COMMUNITY VIDEO IN BENTILEE

An Action-Research Project

PARTS II & III

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PART II

CONTENTS — PART II

The story so far...

The video project was carried out in Bentilee, a large council housing estate in Stoke-on-Trent. The research phase lasted from October, 1972 to the end of June, 1973. Throughout the project my colleague, Ray Dunning, and I enjoyed the co-operation of a team of Young Volunteer Force community workers who were already working on the estate. Although the research phase is now finished, the community workers continue to have access to the university's video equipment. At the time of writing, they and a group of residents are trying to raise funds with which to purchase equipment of their own.

In the eight months duration of the project we worked with a number of local groups and organisations, including the Community Association, youth clubs, a Senior Citizens Association, one of the churches, a pre-school playgroup, the Tenants-Ratepayers Association, schoolchildren and teachers, and a committee of residents who were involved in a land reclamation scheme on the estate.

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Part II is an explication of aspects of the fieldwork. In Chapter One I deal with problems of method in action-research with particular reference to media studies. "Every social situation has an 'inside' and an 'outside'. Everyone is an insider in some situations and an outsider in others. People who feel themselves to be 'in' a particular situation tend to differentiate between themselves and people who are not in it. Insiders have a different view of the situation from people outside it... This has implications for sociological research in general and media studies in particular, since the various kinds of media with which we communicate constitute the interface between 'inside' and 'outside'." Chapter One proposes a dialectical-phenomenological approach to the study of social situations, in terms of the meaning which they have for insiders and outsiders. I draw on the work of Alfred Schutz, J.-P. Sartre, Ronald Laing and others. Of special relevance is the schema of

the Interpersonal Perception Method (Laing, Phillipson, Lee, 1966).

Chapter Two describes some of the 'ins' and 'outs' of the situation in Bentilee. Our relationship with the community workers and other people who were involved in the project is discussed, using the method outlined in the first chapter, in terms of different perspectives or views about what happened. The analysis concentrates on four criteria of intelligibility, based on a systematic comparison of these perspectives: (1) agreement/disagreement; (2) understanding/misunderstanding; (3) feeling understood/misunderstood; and (4) realising/failing to realise that there is understanding or misunderstanding. Various contradictions in the situation are revealed and their eventual resolution as the project progressed is described.

Chapter Three is an account of our work with the Bentilee Valley Project Committee. Once again, this is a case study in contradictions: between what was said and what was done; between what was planned and what actually happened; and between different perspectives of what happened. Video helped to uncover these contradictions and was also instrumental in resolving them, thus enabling the committee to move forward to the next stage of their work.

Chapter Four attempts to relate our work using video with groups to that of the five cable television stations currently experimenting with local programming in this country, and also to the whole question of 'access' television.

Chapter One

INSIDE AND OUTSIDE: Notes on the study of social situations

      Every social situation has an inside and an outside.
Everyone is an insider in some situations and an outsider in others.
People who feel themselves to be 'in' a particular situation tend
to differentiate between themselves and people who are not in it.
Sometimes situations overlap so that some people in one situation
are also seen as insiders by people in another situation, while the
others are seen as outsiders. Outsiders can become insiders, and
vice versa.

      Insiders have a different view of the situation from
people outside it. This in itself does not preclude the possibility
of agreement, for practical purposes, about what the situation is.
However, insiders may indeed see it as one thing while outsiders
see it as something altogether different.

      Insiders and outsiders are both part of the situation.
The situation exists as the relationships between each insider and
the others; between insiders and outsiders; and between outsiders
and other outsiders. The way outsiders interpret a situation for
other outsiders may influence the way the insiders see the situation.

      Even though we may feel a situation to be largely of our
own making, we as insiders may not fully understand it. Outsiders
are in a position to see things which are invisible to insiders. Our
view of the outsiders' view sometimes makes the situation intelligible

in a way which is not possible from the inside only (cf. Schutz, 1972, p.169).

The voyeur is a special case of the outsider. He sees without being seen and therefore does not affect the intelligibility of the situation he is observing. We do not include his view of us in our view of ourselves: if we could, he would not be a voyeur.

As I have said, we are all insiders in some situations and outsiders in others. The outsiders in Colin Wilson's study (1956) are extreme examples of a universal human position. Even Wilson's Outsider is 'inside' his own situation. But whereas most people at some time feel themselves to be 'in' a common situation with others, Wilson's Outsider does not feel himself to be part of any such collective situation: he is inside his own only and outside everyone else's.

The prisoner is 'inside' because he has committed an act which, in the eyes of others, is 'outside' the law. Depending on the way one looks at it, autism is a withdrawal into, or a stepping out of a situation. The more one is inside his own situation, the more he is outside that of the others.

By moving from a state of acting in the world to a state of reflection or contemplation, we step outside our own situation. But in so doing we immediately and necessarily step inside a new situation. Every outsider is, ultimately, an insider: and by the same token we are all, finally, outsiders.

Inside implies outside, and <u>vice versa</u>. Neither can exist by itself. No situation (or object for that matter) can have an inside but not an outside, though insiders may not be aware of the outside. (On the other hand, people may see themselves as insiders only when confronted by outsiders; and <u>vice versa</u>.) The situation <u>is</u> inside and outside. Inside and outside are related dialectically; inside is the dialectical negation of outside, and <u>vice versa</u>. The difference between the insiders' view of the situation and the outsiders' view is a dialectical contradiction.

In real life, ' a social situation' may include any number of individuals, groups, associations, organisations, institutions. Each has a view of the situation which may or may not correspond with the views of some or all of the others. A man whose house is affected by an urban redevelopment scheme sees 'the situation' differently from the planners. The members of an action group formed to negotiate with or fight against the planning department on behalf of the community will have another view of 'the situation'. Although they are all involved in 'the situation' they relate differently to it and to each other. From the point of view of a complete outsider they are all insiders. The man whose house is threatened, however, may see himself as a lone insider standing outside the decision-making arena. He may feel that no one really understands 'his situation'. The members of the action group may see the planners as outsiders bent on changing a community of which they are not a part. They may feel that the planners do not really understand 'the situation'. The planners, on the other hand, may feel that the community does not fully appreciate all the factors which have to be considered, that 'they' do not know the 'inside story'. In such cases it is probably more accurate to speak of situations within situations. Every situation and every

situation within a situation poses problems of communication, of understanding. The way we see a particular situation depends, in part, on whether we see ourselves as insiders or as outsiders. But we cannot understand the situation from the inside or the outside only. In order to understand it we must comprehend the ins and outs of the situation.

All this has implications for sociological research in general, and media studies in particular, since the various kinds of media (I use the term generically to include all means of communication) constitute the interface between inside and outside.

Now, although inside and outside are always and only related dialectically, relationships between insiders and outsiders frequently are not dialectical. This is to say that while the positions held by insiders and outsiders stand in dialectical opposition (and thus all social relationships are potentially dialectical) this relation can be effectively denied, for various reasons and in various ways, by society members. Non-dialectical relating means that I do not acknowledge you as another 'I', as my negation. My view of you does not take into account your view of yourself, nor your view of me; and while I experience myself and you I do not experience you as experiencing yourself and me. The various forms which this takes include disconfirmation, invalidation, reciprocal imperviousness, blocking of metacommunication (i.e. communicating about the way we are communicating) (Watzlawick et al., 1968).

Given that certain necessary conditions of communication have been established, insiders and outsiders will relate dialectically to one another. This requires, for example, that my view of myself

includes my view of your view of me $(A \to A : A \to B \to A)$ and my view of your view of my view of myself $(A \to B \to A \to A)$. And my view of you will include my view of your view of yourself $(A \to B : A \to B \to B)$ and my view of your view of my view of you $(A \to B \to A \to B)$. The same applies, mutatis mutandis, to your view of yourself and of me.

Extending this to situations comprising more than two persons we are faced with a picture of some complexity. Nevertheless, since we are concerned here with the intelligibility of social situations, with arriving at an adequate understanding of what goes on, and with understanding how understanding may be achieved, we must seek an approach to the study of social relations which does not violate their complex reality. Such an approach will itself be dialectical.

Insiders' and outsiders' views of a situation are necessarily one-sided. But, to repeat: the situation is inside and outside. The insiders' view is the negation of the view of the outsiders. They are to each other as thesis and antithesis. A dialectical understanding of the situation involves the negation of the negation, the negation of the one-sided partiality of interior and exterior perspectives, leading to a more comprehensive ('comprehend' in the dual sense of 'include' and 'understand') grasp of the situation. Neither view is completely false, neither completely true.

There is a lesson here for social science. The sociologist approaches the situation he intends to investigate as an outsider. This is the only feasible standpoint of the social investigator. (If he is already an insider then his study sets him apart as an outsider.) Through being aware of himself as an outsider he is aware also that the situation has an inside and that it is experienced as such by the

people who are the object of his study. Also, since he is not
concerned with people _in abstracto_ but _in a situation_ he realises
that he himself is part of that situation. His attention, therefore,
must follow two directions - towards the others and towards himself.
He must be aware of the relationships between them and between himself
and them, and he must try to explicate these relationships if he is
to arrive at an understanding of the situation. His understanding of
the situation should help them to understand it: if it does not, he
is in effect a voyeur. Too often, 'being objective' about a situation
is taken to mean having an outsider's view which can be shared with
and agreed upon by other outsiders. But when the outsider's view does
not include a view of the way the insiders see the situation, this
'objectivity' may distort the object of study. At best it can only
give an incomplete, one-sided picture.

The writings of Alfred Schutz offer insight into the
different meanings which a situation has for insiders and outsiders.
Following Sumner, he distinguishes between the in-group, or We-group,
and the Others-group, or out-group, and finds that the same distinction
exists in Weber's concepts of subjective and objective meaning.
(Schutz, 1971, p.244).

For the members of an out-group to be able to understand
the actions and perspective of an in-group, an adequate 'formula of
transformation' must be found. If the in-group feels that its view of
the situation, its actions and motives, are being misinterpreted by
the out-group, resistance or fear or hostility on the part of the
in-group members may result. Their reaction to their view of the
out-group's view of them may have the effect of confirming and reinforc-
ing the out-group's attitude towards the in-group, establishing a
vicious circle.

Schutz formulates the relation between inside and outside thus:

".... to the natural aspect the world has for group A belongs not only a certain stereotyped idea of the natural aspect the world has for group B, but included in it also is a stereotype of the way in which group B supposedly looks at A."   (op. cit. p.247)

The subjective meaning which a group has for its members comprises shared experience of a common issue and a common way of structuring this experience. The personal histories of individual members in relation to the common situation make an important contribution to the definition they have of themselves as a group. The objective meaning of group membership is a product of the views of outsiders who refer to the group members as 'they'. Schutz points out that even though the way outsiders see the in-group may correspond with the way the members see themselves, "the interpretation of the group by the outsider will never fully coincide with the self-interpretation by the in-group." (op. cit. p. 255.) In cases where subjective and objective meaning are disjunctive, he considers that the contradiction is not likely to have harmful consequences provided that the in-group is not subject to control by the out-group. The example he cites is that of the image which foreign audiences have of the American way of life, as portrayed in Hollywood movies - an image which does not materially affect the day to day life of most Americans. However, control can take many forms and is often most binding when it is most subtle. If significant outsiders persist in acting towards the insiders on the basis of an objective image of the group which does not correspond with the way the members see themselves, the

subjective meaning of the group for the insiders will be disconfirmed and invalidated.*

But the distinction between in-group and out-group is secondary to our present distinction between insiders and outsiders. There are collective situations where inside and outside do not coincide with this differentiation. Furthermore, the boundaries between inside and outside are fluid and ever-changing. For example, when someone says: "In order to achieve something you've got to do this, that and the other...." does he mean to exclude himself? Or does he mean: "One has to do this...." - in which case he may be including himself. Or, again, when someone says: "You think such and such..." to a group of people, is he excluding himself, setting himself apart as an outsider, or is he checking what _he_ thinks against what he thinks _they_ think, with a view to creating a 'we'?‡ We cannot begin an explication of the dialectics of social situations with reference to _groups_, taking their existence as 'social objects' for granted and studying their actions, without first considering briefly how a collectivity of persons achieves objective status (i.e. is constituted as a group-object).

A collectivity of persons cannot be constituted as a group from the outside only, that is, in the eyes of an outsider (whether the outsider in question is a sociologist or not). A necessary co-condition is that the collectivity also perceives itself as a group, that is to say that the persons define themselves as members.

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* At an interpersonal level, such 'binds' and their outcomes have been investigated extensively by, among others, R.D. Laing and his colleagues.

‡ see Barthes, R., (1967 p.22) for a discussion on the ambivalent meaning (conventional and existential) of personal pronouns.

Nowadays, homosexuals and transvestites may be regarded as a group because they regard themselves as such, or at least as an association of groups: they have ceased to be merely a social category. On the other hand, voyeurs do not constitute a group because they do not constitute themselves as such.

However, as Sartre has shown, the unity of a group comes from outside, through the perspectives of outsiders which are interiorised by the insiders, and this unity establishes the objectivity of the group for the members (Sartre, 1960, p.553).

This also has an effect on the outsiders, since the unity of the group brings about a negative unity among the outsiders, that of the non-grouped. A reciprocal relation exists between grouped and non-grouped, between insiders and outsiders. A collectivity of persons will see themselves as a group to the extent that they perceive others as outsiders and themselves as insiders (but as outsiders for the others). And the outsiders, in turn, will perceive themselves as unified to the extent that they perceive the others as insiders, and themselves as outsiders for the others (but as insiders for themselves).

Depending on circumstances, the negative unity induced among the outsiders by the group may be of abstract significance only (une signification parfaitement abstraite) or it may be a concrete, practical unity. Certain kinds of group (Sartre cites pigeon-fanciers and numismatists as examples) result in unity among non-members merely in an abstract sense: the degree of unity among the members is partly determined by the fact that non-members (e.g. the rest of the neighbourhood or town) do not label themselves as pigeon-haters or non-numismatists.

On the other hand, a militant fascist organisation may give birth to a very real sense of unity among the rest of the population, either passively through common fear, or actively if they form counter-organisations. Fascists and communists are insiders for themselves and outsiders for each other. Fascists may define themselves as anti-communist: communists may define themselves as anti-fascist. It is unlikely that a person will align himself with both parties! Fascists see themselves as united against the communist threat: the solidarity of the communists is increased by the menace of fascism.

Central to an understanding of Sartre's conception of the group as a social object is the distinction between totalisation and totality. The fundamental intelligibility of dialectical reason is that of totalisation, of an ongoing act of synthesis. Ontologically, dialectical reason consists in the unification of a multiplicity of diverse elements into a whole. Epistomologically, it exists as totalising activity which is immediately accessible to thought - which, in turn, continually totalises itself in its comprehension of the totalisation from which it emanates and which is its object. (op. cit. p.137.) Thus, knowing is itself totalising (and is, therefore, dialectical in nature). Totality is the synthesis produced by totalisation. The distinction, then, expresses itself as the relation between unification (the act of knowing) and unified (the object known).

Sartre defines totality as: "... un être qui, radicalement distinct de la somme de ses parties, se retrouve tout entier - sous une forme ou sous une autre - dans chacune de celles-ci et qui entre en rapport avec lui-même soit par son rapport avec une ou plusieurs

de ses parties, soit par son rapport aux relations que toutes ou que plusieurs de ses parties entretiennent entre elles." (op. cit. p.138). Thus, a group is not the sum of its members but exists 'in' each of the members and through the relationships which each has with the others. Sartre's intention is to show that it is precisely this notion of totality which, coming from outside the group, constitutes it as a social object in the eyes of both insiders and outsiders.

