels for how far scholars are allowed to go in identifying and problematizing tension points and dubious practices. In the relatively advanced democracies of Northern Europe and North America, tolerance for such work is high; problematization and critique may even be encouraged as a way of improving democracy. In non-democratic societies and emerging democracies, tolerance is typically lower and critique may be seen as controversial or even criminal, for instance in countries that see critique of their governments as attempts at undermining the state. Clearly, phronetic research must be adapted to such differences of context. In the African case, over a period of several years Flyvbjerg and his local colleagues developed phronetic research adapted to the local context, by developing local case studies. The impact on practice was even more profound than in the North, with
enduring national policy changes for the management of land and water in an emerging democracy (Lerise 2005; Nnkya 2008; Flyvbjerg 2001: 164-65). In the Chinese case, by putting method first and having the Chinese define the content of the human rights issues they wanted to work on, the program remained politically "neutral" while building capacity and challenging dominant institutions and culture in China. "Methods" became a subversive tool to enter into China to conduct human rights research, and the results of the different analyses provided a number of inconvenient facts that went beyond opinion and advocacy in addressing significant areas in need of redress by Chinese authorities (Landman, Simmons, and Smith, 2010).

It should also be noted that the normative basis for applied phronesis, and for problematizing tension points, is the attitude among those who problematize and act, and this attitude is not based on idiosyncratic moral or personal preferences, but on a context-dependent common world view and interests among a reference group, well aware that different groups typically have different world views and different interests, and that there exists no general principle by which all differences can be resolved, no view from nowhere. For phronetic social scientists, the socially and historically conditioned context, and not fictive universals, constitutes the most effective bulwark against relativism and nihilism, and the best basis for action. Our sociality and history is the only foundation we have, the only solid ground under our feet. And this socio-historical foundation is fully adequate—it is the foundation that makes the adequation of phronetic social science an important resource for democratic deliberation about shared concerns.

Flyvbjerg, for example, in his work on megaprojects and city management defines his reference group as people who champion the values and rules that citizens and parliament of democratic societies have decided should apply to governance, truth, ethics, economics, the environment, safety, social affairs, and so on— as opposed to bending and misusing these values and rules to serve special interests. The latter is what usually happens, and what problematization uncovers again and again, as documented by the case studies above. Flyvbjerg deliberately defines the normative and social basis for his work this widely, and this uncontroversially, in order to make it as difficult as possible for those opposed to his work to topple it on grounds of idiosyncrasy. The strategy of Sandercock and Attili seems similar, but other reference groups and values are possible for other phronetic research with other purposes, needless to say, as illustrated by Eubanks, Simmons, and Basu in their chapters above.

For people who take democracy and scholarship seriously—and phronetic social scientists typically do—problematization of tension points is among the finest and most productive things one can do. Open
and constant critique is the core mechanism for making the age-old institutions of democracy and scholarship work and such critique must be constantly practiced to keep these institutions effective and improving, as pointed out by social thinkers as different as Socrates, Karl Popper, and Pierre Bourdieu. Those who practice such critique are part of a millennia-long project that, although it has had its setbacks and is not perfect by any means, is remarkably successful. In our view, then, the future for phronetic research is very bright indeed.

IMPORTANT NEXT STEPS
As a way of closing, we see the following important next steps in phronetic social science, directed at consolidating and further developing this particular approach to social science research:

• Further theorizing and teasing out of methodological lessons from the case studies presented above; for instance regarding similarities and differences between the case studies; what does and does not work well, theoretically and methodologically, in and across cases; and a comparative study across cases of how phronetic impact is achieved most effectively.

• Clarification of similarities and differences between phronetic social science and other types of social science research. A key question would be, where is phronetic social science uniquely "phronetic," and where does it overlap with other types of social science, for instance policy research, action research, and collaborative research?

• Exploration of the subpolitical "dark power" identified by Luke (2006: 267), that is, the real rationalities at work in actual governance, public and private, as opposed to the "light power" of the state, civil society, and markets studied by conventional social science. Flyvbjerg (1996) and Yiftachel (1998) have pioneered this type of work in planning research. Linstead, Maréchal, and Griffin (2011) have similar work underway in organization research.

• Using phronetic social science as subversion of dominant practices within democratic and non-democratic countries, where empirical research and the methods that underpin them provide a lever for uncovering inconvenient facts whose articulation can bring about positive change.

• Further research on "tension points." As mentioned above, the case studies show that a focus on tension points appear to be particularly productive in triggering social and political change with phronetic social science. We should therefore try to refine our understanding of how tension points
work and how we may best study them. As a general rule of thumb, the tension between what is said and what is done in specific policy areas forms an excellent point of departure for phronetic research, because it gets us straight to the rationality/power nexus and to issues of accountability. At present the following are obvious tension points, but many more less conspicuous ones exist: Economic growth versus climate change, authoritative versus democratic governance, globalization versus localized social and economic life, what corporations say about social and environmental corporate responsibility and what they actually do, human rights violations, and tensions in the global financial system. For the latter, it is interesting to note that one of the most outspoken critics of the global financial system, Nassim Taleb, recently found it pertinent to develop explicit "phronetic rules" to increase robustness and avoid repetition of the type of global financial disaster seen in 2007-09 (Taleb 2010: 370). Thus phronetic social science is finding its way into finance, in addition to many other areas of social science.

Further clarification of a number of tenacious misunderstandings about phronetic social science, including but not necessarily limited to: phronetic social science is less insistent on strong methodology and strong validity than other social science; relativism is more of an issue for phronetic research than for other research; the fact/value dichotomy has special import and consequences for phronetic social science compared to other social science; phronetic social science must take the point of view of marginalized communities; phronetic social science is action research or collaborative research; phronetic social science is at odds with action research and collaborative research. A common misunderstanding about phronetic social science that should finally have been laid to rest with Chapters 2 and 3 by Schram and Landman above is that the widespread and recommended use of narrative and case study research in phronetic social science renders it a qualitative methodology. Schram and Landman demonstrate that this is not the case, as does Flyvbjerg (2001, 2006: 57-60).

Implementation of more phronetic case studies, aimed at impacting policy and practice, and at generating material for further theorizing of phronetic social science.

Social science is at a critical juncture. The momentum lies with alternatives to the dominant scientistic social science that unreflectively seeks to apply the models of the natural sciences to the social world. The foregoing chapters amply demonstrate the power of a phronetic social science to contribute to the re-vitalization of democratized public decision-making. The future is open to connecting research to policymaking in ways that prior configurations only imagined. Now those dreams can become reality, but not in some grandiose vision of the abstract modelers who reduce social relations to causal
relationships between variables, but in more contextually sensitive ways, case by case, here and now, as citizens and publics allow – and as researchers respond. The challenge is whether they will. The researchers whose work is presented in this book have responded in compelling ways. We await the responses of others.

REFERENCES
Miller, James, 1993, The Passion of Michel Foucault (New York: Simon and Schuster).