A totality is the product or regulative principle of totalising activity: it is the correlative of an act of knowing in the same way that a painting or a symphony are experienced 'through' a pattern of colours or a sequence of sounds.* Totalisation is the unifying activity which produces this objectivity. Sartre refers to it as: "... ce travail synthétique qui fait de chaque partie une manifestation de l'ensemble et qui rapporte l'ensemble a lui-même par la médiation des parties." (loc. cit.)

Now, for the insiders, the group is experienced immediately and lived as totalising activity. For the outsiders not involved in this activity, on the other hand, it is perceived as a totality, a 'thing'. The group as totality is firstly the product of the totalisation of outsiders, which is then interiorised by the members (through their own totalising activity) as an outside view, conferring objective status on their relationships with each other. Each group member interiorises the group-as-object-for-the-outsiders; for it is only in the eyes of the outsiders that the group appears synthetically as an object-totality. In itself, in terms of its internal relations, it is an ongoing totalising activity. The totality of the group is

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* cf. Husserl's ideal objects.

not lived by the group members for itself and in itself: it is
produced through the mediation of outsiders as <u>the schema which
regulates the members' relations with the outsiders</u> (op. cit. p.560).
The group member "vit comme lien d'intériorité a l'organisation
totalisante une liaison d'extériorité au groupe-objet (et objet
<u>extérieur</u>) qui est précisément la liaison de l'Autre a la totalité
inerte et qu'il a reintériorisée...." (op. cit. p.561). Thus, the
relation between inside and outside, between members and non-members,
consists of two inverse mediations: the mediation of the outsiders
between each group member and the group-as-object (totality); and
the mediation of the group-as-object (interiorised by each member)
between the group member as agent and the outsiders as objects of his
action (loc. cit.).

The very existence of the group <u>as a group</u>, then, is
inextricably (dialectically) linked with the existence of those who
do not belong to it, through their perspectives of it. Roughly,
<u>totality</u> corresponds with Weber's objective meaning and <u>totalisation</u>
with subjective meaning. The objective meaning of the group - its
meaning for outsiders - confers objective status on the group and,
interiorised by the members, mediates their relations with outsiders.

For the members, the social reality of the group becomes
a synthesis of subjective and interiorised objective meaning. Its
meaning for them includes their view of it <u>and</u> their view of the
outsiders' view. Their action in any situation will take into account
not only how they see the situation but also how they think the
outsiders see it. The same applies, <u>mutatis mutandis</u>, to the outsiders.

So far in this methodological sketch we have touched
on two main related points:

1)   no social situation can be understood from the inside or the
     outside only,

2)   the group as a social object is a product of the relationship
     between insiders and outsiders.

As researchers, we have regarded these propositions as
axiomatic in our study of the use of video recording as a community
development tool, to promote understanding of local issues and
encourage group action.

This use departs from the usual role of media in society.
The task of the documentary film-maker, for example, is to interpret
situations for the audience - which is to say, for outsiders. In order
to do this, he must interpret the situation for himself, as an
outsider. His film 'manufactures' the image of the groups and
individuals involved in the situation and, in so doing, changes
(e.g. confirms/disconfirms) the meaning of the situation for the
insiders as well as changing its meaning for other outsiders.

Two possibilities exist in the relationship between his
interpretation and the insiders': they may be conjunctive or
disjunctive. His interpretation may or may not correspond with the
way the insiders see the situation. Whether he agrees or disagrees
with the insiders' view is not, in itself, important as long as he
understands the way they see it. However, if he does not understand
them, if the 'formula of transformation' is inadequate, the film will
miss the point entirely: it will not contribute to the intelligibility

of the situation. More than this, it may bring about the destruction
of the situation which it purports to portray. To paraphrase an
example of Shamberg (1971, Part II, p.33): the legitimacy which a
group needs to build a base of community and economic support may be
unattainable if its objectives are misrepresented by the media.
Misrepresentation of a group's aims is rarely a deliberate attempt to
confound their efforts. It may simply be a case of misunderstanding,
of a difference of interpretation, or emphasis, or values.

All media may be used to study and present situations
'objectively' - that is, from the outside - or they may be used
dialectically to help the mediator understand the insiders' view of
the situation, to help the insiders understand his view and, finally,
to help other outsiders to understand. This requires a special approach
to media practice. It requires, for example, that the insiders have
greater control over the media, that they are involved as participants
in the media process and not merely as 'subjects'. The medium
becomes the *formula of transformation* between inside and outside. This
report describes such an approach, using portable video equipment.

For the sociologist engaged in research in this field,
a special problem presents itself. He needs a method which will
enable him to explicate the relations between insiders and outsiders.
Also, as an outsider in the situation he is studying, he himself
needs an adequate formula of transformation if he is to understand
what is going on.

Media research frequently poses the question: "What is
the effect of a particular medium or act of communication?" This

usually presupposes a view of society which is based on a natural - scientific model. We considered the notions of cause and effect derived from the natural sciences to be less useful in a relatively new field of social investigation than those approaches which attempt to discover the meaning of social action: we were concerned with the intelligibility of social situations. We therefore used a dialectical-phenomenological method to analyse what happened. The question we asked was: "What changes in the meaning of the situation occurred as videotapes were made about the situation and what action was taken as a result of these changes?"

The events which took place had meaning for us, as researchers, but they were also meaningful for everyone else who was involved. We saw these events from a particular viewpoint, they saw from another. Nor, of course, did 'they' (i.e. different individuals and groups) always see things in quite the same way as each other. Making the situation intelligible requires a comparison of the perspectives which everyone involved has of the situation. Following Laing, Phillipson and Lee (1966) we may say that four issues are at stake:

1) agreement or disagreement about what the situation is,

2) understanding or misunderstanding,

3) feeling understood or misunderstood,

4) realising or failing to realise that there is understanding or misunderstanding.

Everyone involved in a situation has a view of the situation (a direct perspective); everyone has a view of the others' views (metaperspective); and everyone has a view of the others' views of his own view (meta-metaperspective). The schema devised by Laing

et al. provides a method by which to examine these four criteria of intelligibility.

1) Agreement or disagreement is defined as conjunction or disjunction between the direct perspectives of two or more parties. We may express this schematically, where there are just two individuals or groups, A and B, involved in a common situation, X, as:

$$\text{agreement} \qquad\qquad \text{disagreement}$$

$$A \to X \equiv B \to X \qquad\qquad A \to X \not\equiv B \to X$$

2) Understanding or misunderstanding is defined as conjunction or disjunction between the direct perspective of one party and the metaperspective(s) of the other(s):

$$\text{understanding} \qquad\qquad \text{misunderstanding}$$

$$A \to X \equiv B \to A \to X \qquad\qquad A \to X \not\equiv B \to A \to X$$

$$A \to B \to X \equiv B \to X \qquad\qquad A \to B \to X \not\equiv B \to X$$

In other words, if B's view of the way A sees the situation corresponds with the way A actually does see it, we may say that B understands A; and if A's view of the way B sees the situation corresponds with the way B sees it, then A understands B.

3) Feeling understood or misunderstood is defined as conjunction or disjunction between the direct perspective and the meta-metaperspective of the same party:

$$\text{feeling understood} \qquad\qquad \text{feeling misunderstood}$$

$$A \to X \equiv A \to B \to A \to X \qquad\qquad A \to X \not\equiv A \to B \to A \to X$$

$$B \to X \equiv B \to A \to B \to X \qquad\qquad B \to X \not\equiv B \to A \to B \to X$$

For example, if A thinks B's view of the way he, A, sees the situation corresponds with the way he actually does see it, he will feel that B understands him.

4) Realisation or failure to realise that there is understanding or
misunderstanding involves a comparison of one party's meta-meta-
perspective with the metaperspective(s) of the other(s):

<u>realisation</u>   <u>failure to realise</u>

$$A \to B \to A \to X \;\equiv\; B \to A \to X \qquad\qquad A \to B \to A \to X \;\not\equiv\; B \to A \to X$$

$$B \to A \to B \to X \;\equiv\; A \to B \to X \qquad\qquad B \to A \to B \to X \;\not\equiv\; A \to B \to X$$

Thus, A may realise that B's view of the way A sees the situation
corresponds with A's own view of it - he realises that B understands
him. But, equally, A may see that B's view of A's view of the
situation does not correspond with the way A actually sees it -
in which case he realises that he is misunderstood by B. Whether
there is realisation of, or failure to realise, <u>understanding</u> or
<u>misunderstanding</u>, then, involves a comparison of all three levels
of perspectives.

Using the schema as a guide, we can begin to build up a
detailed picture of what a situation means to the insiders and
outsiders involved. We can also study the way the meaning of the
situation changes.

However, since in dialectical-phenomenological research
this 'picture' is also part of the situation which is being studied,
being itself a <u>perspective</u>, the analysis cannot rest here. The
explication must be validated. At the start of his investigation the
researcher, as an outsider, will begin to form an idea of what the
situation is: this is his initial totalisation. As he becomes aware
of other, possibly conflicting views, he must 'detotalise' his initial
definition of the situation, seeking to sublate a multiplicity of
perspectives in his 'retotalisation'. His own initial view of the
situation will be included in his schematic comparison of perspectives.

When he comes to validate his explication, he may find agreement or disagreement about his new, more comprehensive perspective. He may have understood or misunderstood 'them'. He may have realised or failed to realise that there was understanding or misunderstanding. Validating the retotalisation involves changes in the meaning of the situation which necessitate further explication. Just where the researcher draws the line is usually determined by personal and/or practical considerations - for example, motivation, or time, or money.

The relation between the perspectives of different parties expresses itself as a dialectical contradiction. Even in the case of agreement we must assume that A's view is never identical to B's: for that to happen, A would have to become B. But the dialectic between perspectives is only one kind of contradiction inherent in social situations. Contradictions may arise in social action, in the form of counterproductive activity on the part of a group or as conflict between opposing factions. Such contradictions are also worth studying, not only because they help to make the situation intelligible, but because their resolution points the way to future action.

The above schema is only a guide, the correlation of perspectives merely an indication of the intelligibility of the situation. People may think they agree, whereas in fact there may be disagreement. They may think they understand each other but actually there may be misunderstanding. This is revealed unequivocally by disjunction between perspectives. But even conjunction does not guarantee the intelligibility of the situation. People may agree in what they say but their actions may belie agreement. They may appear to understand each other while events may show that they do not. One must take into account what people do as well as what they say. For

this reason, the researcher's explication must be validated by putting it to the test of effective action.

In the following two chapters I shall discuss some of the contradictions between what was planned and what actually happened, between what was said and what was done, and between different perspectives or views about what happened.

Chapter Two

IN WHICH WE FIND OUR DIRECTION

In this chapter and the next I want to examine some of the
ins and outs of 'the situation' in Bentilee. I propose to concentrate
first on the relationship between ourselves, as researchers, and the
Young Volunteer Force community workers on the estate. This relation-
ship was of considerable practical importance to us during the course
of our reseacch, since we regarded the co-operation of community
development workers as essential to our fieldwork. At the outset, we
decided that we did not want to go into an area 'cold': we wanted to
work within the framework of an already ongoing community development
programme.

Although we had some experience of using video with
groups, we were not community workers: we were 'in' a research
situation. The YVF workers were 'in' a community development situation.
'The situation' in which we all found ourselves, then, was in reality
two separate but overlapping situations (since we were working
together on a common project).

US   X   YVF   X = the common project
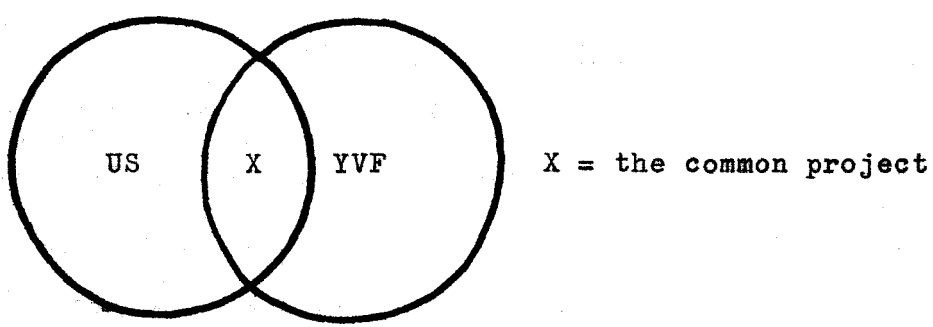
The common project was part of our 'inside'. But it was
also part of _their_ 'inside' and therefore part of our 'outside', too.

It cannot be understood from our point of view alone. Nor can it be understood solely from theirs.

Social situations comprise a multiplicity of perspectives, perspectives of perspectives (metaperspectives), perspectives of perspectives of perspectives..... these 'views' constitute the meaning of the situation. But whereas all social situations are meaningful they are not always intelligible, either to the insiders or to outsiders.

As we saw in Chapter One, people may agree or disagree about what a situation is. They may understand or misunderstand the way the others see it. They may feel understood or misunderstood (they may be correct or incorrect). They may realise that they understand/misunderstand each other - or they may fail to realise it.

What was our relationship with YVF in terms of these indices of intelligibility? Did we agree about what we were trying to do? Did we understand each other? How did we and they experience and act in the 'overlapping area', i.e., the common project?

At the time of our initial exchange of correspondence and information (22.6.72), JF, one of the community workers, sent us a copy of a report entitled The Young Volunteer Force in Stoke-on-Trent which outlined their aims and progress so far. The authors, GW (who left before our arrival) and JF stated that: ".... we have preferred to concentrate our efforts on working with groups, bringing together and supporting individuals who become aware of needs in common and look to each other for a collective effort to meet them. It is this

transition from individual to collective - or community - self-help

that is at the basis of our work in community development."

We may denote this perspective by the notation:

YVF $\rightarrow$ YVF

In a subsequent letter to us (10.7.72) JF wrote:

"It may well be that we will suggest that your actions in Bentilee

are largely directed by a group of local residents. I don't know how

this would seem to you, but just put it as a tentative idea."

This may be taken as an implicit view of our future

role on the estate:

JF $\rightarrow$ Us

We interpreted it as a suggestion that our work in the

area would be generally compatible with that of YVF. From our limited

knowledge of the methods of these workers, from our experience

elsewhere, and from the literature on community development influenced

by Rogerian client-centred therapy, we assumed that this meant, among

other things, working with groups, playing a supportive, non-directive,

'catalytic'* role and encouraging collective decision-making and action.

We may denote these perspectives as:

Us $\rightarrow$ YVF

Us $\rightarrow$ Us

or in terms of the common project:

Us $\rightarrow$ X

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* Our subsequent experience led me to question the so-called
  catalytic model of social change: see Part III.

At this time, we had no definite ideas about what we
wanted to do in Bentilee. We were not yet ready to derive operational
hypotheses from work which we had already done and which had been
done elsewhere by others, to be tested in the course of our research,
and we tried to make this clear to JF and PH (another community worker)
at our first meeting with them (7.8.72):

"They asked us some pretty searching questions about
our motives and attitudes - political and otherwise - and we stressed
that, for us, this was a 'finding out' project rather than an 'activist'
one. We emphasised that we had no hypotheses to prove: we simply
wanted to discover how video could be used by people on the estate.
We thought it was important to put the equipment in the hands of local
residents, to be used according to their own needs."

We were, therefore, quite happy to go along with JF's
suggestion, seeing our own role as more or less similar to that of
YVF. We may denote this concordance as:

$$Us \rightarrow X \;\equiv\; YVF \rightarrow X$$

i.e. we felt that there was agreement, at this stage, about what we
were trying to do, though it had been defined in fairly open-ended
terms.

Furthermore, following our first meeting, we felt that
they had understood us, that is to say that our view of the project
corresponded with the way we thought they thought we saw it. There
was conjunction between our own direct and meta-metaperspectives:

$$Us \rightarrow X \;=\; Us \rightarrow YVF \rightarrow Us \rightarrow X$$

We felt, too, that we understood them, that is, that our
view of their view of the project corresponded with the way they

actually saw it:

$$Us \rightarrow YVF \rightarrow X \; \equiv \; YVF \rightarrow X$$

However, this 'understanding' was based on a knowledge of community development in general, rather than on a knowledge of the particular methods adopted by these workers. Invariably, there are more contradictions in practice than in theory.

That they understood us is borne out by a YVF report on our first meeting with them, written immediately following the meeting but not received by us until some time later (see 7.8.72):

"JF was impressed by their ability to get over their ideas in a non-doctrinaire form and they seem to have the personality to get on with local people. Neither seemed to want to impose their (sic) ideas of the world. The basis of the proposal is to give local groups a machine which can be used in various educational ways. Thus, local groups would control the whole process of making a programme."

i.e. $\quad YVF \rightarrow Us \rightarrow X \; \equiv \; Us \rightarrow X$

Our feeling that we understood them, in view of contradictions which later came to light, between different perspectives of the role of the Young Volunteer Force nationally (including the perspectives of the workers in Bentilee), between these perspectives and the view which the Bentilee workers had of their own role, and consequently between ourselves and the workers, was shown to be a premature assessment of the situation. Not only did we not fully understand them, but we did not realise it. And because we thought we understood them, understood what they were trying to do and what they wanted us to do, and acted on this false understanding, they came, eventually, to misunderstand us as our rather vague definition of the situation became more specific through the work which we did. We

laboured under these misapprehensions for some time.

Although YVF had expressed an interest in the project and were prepared to help launch it, they were concerned that it should not be seen by people living on the estate as a YVF enterprise. Accordingly, they arranged for us to explain what we wanted to do and demonstrate the video equipment to the management committee of the Community Association. We were thus to be seen as separate from YVF, introduced by them to the Community Association, and, hopefully with the committee's backing, via the Community Association to the whole estate.

At the meeting (24.10.72) we introduced ourselves and explained that we were doing research at Keele. We said we had no definite ideas we wanted to try out, apart from making the equipment available to any groups who wanted to use it. Immediately we ran into an obvious contradiction. Although we didn't want to suggest to them how the equipment should be used there were quite a few things we didn't particularly want to get involved in because they seemed trivial to us - and these included several of the suggestions made by the management committee! There was disjunction between (a) our view of the situation and theirs (disagreement) and (b) between the way we saw it and the way they thought we saw it (misunderstanding):

$$\text{(a)} \quad Us \to X \neq CA \to X$$

$$\text{(b)} \quad Us \to X \neq CA \to Us \to X$$

It was, of course, not possible for them to realize that there was disagreement or misunderstanding because, in trying to be as non-directive as possible, we had not made our views known to them. That _we_ realised that there was a discrepancy between our view and

theirs is itself a contradiction, since it was our stated intention to let _them_ decide how the project should develop and to let our role develop accordingly.

The outcome of the meeting was that the committee agreed to call another meeting in three weeks time, to which representatives from various groups on the estate would be invited. Since we were committed to a non-directive approach we decided to "let things take their own, slow course" and spend the time becoming better acquainted with the area. YVF agreed with this policy.

We first began to have doubts about the feasibility of being non-directive following the first three of a series of self-viewing sessions which we held in the sociology lab. at the university (8.11.72). We were interested in studying the subjective experience of 'seeing oneself on TV', using undergraduates as volunteers. At the beginning of the session it had been our intention to try to influence what the subjects said about their experiences as little as possible. However, when we came to play back the recordings, it was obvious that we _were_ influencing what the subjects talked about - even if we said nothing. We asked ourselves: "Should we treat ourselves as equal participants and, if so, what value has this experiment? Is it possible to arrive at an understanding of social/psychological phenomena except through interaction involving the researcher as participant?" The answer to this latter, patently rhetorical question was, in our view, "No". At the time, however, we were not prepared, for various reasons, to act on the implications which this had for our work in Bentilee.

Before the public meeting, we discussed with YVF (10.11.72)
how we should handle it, and particularly whether we should show a
tape-slide sequence entitled <u>Some Ideas About Video And Community TV</u>
(prepared by Mike Hickie and myself for the <u>Communications and</u>
<u>Community Development</u> conference at Liverpool University, May 1972:
see f. 2.7.72). JF had reservations about using it because of the
political nature of some parts of the commentary. JA (the third
fieldworker) thought that it contained some concrete ideas and that
perhaps it would help to start the ball rolling. We replied that if
we showed it we would have to make it clear that the ideas were only
suggestions or possibilities. People could discuss them and criticise
them - the more they criticised them the more constructive it would
be since, in so doing they would begin to form their own ideas (and
that was what <u>we</u> wanted).

We considered re-wording the script to make it 'less
political'. JF said: "It's your decision," - i.e. whether we should
use the tape-slide sequence and, if so, whether we should change it -
"and you take responsibility for it." This was the first time the
onus of making such a decision had been placed on us, and we weren't
too happy about it.

In the conversation which ensued, JF talked about their
aims and method of work:
".... there are various schools of community work, as I'm
sure you're aware. One of the most influential on us is the non-
directive stuff..... we have been very much concerned - and I think
largely we've been successful - in ensuring that the local groups and
the local people are the prime power group that determines our decisions."

This tallies with the report <u>The Young Volunteer Force</u> <u>in Stoke-on-Trent</u> in its view of their approach to community work. We saw our role as basically similar to that of YVF, and we thought they wanted it to be that way. JF's statement, therefore, reinforced our intention to be as non-directive as possible, given that there would be some decisions for which we would have to accept responsibility. We decided to remake the tape and use the sequence at the public meeting.

When the time came (21.11.72), the chairman of the Community Association introduced us to the group representatives and we explained, once again, that we were interested in "looking at the ways people communicate" and, in particular, ways in which they might be able to use video. We said we did not see ourselves as a 'film crew', making videotapes <u>about</u> the area, but as helpers and observers. Then we showed the revised tape-slide sequence (see f. 20.11.72), stressing first that, although it contained ideas based on other projects, they weren't necessarily ideas which we wanted to try out in Bentilee. It was up to them to decide how they wanted to use the equipment.

All the time, however, we did have vague ideas about what we wanted to do, or rather what we hoped <u>they</u> would want to do; but as we didn't want to 'interfere' in our research, we kept them to ourselves. We were really caught between the devil and the deep blue sea, since we wanted to get across to them the kind of things we <u>weren't</u> interested in by showing them some of the things we were interested in; but in an attempt to cling to our non-directive role we told them that we weren't necessarily interested in doing the things in which we were interested: we told them that we were interested in

<u>helping them</u>. What we said to them, in effect, was: "Here are some ideas. You don't have to follow them if you don't want to - in fact we'd rather you came up with your own ideas. You can use the equipment for anything you want..." What we did not say (except to ourselves) was: ".... as long as it makes interesting research."

In spite of this, at the meeting DJ, one of the group representatives, came close to understanding our unvoiced intentions: "What you're interested in is what can we achieve with this equipment, rather than just making pretty pictures."

During the discussion which followed the tape-slide sequence and a demonstration of the equipment, someone suggested that a good way to begin to involve people in the project would be to make a videotape about all the different groups on the estate. PH asked us how we would set about doing this. Expanding on our view of ourselves as helpers/observers (asopposed to a 'film crew') we replied that we couldn't do it on our own: we would have to work in co-operation with a group like YVF or the Community Association, which knew what was happening in Bentilee. We would let them do all the interviewing and operate the equipment. The reason for this was that we wanted to see how different groups would use video. Also, in making a tape themselves, a group would be expressing a 'view of the situation'. If we made the tapes for them, we would be studying our view of their view of the situation.

On 24.11.72 we called at the YVF office to talk about what had happened at the meeting and discuss what our next move should be. JF said that we now had the backing of the Community Association. We had convinced them of our good faith and could now go ahead with the project.

We felt that, for the first time, JF and PH 'put their cards on the table' and we were able to talk more freely. Our relationship with them seemed to enter a new phase of frankness, developing from an initial wariness on their part (our first two meetings with them) through a period of 'matey-ness' following the first meeting with the Community Association. They said that they did not want to get involved in making tapes just yet, but offered to help us in other ways. They continued to guide us. For example, when we mentioned working in schools JF suggested that we postpone writing to local headmasters until he had had a chance to discuss it with some teachers who were already involved with YVF.

Soon after this (5.12.72) we were invited to attend a meeting of the Bentilee Valley Project Committee, a representative body of residents drawn from all the local groups, who were negotiating with the City Planning Department about the reclamation of a large area of derelict land in Bentilee. Some of the members - DJ was one - had been present at the public meeting on 21.11.72. They were interested in using video to explain to other residents what was happening. We showed them the revised version of the tape-slide sequence, with the same general caveat as at the previous meeting.

Five days later, we held a practice session with BVPC, during which they learned how to use the camera and portable video recorder and taped a few dummy interviews. We acted as teachers, helpers and observers. Things seemed to be going well. The committee decided to go ahead and produce a tape about their work.

Around this time, the Christmas edition of UBB, the community newspaper, was published, containing an article about the video project written by PH (see f. 12.12.72). He seemed to understand our general intentions and also to agree with them:

$$PH \to X \equiv Us \to X$$

$$PH \to Us \to X \equiv US \to X$$

We took this as an indication that we were on the right track.

(13.12.72) Following a special meeting of BVPC to evaluate the practice session and work out a shooting schedule for the next tape, JA censured PH for trying to organise things too much. In his (JA's) opinion, the members had shown themselves to be quite capable of working out for themselves what they wanted to do, if only given the opportunity. As things turned out, they had agreed to follow a plan drawn up by PH (who, in addition to being a YVF worker was also secretary of BVPC) and DJ. However, PH had said that he didn't want to get too involved in making the tape because he saw his role as similar to ours, that is, as a helper. Here, then, was another contradiction:

$$JA \to PH \not\equiv PH \to PH$$

since PH saw himself as a helper, whereas JA saw him as an organiser. On the other hand, there was conjunction between PH's view of us and our view of ourselves:

$$PH \to Us \equiv Us \to Us$$

In one of their reports to YVF Head Office (15.12.72) the community workers wrote:

"Bob and Ray said that their role must never exceed that of technical advisers, which implied that they did not wish and on no account would be involved in policy decisions on the making of tapes,

or in the actual making of tapes. This was largely due to the feeling that they wanted to observe just how a community would use this new resource and not how they would get a community to use this resource. YVF largely agreed with this thinking and to a certain extent included themselves in the same decision. That is to say that we, too, felt that as far as possible it was up to us not to control video use ourselves but to make it possible for a very wide range of Bentilee people to have access to the tapes and, if possible, to see that video did not become identified with YVF."

We can express schematically the perspectives in this paragraph, thus:

$$YVF \rightarrow X \ \equiv \ Us \rightarrow X \quad \text{(i.e. they agreed with us)}$$
$$YVF \rightarrow Us \rightarrow X \ \equiv \ Us \rightarrow X \quad \text{(they understood what we were trying to do)}$$

Also, they still saw their role in the common project as similar to ours.

We, for our part, still saw our role as similar to theirs. We also felt that we still understood the way they saw the project:

$$Us \rightarrow YVF \rightarrow X \ \equiv \ YVF \rightarrow X$$

However, in the same report, the authors expressed reservations about the degree to which they were managing to "stay in the background".

When we came to 'help' BVPC make their tape, Promises, Promises (19.12.72) only one member, AB, was available for the first day's shooting. We therefore had to depart from our intended role as helpers and observers and become what we had set out not to be - a 'film crew'. On the second day, though, more people turned up and we left the rest of the recording to them.

Some time later (3.1.73) PH was talking about the video project at a meeting of the Playschemes Association:

"As well as the equipment for a year, Bentilee has also got the expert services of Bob and Ray on one condition, I believe, and one condition only, and that is Bentilee makes the tapes and they advise us how to do it technically. They will not make them for us - they will not tell us what is a good thing and what is a bad thing - because otherwise they'd be 'observing themselves' and not us." This refers to the reason we gave for not wanting to act as a film crew: we wanted to compare residents' views of a situation with each other and with our own views. Again, this statement reveals an understanding of the way we saw the project.

(4.1.73) We had arranged to do some taping at a local school, but for some reason had neglected to tell YVF about it. PH seemed a bit put out by this.

(9.1.73) Mrs. F., a laboratory technician at another school who had been at the public meeting, had talked us into recording some BBC educational broadcasts off-air for her. We didn't want to let the equipment become tied up doing this for long periods, but saw it as a possible springboard for other activities at the school. We were reluctant to say "no", but did our best to discourage any ideas she might have for monopolising the equipment.

(15.1.73) We were still trying to interest other teachers in using video, but JA again asked us to wait for a couple of weeks until he'd had a chance to discuss a project of his own with them.

(18.1.73) Editorial-cum-production meeting of people connected with

UBB, the community newspaper. The project diary contains three

different accounts of this particular evening, two written by ourselves

separately, the third written by PH. Suffice it to say, here, that

PH on this occasion certainly did not "stay in the background" - in fact

the attention of the meeting focused almost exclusively on him and the

long, heated argument about an article which he proposed to write

resulted in no UBB being produced that night. PH's account makes only

passing reference to all this which, to us, appeared to be an important

central issue. But that is in the nature of the dialectical (relative)

truth of all perspectives of any social situation.

PH brought up the subject of that meeting again, some

days later (22.1.73) and pointed to what he felt was the contradiction

in their approach to community development:

".... what I want to do more and more is to put into

practice what we've always said is our policy here - making Bentilee

the first and last reference group. In practice it's very, very

difficult, but it does influence the kind of ways in which we act."

In other words, he recognised that there was a discrepancy between

what they were doing what they said they were doing.

In the same conversation, we also talked about our own

'non-directive' role, which was rapidly becoming untenable:

PH: It has been interesting - by yourselves and through us and through

UBB you've come in on a very definite ticket, you know - you are the

suppliers of goodies and you have said, "We do not want to interfere

in your lives. Here is something for you to do, to play with and we'll

help you do it in the way you want to do it." And you've been as good

as your word, whereas we weren't like that, or we're not always seen like that and other students who've been around haven't always been like that. And I don't think you're going to be able to stay like that much longer, either.

Bob: Yeah, this is something else we've been talking about during the past week or so - mainly with reference to JD and his judo club... we seem to be getting into a rut.

Ray: And Mrs. F. with her recording off the TV....

PH: Sorry?

Ray: Her recording BBC broadcasts - you know, she wants to record educational programmes off BBC or ITV and we're not particularly interested in doing this. But if we're going to be true to our word, as you put it, then we (have to do it).

PH: Even if you do, you see, that may eventually lead to video being tied up with Grasshoppers* and Mrs. Oojah and then I suspect that other people would not allow that and you would either have to say, "Well, you go and sort them out," or you would then have to come down off your academic pedestal and get involved and say, "I quite agree with you," or "Shut up!" You know, I don't think it's going to be possible let alone desirable - that's another issue - I don't think it will be possible to remain neutral all the time.

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* an umbrella organisation of local youth clubs.

Ray: But there's a difference as well between us saying we don't want to be involved in that, and us being pushed into something because of something that happens here. If, as you say, the equipment was tied up with Mrs. F. and Grasshoppers and other people didn't like this because they wanted to use it, well that would put us in a position where we'd have to make a decision.

PH: So that Bentilee had made it for you?

Ray: So that they would have pushed us into making a decision.

PH: Yeah.

Ray: Whereas, at the moment, we're saying we've got the time to do this with Mrs. F., we've got the time to do this with Grasshoppers, but do we want to do it? That's different, isn't it?

PH: So you're becoming involved on your terms rather than on their terms?

Ray: Mmm.... I mean, one reason we've given ourselves for helping Mrs. F. is that it's getting us into Willfield (School) - it's getting us to know people in Willfield and this means we might be able to work in other ways, you know.

JA: It's the same problem for us. Do we respond to any demand... or do we select and on what grounds do we select? - because it's important to our plan or because it seems to us to be a major need?

Both we and YVF, then, confronting our intentions with our actions, were aware of a contradiction between what we had set out to do and what we were actually doing, between what we did and what we said we did. This involved stepping 'outside' our initial, respective 'situations', a regressive movement which may be represented thus:

$$1) \quad YVF \to YVF$$

$$2) \quad YVF \to (YVF \to YVF)$$

$$1) \quad Us \to Us$$

$$2) \quad Us \to (Us \to Us)$$

Now, previously it had seemed that:

$$YVF \to YVF \ = \ Us \to YVF$$

$$Us \to Us \ = \ YVF \to Us$$

$$or: \quad YVF \to X \ = \ Us \to X$$

i.e. we agreed about what we were trying to do. Furthermore, we saw our roles as similar.

Also, it had seemed that:

$$YVF \to Us \to X \ = \ Us \to X$$

$$Us \to YVF \to X \ = \ YVF \to X$$

i.e. they understood us and we understood them.

This 'agreement' and 'understanding' now became problematic in view of the fact that:

$$\qquad (2) \qquad\qquad (1)$$

$$YVF \to (YVF \to YVF) \ \neq \ YVF \to YVF$$

$$Us \to (Us \to Us) \ \neq \ Us \to Us$$

Or, confining the perspectives to the project:

$$(2) \qquad\qquad (1)$$

$$YVF \rightarrow (YVF \rightarrow X) \quad \neq \quad YVF \rightarrow X$$

$$Us \rightarrow (Us \rightarrow X) \quad \neq \quad Us \rightarrow X$$

In fact, we were only just beginning to reach a real understanding of them and hence of what we should be doing:

$$Us \rightarrow (YVF \rightarrow (YVF \rightarrow YVF)) \quad \equiv \quad YVF \rightarrow (YVF \rightarrow YVF)$$

We were beginning to realise that there was a discrepancy not only between what they were doing and what they said they were doing, but also between what they said they wanted of us and what their actions, eventually, demanded of us.

(27.1.73) Ray and I were talking to DJ in the pub about the way things were going. He compared our approach in Bentilee to that of other students who had worked on the estate (e.g. social work students on placement). He said that they gave the impression that they had "come along to help the underprivileged." DJ added that, in his opinion, we "mucked in and worked with the residents". These comments were, of course, very gratifying since they made us feel that our efforts to be non-directive had not been completely futile. If we hadn't taken this line we probably wouldn't have been accepted so readily by local people. However, the contradictions inherent in this approach, which were becoming more obvious as time went by, made it impossible for us to maintain it for much longer.

(21.2.73) Ray went for a drink with JF, JA and GS, treasurer of the Bentilee Valley Project Committee. He told JA that we would have to leave the university in the summer and cut short the project if the Social Science Research Council turned down our application for a

grant (which they eventually did). JA said that YVF might be able to supply some funds and he put this suggestion to JF. JF said firmly that there was "no chance". He said that there were cheaper ways of getting hold of video equipment (e.g. borrowing it from Stoke Polytechnic) and that while it might be very nice to have two interesting blokes hanging about to watch and to supply technical information, the money could be better spent. He said that the responsibility for finding money lay with Ronnie (Professor Frankenberg, our supervisor at the Department of Sociology). Ray said that there was little Ronnie could do apart from helping us in our applications to grant-giving bodies. He had already helped us a lot by letting us use the equipment. JF replied that, in that case, the responsibility for finding money was ours. Ray agreed and pointed out that we had spent several hundred pounds of our own money already. He said we could borrow enough to last until June which would mean that we could qualify for our masters degrees. But that was not the point: neither YVF nor anyone else in Bentilee had made full use of the equipment yet. JF said that YVF didn't want to use it: they would prefer Bentilee residents like GS to push things forward. GS replied that it was difficult for him to devote enough time to video. He sometimes worked at weekends and saw his wife for only a few hours in the week.

Ray became quite angry at the suggestion that we expected to be supported for apparently doing nothing. He said that as 'participant observers' our role should develop and change. It was up to the community to tell us what it wanted and to use us more fully. JF said that that sounded more reasonable and that possibly it was time to start changing our role. GS asked what effect that would have on our research. Ray said that our research included observing crises such as this. JF said that we hadn't spoken in these terms before and that we'd always defined our role in a very narrow and unrelenting

way.

This, then, was the crunch - and it came as quite a shock. To be honest about it, our feelings had been hurt, and Ray and I spent the next few days wondering what to do next. We decided that it was "time to modify our approach to a more participatory one in terms of giving advice, making value judgements and taking action" (28.2.73). Once we had made this decision, a lot of other contradictions seemed to resolve themselves. To use a phrase coined by Ronnie in a different connexion, just a few days later, we "overcame the situation by succumbing to it".

(6.3.73) "We feel that YVF (particularly JF) is being critical of our 'passive' role, yet in the past they have expected us to check with them before making a move, and have even put us off doing things which they thought might interfere with their own activities. We are beginning to realise that we should be more 'active'. Our previous reluctance to accept this may account for the cooling of our relationship with YVF. JF seems annoyed with us. But will they be more annoyed if we start doing things of our own accord? Bob felt that the situation will probably get worse before our relationship with YVF improves."

Actually, although I didn't realise it at the time, we were over the worst. From then on we began to take a much more participatory role in the project, letting ourselves be used as a 'film crew' if people wanted it that way (but always offering them a free hand first). We even took sides in the district council election by making a tape with the Tenants-Ratepayers Association candidate.

Our decision to take initiative coincided with a readiness on the part

of local people to take initiative. For example, GS wrote a letter

to Harold Wilson at the House of Commons arranging for us to tape an

interview between the leader of the Labour Party and BVFC about

neighbourhood councils (see Chapter Three). However, they wanted us,

as "professionals" to do the taping (1.5.73).

Reading through the remainder of the project diary now,
it seems clear that what happened on 21.2.73 was a real breakthrough
in the project. Things began to move after that. I don't want to
give the impression that this was a 'happy ending', but certainly our
working relationship with YVF improved considerably as a result of our
decision to participate more fully and to treat ourselves as part of
the situation we were studying. I would add, though, that when our
shortage of money forced us into temporary retreat over Easter and we
left the equipment with YVF, for them to use on their own with groups,
they realised just how much effort we had been putting into the
project even when trying hard to be 'non-directive' (29.3.73).

Summary

At first there seemed to be agreement between us and
YVF about what we were doing:

$$YVF \to YVF \equiv Us \to YVF$$

$$YVF \to Us \equiv Us \to Us$$

or, in terms of the common project:

$$YVF \to X \equiv Us \to X$$

It seemed, too, that we understood each other:

$$YVF \rightarrow Us \rightarrow X \quad \equiv \quad US \rightarrow X$$

$$YVF \rightarrow X \quad \equiv \quad Us \rightarrow YVF \rightarrow X$$

This was our initial totalisation of the situation. However, the totalisation did not stand up to the test of effective action. We thought we knew what the situation was but, only by acting in it did we really begin to understand it. A detotalisation was precipitated by the events of 22.1.73 - 21.2.73 when it became only too obvious that there was a radical contradiction between our original view of the situation and what the situation was beginning to mean to us, and between the way we saw it and the way YVF saw it. At the beginning, then, we did not really understand the situation, nor did we realise that we did not understand it:

$$Us \rightarrow YVF \rightarrow Us \rightarrow X \quad \neq \quad YVF \rightarrow Us \rightarrow X$$

The principal contradiction lay in the fact that:

1) We assumed that YVF were non-directive.

2) They described themselves as non-directive, whereas......

3) they were not.

4) We thought they wanted us to be non-directive, so.....

5) we tried - in spite of the inherent contradictions.

6) As a consequence, they became annoyed by what they saw as our uninvolvement.

The resolution of the principal contradiction (retotalisation) involved (1) our realising that they were not as non-directive as we had assumed, or as they claimed to be; (2) deciding, therefore, that it was pointless to try to emulate this 'pure', theoretical approach; and (3) acting on the decision.

By acting on the decision, the contradiction was effectively resolved and a new stage in the intelligibility of the situation was reached.

Footnote: excerpt from a report prepared in association with the University of Keele research project on the Youth Service, entitled Young Volunteer Force in Stoke-on-Trent (not to be confused with the report mentioned earlier in this chapter).

".... inevitably conflicts arise, both between the conflicting need of various groups and between what people want and what YVF sees as their needs. The Stoke weekly reports show that the field-team there is essentially directive, resolving these conflicts in ways which the YVF workers feel to be best, whatever the wishes of the public may be. So, despite the claim in one report that the workers have set a goal of 'maximum local involvement', there are frequently descriptions of work done which show that, whether or not this may be an end, it is certainly not the means used. To quote from these reports: 'Thus, although one would like to be completely open with a group, and to make it a complete learning process for them, I do not feel this will be possible in general, given limited time and resources' - or, even more appositely: 'There seemed no realistic alternative if the group was to continue to function at the level we wanted (as opposed to them)! (Underlining in the original.)"

Chapter Three

COMMUNITY ACTION AND CONTRADICTION

The Bentilee Valley is a bleak, sixty-three acre strip
of land which runs the whole length of the housing estate. A narrow,
polluted stream known as the Brook flows through the middle of it. In
winter, the Brook is subject to flooding, turning the Valley into an
impassable barrier between one half of the estate and the other.
There are no footbridges, only stepping stones, and so people who
live on the opposite side from the shops and schools have to walk
around by road. There are no trees to speak of and the land is used
as a dumping ground for old cars, unwanted furniture and household
rubbish. In summer, residents who live nearby complain of the smell
and flies and rats. Children play there and people take their dogs
for walks because there is no other large open space on the estate.*

For eighteen years, the Valley had been a bone of
contention between local residents, who wanted it to be cleaned up
and landscaped and made into a public amenity, and the city council.
At last, in 1971, it was agreed by city officials and central
government that the Valley should be reclaimed. The Ward Labour Party
called a meeting of residents to discuss the plan and a scheme of public
participation was proposed. The decision was taken to make consultation

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* This description pertains to conditions in late 1972. Since then
the first phase of reclamation work in the Valley has been started.

between the planning department and the community independent of the
Ward Labour Party, and following the confirmation of a government
grant to help meet the cost of the work, the Bentilee Valley Project
Committee was formed, consisting of residents representing most of the
organisations on the estate and local councillors. The chairman of
BVPC (RW) was also chairman of the Ward Labour Party. The committee's
secretary was one of the Young Volunteer Force community workers (PH).
Early in 1972, a newsletter (UBB) was started, with the intention of
keeping residents informed about the progress of the project. An
exhibition of material prepared by schools on the estate was also held.

Soon after our arrival in Bentilee, Ray and I contacted
BVPC and we were invited to attend a meeting on 5.12.72 to talk about
video. We showed them how the equipment worked and discussed the
possibility of its use by the committee. By this time, consultation
between BVPC and the planning department had been completed and the
committee had succeeded in getting some of its proposals adopted.
However, they were concerned that, although they had been instrumental
in getting something done about the Brook, the reclamation work still
hadn't started and so things weren't <u>seen</u> to be happening by local
people. There was disjunction between the way BVPC saw the situation
and the way other residents saw it:

$$BVPC \rightarrow Brook\ scheme \neq residents \rightarrow Brook\ scheme.$$

The committee decided to make a tape about the Brook scheme,
to include details of the proposed changes and interviews with BVPC
members, councillors and officials, the contractor and local people.
They planned to play back the tape at the community hall, in working
men's clubs, pubs, the shopping precinct, etc., to show people what the
committee had been doing to reassure them that the reclamation work was

due to begin early in the new year. We said that we would help them
to make the tape but that we didn't want to make it _for_ them. (We
were still going through our 'non-directive' phase.)

The following Sunday (10.12.72) we held a practice session
with some of the committee members. They taped shots of the Brook and
interviewed each other, getting the 'feel' of the video equipment.
Later, we went to a pub overlooking the Valley where they recorded
interviews with several people in the bar. As a result of this exercise,
the committee's initial appraisal of the situation was largely borne
out. One or two people had heard about the Brook scheme but were
unaware of the existence of BVPC. Everyone agreed that something
should be done about the Brook. However, even in the face of assurances
by the committee that the reclamation work would begin in a matter of
weeks, people were still sceptical that it would ever happen:

DJ: Good morning sir. I'm from the Bentilee Valley Project
Committee, the committee that was set up to deal with the reclamation
scheme - the negotiations that were carried on with the local authority.
The scheme is going to commence in January of next year; what are
your views about the scheme and what it should provide?

Man: It should have been provided a long time ago. It's nineteen
years I've been going, now, waiting.

DJ: You say that you've lived in the area for nineteen years?

Man: On the twenty-second of this month.

DJ: And during that time what has been provided in the area?

Man: As far as I can see, only that park up there for those children.

DJ: Nothing else whatsoever?

Man: Not as I know - not round this area anyway.

DJ: Well, now we have the opportunity of something being provided, what do you think we should do about it as a community?

Man: Let the Council pay for all this lot to get done up ......

DJ: What if I was to tell you that it is going to be cleaned up, landscaped, and the Brook is going to be contoured in a proper way? Would you feel that this is quite reasonable?

Man: Are you telling me that now? Well, I'll give you the true answer to that, how often have we been told that?

DJ: Well, this is a very good question. Can I assure you it is going to commence early in the next year - how do you feel now?

Man: Well, I won't be assured till I've seen it done because they've been promising that long, haven't they?

DJ: So what you're saying is, it's a series of broken promises?

Man: Well it is because (we're) paying (our) rents, the rents are going up, the rates going up - they're going to do this, they've been going to do it for years and they haven't touched it yet. They did

start on the top end and they soon packed that in, didn't they? Why did they pack it in?

DJ: Well, I've no idea.

Man: Well nobody knows the truth to that, do they?

DJ: So you're not very happy, even at this stage, that the Council - although I say that it is going to go on - that it will eventually be provided?

Man: Well, after the promises they've made about being provided, I'll believe it when I see it now.

The man's comments were typical of the general feeling of people interviewed during the practice session. It seemed that BVPC understood the way local people saw the situation:

$$BVPC \rightarrow residents \rightarrow Brook \; scheme \; \equiv \; residents \rightarrow Brook \; scheme$$

Their analysis of the situation confirmed by the comments of people in the pub, the committee set out to produce a second tape. We had two meetings to evaluate the practice session and discuss what to do next, one immediately afterwards, the second a couple of evenings later (12.12.72). At the first meeting, two committee members (DJ and PH) agreed to draw up an outline shooting schedule which would cover the main points they wanted to get across to people. This was presented to the other members at the beginning of the second meeting. After running through the practice session tape again, some of the sequences were discussed in more detail and revisions were made to the shooting

schedule in the light of what was said.

The next evening we started work on the second tape which, in view of the comments made by people in the pub on Sunday, the committee had decided to call <u>Promises, Promises</u>. The revised shooting schedule comprised five main sections:

1) An introduction by the chairman, RW, explaining the role of BVPC, the history of the Brook scheme and the reasons for the delay, and the general idea of public participation.

2) An explanation about the tape itself - how the equipment came to be made available, who made the tape and why.

3) Interviews with BVPC members, planning officials, councillors and residents.

4) Discussions between BVPC and residents, recorded at the community hall and in one of the working men's clubs (these discussions to be based on playbacks of sections 1, 2 and 3).

5) Conclusions and pointers to the future, posing the question "What next?" - i.e. what happens when the basic reclamation work has been carried out?

The actual production of the tape deviated somewhat from this schedule. We recorded the chairman's introductory comments on 13.12.72. Section 2 was postponed and, as it turned out that the interviews with officials and councillors would take a week or more to arrange, it was decided to go ahead and record the opinions of some of the residents as soon as possible.

These interviews were taped on the morning of 19.12.72 at the Brook. One of the committee members (AB) talked to the people who lived nearby. The first person he interviewed knew about the reclamation scheme from reports in the local newspaper and on Radio Stoke. He had also heard about the work of BVPC. The others all took the expected sceptical attitude to the news that the project was, at last, going to start: "Seeing is believing......" AB asked them about the kind of changes they would like to see made in the Valley. His interviews largely duplicated the preliminary "survey" of the practice tape.

The following evening (20.12.72) we recorded the next part of the tape (Section 4) in the television lounge of a working men's club. We played back the tape as far as it went, after which DJ started a discussion about the points which it raised. It soon became apparent, from the kind of amenities which people said they'd like to have, that they weren't very sure what "reclamation" meant. DJ therefore asked the cameraman to stop recording while he explained (we later realised that it might have been better if they had continued taping). Then he carried on talking to them in small groups, drawing out their questions and ideas while we recorded again. By this time, everyone seemed to have forgotten about the shooting schedule. DJ moved right on to the (intended) final section of the tape ('pointers to the future') and his questions became increasingly orientated towards what would happen when reclamation was completed:

"Do you think that the public ought to do something about this (i.e. keeping the Brook area tidy) once the scheme is done?"

"What we're talking about.... is basic reclamation work. This is purely grassing and treeing.... From then on it's going to be between the public and the council, and this is what we're interested in - your views..."

"The extension from reclamation is going to be to some extent something that's going to happen only if we, as members of the community... push the local authority into doing this thing."

".... the people that have got an interest, who are willing to get together with us - we're only quite a small band at the moment - I'd like to think that a lot more people are interested in this estate when the reclamation starts, and would be willing to get involved - perhaps one night every couple of weeks for a couple of hours.... and put suggestions forward and be willing to process them too. Even to pushing the local authority into saying this is what we want for this estate."

Some members of BVPC were pressing the establishment for a neighbourhood council on the estate as a follow-up to the Brook scheme and DJ was very much in favour of this idea (he had made this rather obvious in his interviews at the pub during the practice session). Eventually we ran out of tape and played it back. Most of the people stayed to watch.

This deviation from the shooting schedule resulted in some conflict among the committee members, particularly between DJ and AB. AB wasn't very happy with the way things had turned out. He thought DJ was "trying to run before he could walk" by asking questions which went beyond the idea of public participation and hinted strongly at the

formation of a neighbourhood council. He said he was thinking of breaking off his association with BVPC when the reclamation scheme was completed. He didn't want anything to do with the neighbourhood council proposal because it involved "clashing with the council". (The Labour-controlled city council had already rejected the plan.) The conflict centred on the fact that DJ and AB each had different views of what the tape was supposed to be about:

$$DJ \rightarrow tape \; \neq \; AB \rightarrow tape$$

They did not understand each other's intentions:

$$DJ \rightarrow AB \rightarrow tape \; \neq \; AB \rightarrow tape$$

$$AB \rightarrow DJ \rightarrow tape \; \neq \; DJ \rightarrow tape$$

and they did not realise it:

$$DJ \rightarrow AB \rightarrow DJ \rightarrow tape \; \neq \; AB \rightarrow DJ \rightarrow tape$$

$$AB \rightarrow DJ \rightarrow AB \rightarrow tape \; \neq \; DJ \rightarrow AB \rightarrow tape$$

Although the tape was seen and discussed by a few people, it was never shown publicly on the estate. Herein lies a significant contradiction: between the way the tape was intended to turn out and the way it actually turned out; and between the way it was originally intended to be used and the way it was eventually used (see 1.3.73). At the time, it seemed to me that this was the principal contradiction in our work with BVPC to date and that resolving it would lead to a more effective use of video. I tried to bring the matter up for discussion at a subsequent meeting of the committee (20.2.73) but the suggestion was by-passed.

However, the members had, from the outset, been aware of other contradictions in the situation (though they may not have formulated them in sociological jargon) and had sought to take appropriate

action. In their initial appraisal, they recognised a discrepancy between their view of what was happening and the views of other residents. This resulted from the fact that BVPC had information which the public didn't have. Resolving the contradiction therefore required an act of communication which would lead to an understanding of the issues involved. The members felt that they understood the residents' views (i.e. that nothing was happening). The residents, on the other hand, didn't understand the way the committee saw the situation (i.e. as a scheme which was about to begin):

$$residents \rightarrow BVPC \rightarrow Brook\ scheme \neq BVPC \rightarrow Brook\ scheme$$

The first tape provided an opportunity for the members to practice using the equipment and also to 'rehearse' the kind of information they wanted to communicate. As it turned out, this tape would have been more appropriate at an earlier stage in the project, while negotiations with the planners were still in progress. By this time, there was not really much point in asking people whether they thought the Valley should be reclaimed and, if so, what kind of amenities should be provided. There was thus a contradiction between their intentions, based on their analysis of the situation, and the results. This point was picked up at the first evaluation meeting and the shooting schedule was drafted. The schedule was revised following the second evaluation, representing a possible resolution of the contradiction. However, when the second tape was completed, the contradiction between intentions and results was, if anything, even greater. In terms of what they had set out to do, Promises, Promises was pretty useless.

What people really needed to know was what reclamation involved. BVPC assumed that the public knew this, but that they didn't

know the work was going to start in the next few weeks. (In fact, some of the people they talked to did know that the scheme was about to start.) Hence, DJ had to break off in the middle of Promises, Promises to explain what reclamation meant.

The process so far had been: analysis of situation → formulation of intentions → action → results. The results (in the form of two videotapes) were not definitive resolutions of all the contradictions in the situation, since it was only in the act of making them that the members began to see more clearly what the situation actually was. Each time they acted on their 'working definition' of what the situation was, their actions brought about changes in the meaning of the situation which revealed, through new contradictions, new issues which had to be dealt with.

It is a pity (at least from our point of view as researchers) that no further tapes were made about the Brook scheme. It would have been interesting to trace the progress of subsequent analyses, plans and taping sessions. Events seemed to get bogged down in the difference of opinion between DJ and AB, with the result that DJ continued to make tapes on his own (i.e. not as a representative of BVPC) while AB had nothing more to do with video. BVPC formed a subcommittee to deal with video and another member, GS, was elected as its chairman. By this time the issue was stone cold, reclamation work had started, and BVPC began to consider other projects involving video.

Several more tapes were made on topics ranging from parking problems and the lack of play facilities in Bentilee to a local festival. Most of these, too, were seen by only a few people (see 5.5.73 - 14.6.73).

Meanwhile, although the Brook scheme was now underway, the proposed neighbourhood council had not been forgotten. In spite of the conflict which it had created within the group, those members who supported the proposal were determined to carry on with the campaign.

DJ had recognised the contradiction in the decision to make participation independent of the Ward Labour party - a contradiction which consisted in the fact that RW was chairman of both the Ward Labour Party and BVPC (27.1.73). Since the city Labour Party had already rejected plans for a neighbourhood council in Bentilee, he felt that BVPC would not be able to get much further with the idea.

However, a subsequent event pointed the way to further action. On 11.2.73 the newspapers printed a speech made by Harold Wilson in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, entitled Democracy in Local Affairs, in which the leader of the Labour Party advocated the formation of elected neighbourhood councils within the reorganised structure of local government. There was thus a contradiction between this policy and the policy of the Labour Party in Stoke-on-Trent. BVPC decided to capitalise on this contradiction by making an issue out of it.

On 1.3.73, GS, chairman of BVPC's video subcommittee wrote to Harold Wilson asking if they could tape an interview with him. The request was granted. Not long afterwards, DJ joined the Labour Party.

In view of the importance of the interview, the committee asked us, "as professionals", to make the recording (1.3.73). We agreed to do this, as a sequence of events had let us to question our former, non-directive approach: we were changing from observers to participants (see Chapter Two).

The interview with Harold Wilson was taped in his office at the House of Commons on 12.7.73. This was almost the last entry in our project diary, as lack of funds forced us to wind up our fieldwork. The tape was handed over to BVPC. The outcome of the interview was the formation of a neighbourhood council steering committee, with RW as its chairman.

In October, we heard that the tape had been shown publicly on the estate. In a report in the Stoke-on-Trent Evening Sentinel (2.10.73) the steering committee called on the city council to give financial support to the project. A press release issued before the showing of the tape portrayed the campaign for a neighbourhood council as a natural progression from BVPC's negotiations with the planning department. No mention was made of the intra-group conflict which took place prior to the decision to go ahead and press for a neighbourhood council.

"Early on in their deliberations the group realised that all the improvements and benefits the reclamation would bring could very easily be wasted and destroyed.... One of the main aims of participation was to foster concern amongst local people for the Brook land and the estate as a whole. But such concern and community spirit has to be maintained as well as fostered....thus it was that the idea to establish a neighbourhood council was born."

The analysis of contradictions in social situations enables us to determine future courses of action which will lead to a supersession of conflicting elements. Dialectical-phenomenological sociology attempts to reveal such contradictions and discover the relations between them (e.g. the 'effect' of contradiction upon

contradiction; playing off one contradiction against another;
formulating the principal contradiction under which various other
conflicting elements may be subsumed). The analysis is checked by
putting it to the test of effective action (an act is judged effective
if it resolves the principal contradiction).

The principal contradiction appeared at first to exist
between (1) the way Promises, Promises was intended to turn out and
the way it actually did turn out, and (2) the way it was intended to
be used and the way it was eventually used. It seemed that the conflict
between DJ and AB was 'contained' within the contradiction. In fact
the reverse was later shown to be the case (and this may explain why
the above formulation was not discussed at the meeting on 20.2.73).

The principal contradiction lay in the difference of
intention between those members of BVPC who thought they were making
a tape about reclamation and those who were bent on taking the matter
further. The Harold Wilson interview, in contrast to the previous
tapes, did turn out the way it was planned and it was used in the way
intended. The principal contradiction was resolved. The events which
led up to this were not fully recorded by us since by this time we
were no longer working in Bentilee. However, that a resolution did
occur is undeniable, and it was clearly related to Harold Wilson's
speech which pointed out the contradiction between the partyleader's
views and those of the Labour-controlled city council.

Summary

BVPC had access to information about the Brook scheme which the other
residents didn't have: they therefore 'saw' the situation differently:

$$BVPC \rightarrow Brook\ scheme\ \neq\ Residents \rightarrow Brook\ scheme$$

They thought that they understood the way the residents saw the
situation:

$$BVPC \rightarrow Residents \rightarrow Brook\ scheme\ \equiv\ Residents \rightarrow Brook\ scheme$$

This was only partly true, since:

$$BVPC \rightarrow "reclamation"\ \neq\ Residents \rightarrow "reclamation"$$

Some members of BVPC were aiming for a situation where:

$$Residents \rightarrow BVPC \rightarrow Brook\ scheme\ \equiv\ BVPC \rightarrow Brook\ scheme$$

and

$$Residents \rightarrow Brook\ scheme\ \equiv\ BVPC \rightarrow Brook\ scheme$$

(i.e. they were trying to establish understanding and agreement.)

Also, they were aiming for:

$$Residents \rightarrow BVPC \rightarrow "reclamation"\ \equiv\ BVPC \rightarrow "reclamation"$$

(i.e. an understanding of what reclamation involved).

However, some of the members wanted to go further and use the tape as an opportunity to put forward the idea of a neighbourhood council. BVPC was divided into two factions:

$$BVPC1 \to tape = \text{reclamation (e.g. AB)}$$

$$BVPC2 \to tape = \text{reclamation/neighbourhood council (e.g. DJ)}$$

Therefore:

$$BVPC1 \to tape \neq BVPC2 \to tape$$

They did not realise that there was a difference of intention until they started making the tape (or at least the tape brought matters to a head). The two factions did not understand each other:

$$BVPC1 \to BVPC2 \to tape \neq BVPC2 \to tape$$
$$BVPC2 \to BVPC1 \to tape \neq BVPC1 \to tape$$

and they did not realise that there was misunderstanding:

$$BVPC1 \to BVCP2 \to BVPC1 \to tape \neq BVPC2 \to BVPC1 \to tape$$
$$BVPC2 \to BVPC1 \to BVPC2 \to tape \neq BVPC1 \to BVPC2 \to tape$$

After making _Promises, Promises,_ although the two factions did not _agree,_ they _understood_ each other's intentions more clearly:

$$BVPC1 \to BVPC2 \to tape \equiv BVPC2 \to tape$$

and

$$BVPC2 \to BVPC1 \to tape \equiv BVPC1 \to tape$$

This understanding resulted in no more tapes being made about the Brook. Then came the parking, play and festival tapes.

It was the contradiction between Harold Wilson's speech and local Labour Party policy which led to the resolution of the conflict between BVPC1 abd BVPC2. It was no longer contradictory to be a Labour Party member and a neighbourhood council campaigner (DJ joined the Labour Party and RW became chairman of the neighbourhood council steering committee).

The Harold Wilson tape, then, marked the resolution of the principal contradiction in the situation.

$$BVPC1 \rightarrow \text{neighbourhood} \equiv BVPC2 \rightarrow \text{neighbourhood}$$
$$\text{council} \qquad\qquad \text{council}$$

(N.B. The Harold Wilson interview tape resolved the principal contradiction to the extent that it enabled BVPC to progress a stage further with the neighbourhood council proposal. It did not necessarily reconcile all the personal differences within BVPC, although in the case of RW a change of viewpoint did occur.)

Conclusions

The original intention was to make a tape which would inform other residents about the Brook scheme. What happened was that the members discovered things, of which they were previously unaware, about the way other residents saw the issue (for example, the residents

they interviewed didn't realise that reclamation involved only basic landscaping). They also found out things about themselves (for example, their different underlying motives for making Promises, Promises). The 'effect' of the tape should not be judged in terms of the members' failure to carry out their original intention. Rather, it should be seen as part of a process of coming to understand more clearly what the situation was so that effective action could be taken - in this case, taping the interview with Harold Wilson. Promises, Promises drew attention to the split between those members of BVPC who supported the neighbourhood council plan and those who opposed it on the grounds that it would involve a clash with the local Labour Party. In so doing, it defined the principal contradiction which had to be overcome.

The emergence of the conflict within BVPC more or less coincided with our own growing awareness of the contradiction in our approach to the video project as a whole. Looking back, it seems that the two were, in fact, related. If we had taken a more directive role during the making of Promises, Promises, then quite possibly the group's internal conflict would have remained hidden. DJ, at least, appreciated our attempt to be non-directive at that stage (27.1.73). Later, when we decided that we would have to become more involved if the project was to continue, BVPC was going through a 'fallow period' following the completion of Promises, Promises. We cannot say definitely what would have happened if we had stayed in the background. Instead, we stepped in and took a more active role at the time when BVPC was wondering what to do next. At their request, we acted as a 'film-crew' in the production of the festival and play/parking tapes. We responded to their initiative by taking some of the initiative ourselves thereby keeping links with BVPC open. For the Harold Wilson interview, they used us as "professionals", something we would not have let them do at the time of Promises, Promises.

Chapter Four

POSTSCRIPT

At the end of the video project in Bentilee, Ray and I were invited to take part in a programme in Granada Television's Open Night series (20.7.73). A panel of 'experts' - Maurice Townsend, managing director of Greenwich Cablevision*, Peter Lewis, station manager of Bristol Channel*, Julian Critchley M.P., vice chairman of the Conservative Committee on Broadcasting and ourselves - discussed public access to television with a studio audience comprising Open Night regulars and people from Greenwich and Bristol. This chapter was drafted shortly afterwards in an attempt to draw out some of the salient points in the debate and to place the work described in this report in a wider perspective.

*   *   *   *   *   *   *   *   *

Popular demand for a more participatory approach to television programming in this country is increasing. Everyone seems to agree that what the nation watches night after night should not be determined solely by a professional elite. Advocates of public access to, and even control of, the 'means of production' are to be found among the broadcasters themselves, as well as in the ranks of the viewing public. The campaign involves far more than an argument for the public

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*   two of the cable television stations now operating in this country.

accountability of our media institutions. However, the exact nature

of the benefits we may expect to gain from access is by no means

clearly understood. Will people even bother to watch programmes made

by non-professionals who feel they have something to say?

We have, of course, had public involvement of a sort in

broadcast television for some years, ranging from programmes like

Opportunity Knocks and quiz shows to Open Night itself. But, as Ronnie

Frankenberg once pointed out,* a contradiction exists in that viewer

involvement generally has been encouraged in 'non-serious', entertainment

programmes, (in which the actual scope for involvement is minimal) but

not encouraged to any great extent in 'serious' programmes where the

man in the street might be expected to have something worthwhile to

say. Now that programmes like BBC 1's current affairs magazine Midweek

have regular phone-in spots, during which viewers have a chance to

put questions to the politician or other public figure of the day, this

criticism is less pertinent. However, there is a difference between

'involvement' and 'participation' and no amount of phone-in programmes

will placate the campaigners.

The BBC 2 programme Open Door marked a new departure in

broadcast television in this country, when minority groups were given

access to studio facilities, provided with technical assistance and a

modest budget and allowed to decide for themselves what they wanted to

say and the way they wanted to put it across. Nevertheless, the results

were clearly influenced by the traditional format of broadcast television.

(More recently, London Weekend has jumped on the bandwagon with with

its own access programme Speak for Yourself.)

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* in a discussion, 31.1.73

The licensing of five local cable TV stations in 1972 by the Minister of Posts and Telecommunications, permitting them to originate programmes in addition to relaying broadcast transmissions, was another hopeful sign. There is, however, no stipulation under the terms of the licences that the active participation of local people in making programmes is to be sought.

Open Night began with a flashback to a previous programme, recorded before the BBC 2 experiment started, in which the presenter, Mike Scott, asked the studio audience how many of them intended to watch Open Door. Most of them had put up their hands. Now, when asked how many of them had in fact watched any of the programmes, only two or three hands went up. This response apparently reflected the official viewer ratings for the series. The question he now put to them was, "Why?". Clips were shown from one of the Open Door programmes, from an 'access programme' on Tyne-Tees Television, and from programmes put out by the cable stations at Bristol and Greenwich. Many of the audience said they found the excerpts amateurish and boring: they watched television for entertainment and this was just not good enough. The idea of access was fine but the actual product needed more expertise and polish.

There would seem, then, to be a contradiction in that everyone wants access, but no-one wants to watch the results. We want television to change, but we want it to carry on giving us what we're used to. This may prove to be an inevitable problem in programming by minority groups for mass viewing. The contradiction was made even more apparent when the audience reacted strongly against the views of Julian Critchley, an outspoken champion of the case against access.

The question which needs to be discussed is not whether
every group which has something to say should have a right to air time,
but whether in fact what they have to say is best communicated via the
medium of television. In the case of, for example, the _Open Door_
programme about Mary Hobbs's Cleaners Action Group, television was
probably the best way for a newly formed, nuclear organisation to reach
a small but diffuse section of the population. Whatever the success
of that particular programme, it certainly cannot be measured in terms
of viewer ratings and the fact that most of the _Open Night_ audience
did not watch it is no reflection on the programme's relevance to the
people it was intended to reach, namely, Britain's office cleaners.

In many respects, the studio audience at _Open Night_
(representing a 'cross section of the viewing public') is privileged:
from a pool of 700 viewers, 100 are selected to take part in each
programme, so that some of them are quite old hands at participation.
However, they are still very much _an audience_, for all that. They
applied the criterion of entertainment value to the clips they were
shown - and rejected them on that ground. The resolution of the
contradiction must involve a change in our attitude towards television
and in the way we use the medium. As long as television is regarded
as synonymous with entertainment the contradiction will be perpetuated.

The requisite change in public attitude cannot be achieved
by opening the doors of broadcasting studios to amateur programme-makers.
The viewing public will continue to apply the criterion of entertainment
value as long as they are treated _only_ as an audience - and broadcasting
necessarily implies that the audience will always be in the majority.
Thus, access, in itself, does not help the campaign for participatory
programming: in fact it hinders it. Rather, access is the end to

which we have to find an appropriate means. A change in public attitude to television requires a structural change, that is to say, a change in the ratio of 'producers' to 'consumers': this is one half of a dialectic. Access programmes do not significantly alter this ratio. More than this, the labels 'producer' and 'consumer' have to lose their meaning in a merger of the two roles.

The cable TV stations represent a move, however small, in the right direction. The debate between the <u>Open Night</u> regulars and members of the studio audience imported from Greenwich and Bristol revealed a difference in attitude between, on the one hand, a participant <u>audience</u>, and on the other, people who have experienced television from both sides (i.e. as 'producers' <u>and</u> 'consumers'). But the regulations concerning programme quality, coupled with the necessity to make programmes to fit weekly schedules, not local need, dog these projects. And although the ratio between 'producers' and 'consumers' is reduced, these labels still apply. One woman pointed out rightly that for people to sit at home watching a programme about the plight of people living in the next street is also a contradiction: cable TV has been described as a community service yet it cannot serve the needs of a <u>community</u> because it is obliged by the nature of its distribution system to treat the community as a collectivity of <u>individual viewers</u>.

At the root of the problem lies the fact that there is no tradition of participation in television. We phone-in, we disport ourselves on quizzes and talent shows, we, the public, even make the news. But we do not decide what shall be shown, how it shall be presented, when and to whom. This is the province of professionals who

have certain standards (theirs and ours) to guard. They know what's news and what isn't, what's important and what isn't, what's 'good television' and what isn't. We expect them to know and we take it for granted that they do know. We may even think we know what they know.

We have always been 'involved' but our involvement has always been prescribed by mediators who stand between us and 'the others'. We are not used to seeing 'the others' without this intervention. Divested of its wrapping of 'good television!, the naked reality of 'the others' bores and offends. How, then, are we to liberate ourselves from this 'way of seeing'? (and we must free ourselves for no-one, not even the broadcasters, can do it for us).

In his book <u>Television and the People</u> Brian Groombridge (1972) points to community development as a model for participatory programming. He suggests that what the community worker attempts to accomplish on a local scale, in terms of "enabling people...to clarify their objectives, improve relationships, overcome obstacles" (p.174), television should try to do on a larger scale. Especially important in this proposal, in my view, is the nuclear beginning and process of gradual growth and expansion of participation which the model implies. The medium itself can change only to the extent that our attitudes change (this is the other half of the dialectic between the structure of television and what it means to us). Changes in neither will be achieved overnight. This is the lesson which the proponents of change must learn from the community development worker.

At the same time as the demand for change has been increasing, some community workers have been learning about the basic technology of television - the portable videotape recorder, or 'portapak' - and using it in their work. It may be that experiments of this kind will expedite a redefinition of television's role and of the way we relate to the medium. Part of the value of community video projects lies in our re-education about the possibilities of television. There is no ontological basis for the present structure of television. It was created as a mass medium, as a result of deliberate political decisions, by limiting the number of channels (limited by policy, not technical possibility) and by investing capital in a centralised system of production and distribution.

With video, as far as the labels 'producer' and 'consumer' still apply, the ratio between them becomes a variable. No longer is there a need to cater for the 'general interest' by providing entertainment - it is possible to make 'programmes' for a specific audience (one person, or several, or many) and for a specific purpose. And the means of production and distribution - the portapak and video monitor - can bring 'producers' and 'consumers' together as participants. There may be a tendency at first for such 'programmes' to adhere to the idiom of broadcast television. But we found that when tapes did depart from this format the groups which made them did not regard it as a bad thing. A lot of what we take to be natural on television is shown to be professional artifice.

Here is a story which dates back several years, when I was involved in the North Kensington video project. A social worker who saw some of the videotapes which we made thought that they "degraded" the people portrayed in them because of their "poor technical

quality". She compared the feeling she experienced while watching them to the way she sometimes felt on entering a dingy council flat occupied by a poor family - a feeling of well-meant disgust at the meanness and shoddiness of the dwelling, inflicted on the occupants by the architect who designed it (and who, presumably, lived in quite a different style). I asked whether she would feel the same way if the flat - mean and shoddy by her standards - were the result of a creative 'do-it-yourself' venture on the part of the occupants, that is, if it reflected not only their financial means but their tastes and concept of 'home' as well. The point I was trying to make was that the tapes, both their content and technical quality, were the products of an ongoing process in which the people portrayed in them were also involved in their creation - but I don't think she got it. The anecdote illustrates the degree to which our values are influenced and our horizons limited by exposure to 'professional standards' and ways of doing things.

Video is the basic technology of television but video <u>isn't</u> television. An analogy (drawn with reservations) which helps me to clarify what I mean may be found in the written word. Video is to television as handwriting is to print. But whereas print, a mass medium, succeeded and to a large extent superseded handwriting (and in so doing fostered the growth of literacy) broadcast television came before the portapak. The result has been that, as far as television is concerned, we are only half-literate: to continue the analogy, we can 'read' the 'print' but we do not know how to 'write'.

Things are happening the wrong way around. There is too much premature preoccupation with access to broadcast television, even with cable. Community video is very much a poor relation of these two,

disproportionately so in view of its wider, cultural significance.
People need the opportunity to experiment with the technology themselves.
They need to learn how to speak the language. Why, then, is there so
much _interest_ but (apparently) so few funding bodies who are prepared
to support this kind of work?

In the tape-slide sequence which we used at the beginning
of the Bentilee project we discussed the use of video/television in
community development under three headings, corresponding to three
'spheres' of communication: interpersonal (which, in some cases, is
more appropriately described as intragroup); intergroup; and
community-wide. We suggested that each sphere of operation needs to
be developed concurrently. We may add a fourth sphere in the present
context, namely, access to and participation in broadcast television.

Some of the tapes made by people in Bentilee were
intended for a very specific audience. Some of them had a wider
interest and were made to be shown publicly at meetings and in the
shopping precinct. Had there been a cable station in the city, this
would have provided a further outlet for these tapes. At least one
tape, the interview with Harold Wilson about neighbourhood councils,
while relating directly to the political situation on the estate, would
have been suitable for inclusion in a broadcast access programme,
since it also had relevance for other communities facing similar
problems in other parts of the country. Equally, some programmes
made specifically for cable might be worth broadcasting and some
broadcast programmes might be useful in a local or community context.
The relation between each sphere ought to be one of reciprocity. It
is not a case of putting the horse _before_ the cart, but of making sure
that we have the horse _and_ the cart.
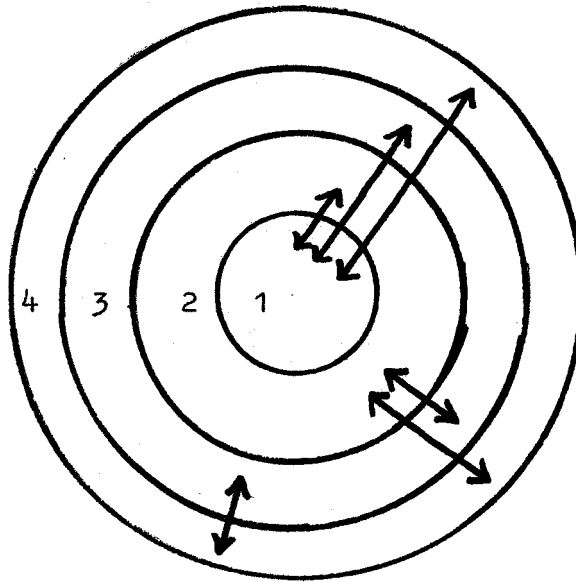
The Four Spheres of Operation

1. Interpersonal/intragroup

2. Intergroup

3. Community-wide (public viewing sites, cable
                      distribution)

4. Access television (broadcast)

One final contradiction: as the campaign for participation gathers momentum, the kudos of those broadcasters who support access is increased as a result of their involvement in the campaign. And their power, too?

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PART III

DO SOCIAL CATALYSTS EXIST?

An Essay on Semantics and Social Change

CONTENTS - PART III

The literature on community development contains many references to the 'catalytic' role of the community development worker. When video has been used as part of the process its effect, too, is described frequently as 'catalytic'. This essay questions the status of the catalyst analogy in applied social science through a comparison of the meaning of the term catalysis in natural science with its use by social scientists and others. I suggest that events in the social world are so radically different from those which are the object of study by chemists and biologists that the term, as an analogy, is inadequate. A comparison of the meaning of the term in social scientific writings, in an attempt to establish it as an independent theoretical construct on the grounds of internal consistency, is unsuccessful.

I conclude that, from a phenomenological point of view, catalysis does not provide an explanation of the social changes to which it is applied: rather, it is a convenient 'gloss' over events which are not fully understood in their own terms, and hence is a barrier to understanding.

A large proportion of this essay is devoted to a review of three reports published by the National Film Board of Canada as part of its Challenge for Change programme. The essay ends where the project diary begins, with a reference to the North Kensington Television Project in which I was involved in 1970 - 71.

INTRODUCTION

        Social scientists and others sometimes invoke an analogy with <u>catalysis</u>, in an attempt to explain the effect of certain key individuals or groups on social change. In particular, 'catalysis' may be seen as a function of the <u>outsider(s)</u>. As we shall also see, the analogy is extended to <u>media</u>, when they are used in a particular way.

        Two questions immediately present themselves in connection with the present study.

1)   Firstly, can the use of such an analogy contribute anything towards a phenomenological understanding of the processes involved?

        Our everyday experience of ourselves and others, and of the relationships between ourselves and others, is the foundation of social-scientific knowledge. The beginning and end point of social research is the whole realm of human experience and behaviour. It is here that the <u>possibility</u> of all social-scientific theories is first apprehended and where, ultimately, their <u>probability</u> is tested. Social phenomenology is the first, pre-hypothetical, pre-experimental, pre-theoretical step towards a scientific understanding of social phenomena. At this stage the task is to explicate aspects of social change in their own terms. <u>Explication</u> differs from <u>explanation</u>, which van Kaam (1969, p267) understands to be "an interpretation of behaviour, usually with recourse to theories, facts and observations other than the given behaviour itself." We must conclude that analogy and metaphor have no place in social phenomenology - or, to be more precise, analogical reason has

no place here. The use of analogy goes beyond mere explication; it attempts to explain phenomena in terms of something else and so belongs, if anywhere, to a subsequent stage of analysis.

However, the aim of social phenomenology is to describe situations and events in a way which conveys their 'concreteness'. Therefore its language (but not its reasoning) may be analogical. That is to say that descriptive terms should bear as close a resemblance as possible to what they are intended to describe.

Following Watzlawick et al.(1968) we may say that the use of the term <u>catalysis</u> in the context of social science is not analogical but digital:

"In human communication, objects - in the widest sense - can be referred to in two entirely different ways. They can either be represented by a likeness, such as a drawing, or they can be referred to by a name." (op. cit. p.61)

The authors call these two types of communication <u>analogic</u> and <u>digital</u> respectively. The relation between an analogic signifier and the signified object is immediately apparent and comprehensible: in the case of digital communication, signification is arbitrary and settled by semantic convention. Analogic communication comprises "virtually all nonverbal communication". (op. cit. p.62)

"This term, however, is deceptive because it is often restricted to body movements only, to the behaviour known as kinesics. We hold that the term must comprise posture, gesture, facial expression, voice inflexion, the sequence, rhythm and cadence of the words themselves, and any other nonverbal manifestation.... as well

as the communicational clues unfailingly present in any <u>context</u> in which an interaction takes place." (loc. cit.)

It may be argued that sociological description and analysis, by the very nature of the medium by which it communicates its findings (i.e. chiefly the printed word) is bound to digitalise the situations and events which it studies. From the point of view of social phenomenology, a more enlightened use of audio-visual media by researchers would represent a move towards understanding society 'in its own terms', that is, towards analogic description.

But I would suggest that the above classification also operates at a higher level (metalevel). Social change may not always be <u>experienced</u> in digital terms, but it may be thought about and described by all those involved in verbal (i.e. digital) terms. The meaning of social action may be expressed verbally. And the researcher, in writing up his results, may further digitalise the verbal statements of the actors involved in the situation which he is studying. What he says about what they say involves a metadigital operation, transforming their language into his language, the language of social-scientific concepts and constructs. On the other hand, he can present <u>an analogical description of their statements</u>, as well as their actions, by adhering, as closely as possible, to what they say and the way they say it, whether in print (in which case the limitations are still severe), or by supplementing his written account with audiotapes, photographs, films, videotapes, etc. 'Pure' digital language, whether jargon, technical terminology or scientific construct, is a preconceived way of looking at the world.

The distinction between analogical and digital communication points to the problem of the relationship between sociological theories and our experience of social 'reality'. I call this problem The Impossibility of Practising What You Preach.

There seems, often, to be a gap between our day to day experience of life and the theories we make about various aspects of life. Theories are, by definition, abstractions from life; they are about life, they are not life itself, life is not just a theory. Because of their abstract nature, theories are not expressed in the same ways (media) as our day to day experiences - e.g. sights, sounds, smells, etc., - they are expressed in a language which itself is an abstraction from these experiences.

The first stage in constructing a theory involves converting day to day experience into a form which can be communicated and compared. This is the first stage of abstraction from life. Even if one aims to write a full account of what happened, some things are bound to be left out.* More fundamental is the fact that life is transformed in the writing; it becomes incapsulated in/written word. The link between experience and the written word at this stage is crucial to the validity of subsequent analysis. Theories about life are not based on life per se but on descriptions of life. The important point is that the media we use for describing and theorising have more in common with each other than do the media of experience and description.

We use words to describe deeds, and we also use them to theorise. Although words may be adequate to express a theory of

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* This applies, of course, to the project diary.

experience and action, they are not a very complete <u>representation</u>
of experience and action. Words are not deeds (that is to say, they
are not the deeds which they describe) but the accuracy of their
description may be improved by using a dialectical method. The point
I am trying to make is that, by using words to describe experience
of the world, and also for theorising, we may tend to assume that
there is a closer correspondance between experience and action on the
one hand, and theory on the other - between what is 'practised' and
what is 'preached' - than in fact exists or could exist.

There is a world of difference between our experience
of the world and our descriptions of it. Verbalisation reduces the
multi-media world which is apprehended multi-sensorially to a single
medium. The gap between description and theory is much smaller and
more easily bridged, conceptually, because the mediated form of the
material used does not require further mediation. In the first case
we are dealing with a radical translation from total-experience to
words: in the second case we are 'reorganising' words.

To put it another way; life, description and theory are
related as level, metalevel and metametalevel. The jump from level to
meta level involves a change from experience to abstraction*, from one
medium to another. The jump from metalevel to metametalevel merely
involves a further abstraction, often using the same medium (e.g. words).
The first is a <u>qualitative</u> change, the second, one of <u>degree</u>.

If we confront a theory with a written description of an
event, it is quite possible that a positive correlation between the

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* This does not imply that experience itself is not selective.

two will be apparent only because the medium used to describe the
event has an affinity with the medium we use to make theories. Thus
we assume that the theory 'fits' the 'reality'. If, on the other hand,
there is only a fairly close correspondence between day to day
experience and description, then this becomes apparent when we confront
a theory based on the description with living experience. It seems to
me that it is much more difficult to get an adequate 'fit' between
experience and description than between description and theory (and
therefore between experience and theory) because of the qualitative
change which is involved in putting experience into words. Hence,
the impossibility of practising (in 'real life') what you preach (in
theory).

In the pursuit of sociological knowledge there are three
basic alternatives:

  (i) Inductive method

        LIFE ⟶ DESCRIPTION ⟶ THEORY

 (ii) Deductive method.

        THEORY ⟶ DESCRIPTION ⟶ LIFE

(iii) Dialectical method.

            LIFE
          ↗   ↘
DESCRIPTION ⟷ THEORY ⟷ OTHER THEORIES

In my view a dialectical method offers the greatest possibility of
correspondence between experience, description and theory.

I have said that the relation between experience and
description is crucial to social theory. 'HOUSE' and are, at
best, only partial representations of experienced reality. Often,
a close correspondence between theory and practice is apparent only
because of what we omit from our description of practice.

This area is the concern of social phenomenology. The social phenomenologist attempts to describe situations and events in a manner which preserves their essence, abstracting from them without violating their integrity. It should be emphasised that this is a continuing exercise, since situations change, and sociological investigation may be a contributing factor in these changes. Inductive and deductive methods do not readily permit continuous assessment and reassessment of the object of study, of the way it changes, and of the way it is changed by the process of investigation.

The first step is the phenomenological reduction. In the 'reduced' state, the investigator 'brackets' his own view of the situation, including his naive and scientific preconceptions, that is to say that he regards them as problematic and not taken-for-granted, since these may prevent him from getting at the meaning and structure of the situation as it actually presents itself. Explication is grounded in experience, that of the researcher and of his subjects. It leads to a hypothetical identification of the essential constituents of the phenomenon which is being studied, in its own terms. This must be checked by referring back to the original 'situation' (e.g. subjects' verbal descriptions of their experiences). If it does not 'fit', the explication must be repeated until the hypothetical identification is positively established (van Kaam, 1969, pp.334-5).

Now, in cases where the researcher is in face to face contact with his subjects - for example, in participant observation - such validation presents complications. The comparison of the researcher's experience of a situation with the experiences of the people in the situation, which is necessary if he is to understand what the situation means, will involve changes in the situation he is

studying. I shall return to this problem shortly.* For the present,
it is necessary to point out that a methodological approach is
required which takes these complexities into account.

The foundations of such an approach to social investigation
have been laid by Sartre (1958, 1960) and subsequently used by Laing,
Esterson and others. The structure of social relationships is
dialectical; this structure cannot be comprehended analytically,
in the manner of the natural sciences, but requires a dialectical
method of investigation. Sartre has written: "... the sociologist
and his 'object' form a couple, each one of which is to be interpreted
by the other; the relationship between them must itself be interpreted
as a moment of history." (1968, p.72) A lucid exposition of the
implications of this statement is given by Esterson, in his book
The Leaves of Spring (1972).

"Since the field he (the observer) studies is composed
of himself and the other(s), by himself and the other(s), he must be
able to reflect upon, and reason about, a reciprocity that includes
himself as one of the reciprocating terms. He must study from a
position within the situation he is reasoning about. This requires a
rationality that is dialectical in form." (op. cit. p.218)

The dialectical method involves three phases or 'moments':
(1) Totalisation: the observer formulates his view of the situation
     and becomes aware of a contradiction between this view and the
     way the insiders see it.

(2) Detotalisation: he negates his previously held view and
     formulates the principal contradiction.

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* see under : The Participant Observer as Catalyst.

(3)   The observer <u>retotalises</u> the situation, reconciling his former

view with the contradictory elements in a wider, more comprehensive

synthesis (op. cit. p.228).

The observer's retotalisation is both theoretical and

practical. It imparts a new intelligibility to the situation, in the

form of a working hypothesis which can be put to the test of

effective action (op. cit. p.232). Above all, it allows for changes

in social situations and for the emergence of the unexpected. New

events which contradict the previously established view of things

lead to a synthetic restructuring of the phenomenological 'pattern'

(op. cit. pp.226-7).

The validity of the working hypothesis is checked against

social 'reality', as experienced and defined by all those involved.

"The criterion of effective action in a social situation is the super-

session of the principal social contradiction." (op. cit. p.239).

But the negation of the principal contradiction does not mean that all

contradictions are abolished:

"A dialectical praxis is definitively successful when

the existing social or interpersonal situation is transcended in such

a way that the current principal contradiction is depassed* in a wider

practical synthesis, and a new principal contradiction, based on a

different principle of praxis, brought into being." (op. cit. p.239)

It is precisely for this reason that the description of a situation

can never be regarded as a complete picture of that situation.

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*   i.e. transcended or superseded. The word is a literal translation
    Sartre's term <u>dépasser</u>.

Retotalisation provisionally validates the formulation of the principal contradiction. Effective action confirms its validity. "Thus, the dialectical scientist must carry his experience into action if a probable conclusion is to be transformed into practical knowledge, or knowledge for practical ends." (op. cit. p.240)

By "carrying his experience into action", the observer's view of the situation is checked against the 'reality' of the situation, for himself and for the other(s); and the dialectical method allows for an explication of the way the situation changes, and of the effect of validatory checks on these changes.

Thus, a dialectical-phenomenological approach consists in:

(1) 'bracketing' preconceptions and scientific constructs (such as the concept of 'catalysis') which may gloss over 'the facts' for the sake of conceptual ease at the expense of conceptual accuracy.

(2) explicating the situation in its own terms,

(3) Validating the explication,

(4) explicating the change which may result from validation,

(5) Validating the explication in (4),

(6) explicating the changes which result from (5)...

and so on.

Dialectical research is, thus, theoretically never-ending, although a particular investigation may be curtailed at any 'moment' for practical reasons. In this way, the correspondence between social situations and sociological description (and hence sociological theory) is continually questioned, reformulated and revalidated.

The catalyst analogy clearly takes us beyond the attempt to understand social phenomena in their own terms. In most of the examples quoted in this essay, 'catalysis' is used as an explanatory term to label certain social processes. Precise definitions of the term are rare in social-scientific writing. Implicated in these accounts, however, are a number of theoretical assumptions about social change which derive from its status as a concept borrowed from natural science. In particular, it involves the assumption that a meaningful similarity exists between certain social change processes and catalysed chemical and biological reactions. I propose to 'bracket' this assumption, which is to say that I shall regard its meaning as problematic and not to be taken for granted.

2)   The second question which I must treat concerns the compatibility or otherwise of a concept borrowed from the physical and biological sciences with a dialectical view of society. (If I am to be thoroughly dialectical, I must say that the term can be neither completely valid nor completely spurious.) I cannot discuss this question, however, without prior consideration of what catalysts are and what they do. (Actually, the question I must ask is not: "What are catalysts?" but: "What does catalysis mean and what has it meant?") The method I have used involves a comparison of perspectives; firstly, of definitions of catalysis given by chemists and biologists, and secondly, of these definitions with the use of the term by social scientists.

The following is a sample of definitions of catalysis, presented chronologically.

CATALYSIS AS A CONCEPT IN NATURAL SCIENCE

Dixon (1971, p.18) quotes the Swedish chemist J.J. Berzelius, who coined the word 'catalysis' in 1873:

"...many bodies... possess the property of exerting an influence on complex bodies which is quite different from ordinary chemical affinity, causing thereby a rearrangement of the constituents of the body into other relationships, without necessarily taking any part therein with their own constituents, although that may happen occasionally.... Availing myself of a well known derivation in chemistry, I will call it the 'catalytic power' of bodies, and decomposition by its means I will call 'catalysis', just as we understand by the word analysis the separation of the constituents of bodies in virtue of ordinary chemical affinity. Catalytic power seems really to consist in this, that bodies can, by their mere presence, and not by their affinity, arouse affinities slumbering at this temperature, and as a result the elements in a complex body become rearranged."

With time, the original meaning of catalysis changed somewhat. Bell (1941, p.2) notes Ostwald's (1895) definition:

"'Catalysts are substances which change the velocity of a given reaction without modification of the energy factors of the reaction' - a definition which is still regarded as essentially correct." (i.e. by Bell in 1941).

Ashmore (1963, pp.6-7), discussing definitions of the term from Berzelius to the time of his writing, quotes a subsequent definition by Ostwald (1902):

"'A catalyst is any substance which alters the velocity of a chemical reaction without appearing in the end product of the reaction.'" Ashmore continues: "These definitions were meant to exclude from the category of catalysts substances which accelerated the rate of a reaction by producing an entirely fresh equilibrium position which could not be attained in the absence of the added substance."

Ashmore (op. cit. p.9) also refers to a definition by Hinshelwood (1951):

"'Catalysis occurs whenever the addition of a new substance to the system offers the possibility of an alternative and more speedy reaction route.' This change from the second definition of Ostwald recognises the experimental fact that the regeneration of the catalyst after some reaction with the substrate is really a secondary effect, and certainly often results in the exchange of atoms between catalyst, substrate and products."

Berzelius first used the term catalysis to denote chemical decomposition. The 1957 edition of <u>Encyclopaedia Britannica</u> (Vol.5 pp. 19-22) applies the term to chemical synthesis as well as decomposition, in cases where reactions are: "accelerated by a substance not permanently changed in the process."

Also: "Since the catalyst is not permanently changed, it may be used over and over again. A small amount of catalyst can thus effect the conversion of a large amount of the substance being changed.. (p.19). A catalyst can increase the rate of a reaction, but it cannot change the position of the final equilibrium reached in a true equilibrium reaction. In a simple reaction.... the catalyst merely hastens the reaction towards equilibrium. Reactions involving organic

compounds may be more complicated in that several reactions are possible. Some catalysts are selective in that they can hasten one of several possible reactions toward equilibrium, leaving the other possible reactions practically unaffected." (p.20)

This same article divides catalytic theory into two branches, "depending on relations between the catalyst and the materials involved in the catalytic reaction. The branches are homogeneous catalysis and heterogeneous catalysis. In homogeneous catalysis there are no phase boundaries between the substances taking part in the reaction and the catalyst (i.e. they are in the same physical state).... In heterogeneous catalysis there is a phase boundary between the catalyst and the substances reacting (i.e. they are in different physical states)." (p.20) The current (i.e. in 1957) view of heterogeneous catalysis was that: "... it involves a sequence of reactions in which the catalyst surface participates as an actual chemical reactant." (p.21)

Laidler (1958, p.4), discussing the catalytic properties of enzymes, takes as a definition:

"The essential characteristic of a catalyst is that it influences the rate of a chemical reaction but is not itself used up during the process and can in ideal cases be recovered at the end of the reaction. This does not, of course, imply that the catalysts act by virtue of some external effect which they exert, and that they do not themselves enter into reaction: on the contrary it is well established that in all types of catalysis the catalyst forms some kind of complex with the substrate (i.e. the reacting substance) and that this complex finally breaks down into the products of reaction and the catalyst."

Benson (1960, p.7) writes:

".... certain substances present in a reaction system in only small quantities may have a considerable effect on the rate of the reaction. In the cases where these substances are not consumed chemically the phenomenon is referred to as catalysis." If the substance increases the rate of the reaction it is called a promoter, or positive catalyst. If it decreases the rate of the reaction, it is called an inhibitor, or retarder, or negative catalyst.

Ashmore (op. cit. p.10) concludes his retrospective examination of definitions of catalysis with his own contribution:

"The properties of a catalyst may be summarised as follows. The catalyst increases the rate of approach to an equilibrium position which is chemically and thermo-dynamically possible in its absence. It must not alter the free energy change of progress from reactants to the equilibrium position by more than a very small proportion of the original value. It should be effective when present in small proportions relative to the reactants. It functions by reacting chemically with one or more of the reactants, and it often exchanges atoms with them."

Anderson (1968, p.1) describes catalysis as a "kinetic process". The catalyst "increases the rate and/or directs the reaction to form desirable products". (Although this is hardly a definitive definition I have included it because I suspect that it is quite close to the vague notion which some social scientists have in mind when they use the term to describe social processes.)

Clark and Wayne (1969. pp.351-2) define catalysts in general as:

".... a species that accelerates a particular reaction without itself being consumed in the overall process. The role of the catalyst is usually to provide a different mechanism involving a series of steps whose overall free energy of activation is less than that for the uncatalysed reaction path."

Gray (1971, p.28), writing specifically on the subject of enzyme-catalysed reactions, points out that although the catalyst affects the reaction it does not appear in the equation representing the reaction:

".... no matter how a molecule of a catalyst may be involved, it is regenerated at the end of the process, and so is able to participate again with another molecule of substrate. The fact that a catalyst must be regenerated (which of course leads to its not being included in the reaction equation) is of great importance and is regarded as a criterion for catalysis."

It is apparent even from these few examples that catalysis is still in the process of being defined. We cannot state definitively, once and for all, what catalysts are and what they do. We can only lump together what has been defined, including divergences and contradictions, as well as points of agreement; for even in disagreement there is meaning.

Catalysis, then, is a 'kinetic process' (Anderson). At one time it was thought that the catalyst affects the reaction without necessarily taking part in it, though it may do so (Berzelius). A

later view holds that catalysts do, in fact, always react chemically with the substrate before the final separation into catalyst and product (Laidler, Ashmore). Berzelius used the term to refer to decomposition only: later, it was applied to synthetic reactions also (Encyclopaedia Britannica). Some writers state that the catalyst increases the rate of a reaction at a given temperature; the reaction would take place in the absence of the catalyst, but at a slower rate or at a higher temperature (Berzelius, Hinshelwood, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Ashmore, Anderson, Clark and Wayne). Others take an equivocal position: the catalyst merely changes the velocity of the reaction (Ostwald), or influences it (Laidler). Benson writes of positive catalysts which speed up reactions and negative catalysts which retard them. There has been a slight change in definition due to the fact that catalysis is now thought to involve some change in the 'energy of activation' (Ostwald - 1895; Ashmore, Clark and Wayne). The catalyst, although it reacts chemically with the substrate, does not appear in the end product of the reaction (Ostwald - 1902), nor in the equation which represents the reaction (Gray); it is not permanently changed and may be used again (Encyclopaedia Britannica, Laidler, Benson, Clark and Wayne, Gray). A small amount of catalyst is effective in changing the reaction velocity of a much larger amount of substrate (Encyclopaedia Britannica, Benson, Ashmore). Although the catalyst influences the rate of reaction towards a state of equilibrium, it cannot alter the position of the final equilibrium (Encyclopaedia Britannica); and, as we have seen, equilibrium is possible in the absence of the catalyst (Ashmore). Some catalysts are selective in their influence (Encyclopaedia Britannica); they may direct a particular reaction, in addition to changing its velocity.

Definitions of catalysis will, presumably, continue to change. For the present, I am interested in these questions:

(1) How have social scientists and others used the term and what do they think it means?

(2) How does this compare with the way chemists and biologists have used the term?

(3) Is the way in which social scientists and others use the term to explain what is happening consistent with their descriptions of what is happening?

(4) If so, are their descriptions adequate?

(5) To what extent are social events comparable with chemical and biological events?

(6) Are the various ways the term has been used by social scientists and others consistent with each other?

CATALYSIS AS A CONCEPT IN SOCIAL SCIENCE

It is interesting to note that the International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences contains no reference to catalysis under that heading. However, the term seems to have found an unquestioned place in the literature on psychotherapy, group dynamics, participant observation and community development. Drawing examples from these and other sources, I shall try to arrive at some answers to the questions posed above.

The Psychotherapist as Catalyst

Bonner (1959) discusses the different roles which a therapist will play in a therapeutic group, "depending on the needs of the clients and the requirements of the therapeutic situation from moment

to moment." (p.459)

"The first role of the therapist is that of a <u>catalyst</u> or change agent.... There is no group locomotion of any kind unless someone initiates it.... In a therapeutic group, movement is <u>initiated</u>,but seldom sustained, by the therapist. More specifically, the therapist must create a more satisfying relationship between himself and the clients. This consists of establishing an atmosphere of security with a minimum of restraint upon the expression and behaviour of the clients. As a catalyst or change agent the therapist, by infusing freedom and security into the group, encourages the release of repressed feelings and memories in the clients, thereby ensuring the constant flow of material which is necessary for the continuance and therapeutic value of the group." (op. cit. pp.459-60)

There is a double contradiction here, between Bonner's use of the term 'catalyst' and the way it has been used by chemists and biologists, and between his use of the term to explain what is happening and his description of what happens.

Catalysts do not <u>initiate</u> change; they change the rate at which change occurs, and the change is possible in their absence. This is the first contradiction. There are chemical change agents which do initiate change and which may furnish a more accurate analogy in this respect. However, it is not my intention to substitute one analogy for another at this point, but to indicate the need to explain social change in terms of an explicative description of social change.

Bonner describes the therapist as "infusing freedom and security into the group". Now although catalysts react with the

substrate they do not contribute to the product of the reaction. The exchange of atoms between the catalyst and the reactants alters the process but not the product of the change. If the therapist is a catalyst, then the freedom and security which he infuses into the group must, eventually become separated out: these qualities must not form part of the 'product'. At the termination of therapy, the group members must feel as unfree and insecure as they felt at the beginning. This is the second contradiction.

Klapman (1959) also refers to the catalytic role of the group therapist:

"Whether he is aware of it or not, the group actions and interactions, as moderated, interpreted or even guided by the therapist tend to provide each member with the materials with which to construct an affectively charged psychological texture comparable to that of the therapist's personality... The therapist is something of a catalyst in this regard. He effects and group members effect these changes largely by a kind of psychic osmosis whereby the texture and some content of the therapist's personality, and perhaps to a lesser extent that of other group members are incorporated by all the group members generally, while the therapist himself remains relatively unchanged. Of course, not wholly unchanged, for at the very least the encounters with the many unusual personalities and incidents will leave a minuscule residuum - a very minute modification of the therapist's personality undoubtedly occurs, be it only a sharpening of technics as a result of his experience." (p.64)

In this excerpt we are faced with a multiple contradiction. In the first place, the changes which Klapman describes cannot possibily occur except in the presence of the therapist. The inter-

pretation of group actions and interaction by the therapist is, as
I shall argue presently, an act of direct intervention which radically
changes the situation to one which could not exist in the absence of
the so-called catalyst. Second, the 'catalyst' here is really a
model or primer for the changes which occur. (The expression 'psychic
osmosis' may lend a certain 'scientific' dazzle, but only confuses
further the phenomenon which we are trying to make intelligible.)
Third, in a catalysed reaction the catalyst is not changed: Klapman's
admission of some change on the part of the therapist is self-
invalidatory.

The use of the catalyst analogy to explain the role of
the therapist still persists. Rhyne, co-director of art activities
at the San Francisco Gestalt Therapy Institute, writes:

"My job is not to analyse. The participants find their
own answers in images and sometimes in verbalising their private
explorations to the group and to me. I am catalyst and facilitator,
responding to movements, representations and words. Although I have
learned techniques to help people to get in touch with hidden areas
of themselves, my best response is intuitive. I know that the best
thing I can bring to my work is a sense of relatedness between me and
the individual with whom I am working. When I go with him and feel
with him, good things happen for both of us. When I am alienated from
myself or he from himself, nothing valid happens to either of us."
(1972,p.313)

The use of the term here is so vague as to be almost
incontestable. However, I would suggest that implicit in this passage
is the assumption that change occurs not only in the participant but
also in the 'catalyst', ("... good things happen for both of us").

If this is so, then quite clearly the role of the therapist is not merely catalytic and a more adequate explanation must be sought which will fit the described change.

Catalysis in Group Dynamics

In their theory of group development, Bennis and Shephard (1961) state that members of specific personality type (which they discuss in some detail) "are considered to be responsible for the major movements of the group toward valid communication. That is, the actions of (these) members.... move the group to the next phase. Such actions are called barometric events, and the initiators are called catalysts.... The catalysts... are the persons capable of reducing the uncertainty characterising a given phase (reducing 'energy of activation'? cf. Clark and Wayne, 1969, pp.351-2). 'Leadership' from the standpoint of group development can be defined in terms of catalysts responsible for group movement from one phase to the next." (p.324)

"The major events of this kind are the removal of the trainer as part of the resolution of the dependence problem; and the evaluation—grading requirements at the termination of the course. Both these barometric events require a catalytic agent in the group to bring them about. That is to say, the trainer-exit can take place only at the moment when it is capable of symbolising the attainment of group autonomy, and it requires a catalytic agent in the group to give it this meaning. And the grading assignment can move the group forward only if the catalytic agent can reverse the vicious circle of disparagement that precedes it." (op. cit. p.339)

Once again we are faced with quite glaring inconsistencies. I have already noted that catalysts do not initiate change and that change can occur without the catalyst. In fact, the change is already taking place before the introduction of the catalyst. Bennis and Shephard, on the other hand, refer explicitly to a reversal of what is already happening (the "vicious circle of disparagement"), brought about by the action of the 'catalyst'. Furthermore, the 'catalyst', by giving new meaning to the situation, does not merely influence the way the situation changes; he changes the way the situation changes so that the situation becomes what it could not be without him. I shall discuss this idea more fully in the next section.

The Participant Observer as Catalyst

The reliability of participant observation studies is frequently questioned by those who assert that they are not sufficiently 'objective' to warrant the name social science. The problem of freedom from subjective bias is a source of constant worry among participant observers. Another criticism which is often directed against them is that, by becoming involved in the situation they are studying, they may unwittingly change it, thus giving a false picture.

This objection is valid only if the aim of the research is to describe the situation 'as it is' (whatever that may mean). For the study to be an adequate description of what is going on it is considered essential that not only the arrival and presence of the observer, but also his departure will not radically alter the situation. Obviously, if the intention is to discover 'what is happening' the observer must try to ensure that his induction into the situation does not change 'what is happening'. He also hopes that when he leaves to write up his study the situation will not change to the extent that his

description is rendered out of date.

However, the intention to study social situations 'as
they are' is, I believe, largely futile; the intention to study
situations as they change is a more feasible proposition. It also
puts the participant observer in a more realistic position. I shall
discuss some of the ways in which a participant observer may become
involved in changes in the situation he is studying, and some of the
ways in which, inevitably, he initiates some of these changes.

Frankenberg (1963) plays down the role of the participant
observer as an agent of change using the catalyst analogy:

"I do not think a single observer in, say, a village or a
tribe is going to change custom and practice built up over years or
even centuries. If he does this is something that needs analysis.
What is more likely to happen is that he may prove a catalyst for
changes that are already taking place. On the occasions when I was
thrust into positions of leadership in Glynceiriog when I was called
upon to influence decisions, I do not believe I really did so.
Villagers had their differences of opinion. In a village society a
difference cannot be isolated to the activity in which it arises. A
quarrel about football may have repercussions in the Chapel. The
Chapel repercussions may affect relationships in a group of kin and so
on. Those societies which have the greatest overlap of personnel in
different activities, the greatest multiplicity of ties linking
individual to individual, also have the greatest possibility of conflict.
Their conflicts are also potentially the most disruptive of the social
order. They are also the easiest to study by participant observation
methods. If these differences are brought into the open not by the
action of villagers but by some outsider, the possibility of open

dispute is minimised. A participant observer fits very well into this role." (p.23)

In a tape recorded conversation (1.2.73) I asked Professor Frankenberg to elaborate upon this idea of the participant observer as a catalyst:

"How catalysts work is they..... they work by combining with the reagents and then de-combining again. And it was in that sense I was using it. Because - I did biochemistry as an undergraduate - and the image I had of a catalyst was of an enzyme, an enzyme catalyst, which acts in this way - what happens is, you get sort of two pieces and they are not combined with each other and they join on to the catalyst and then through the catalyst they're linked to something else and then the catalyst drops out and the two pieces end up linked to each other. I don't know if I made that terribly clear. So that I was using the idea of catalysts in quite an exact sense, where the observer gets involved in the situation and then disinvolved, and if you take two stationary states, A and C, and at A the observer isn't involved and if you don't know about B, it looks as though he's never been involved - which is what happens to a catalyst in a chemical reaction - when you examine it before, the catalyst is there, unharmed, and when you examine it afterwards the catalyst is there, unharmed, but during the actual moment of reaction it has been involved. And then I linked this up to the psychoanalytic idea of transference (see Frankenberg, 1963) and I argued that in fact the observer has to become totally absorbed into the community and then, in the process of writing up, he gradually detaches himself, and as he detaches himself be is able to see the situation objectively because he can simultaneously see it from within and without."

Clearly, Frankenberg is using the term catalyst here in a way which does not contradict the chemical and biological usage. I must concede that he is better qualified than I am to discuss the analogy at this level.

Nor is there any overt discrepancy between his use of the term to explain what happens and his description of what happens. Label, explanation and description are, apparently, correlated.

If, however, we continue the analysis at the level of the relation between the description and what the description describes, a significant omission is disclosed.

Imagine a research project where two participant observers are studying the same changing situation and do not compare notes until their descriptions are completed. We may expect to find, not surprisingly, that their accounts differ. Have they in fact been studying the same situation?* Or have they concentrated on different aspects of the same situation? Or is it possible that their presence has, in some way, changed the way the situation changes, both for themselves and for the people involved?

It may well be that in the case of rituals or customs which are rooted in history the presence of an observer will not bring about any changes in the patterns of behaviour or sequences of events which constitute such practices. That is to say that, in terms of social action there may be no change. However, social action is not reducible to a sequence of events which can be described 'objectively', in the style of the natural sciences. We assume that the rituals and

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* Phenomenologically, it is not possible for two researchers to study the 'same' situation.

customs in which the members of a society engage are <u>meaningful</u>.
We further assume that the meaning they have for the members is not
the same meaning which they have for an observer. Although the mere
presence of the participant observer may not change the behaviour or
events he is studying he will, simply by virtue of the fact that he
is there, change the meaning which the events have for the members;
and the meaning of the situation is an inherent part of the situation.

It is at this point that the catalyst analogy becomes
inadequate. In chemistry we take it for granted that the reaction has
no meaning for the molecules undergoing change, nor has it any
meaning for the catalyst. (We assume this because if there is 'meaning'
at molecular level it is not meaningful to us.) In the case of social
action, however, change is meaningful to the actors and it is also
meaningful to the so-called catalyst. What is more, the term 'catalyst'
itself has meaning which cannot be separated out from the situation.

Frankenberg is suggesting that social change lies
'slumbering' (Berzelius) until the introduction of a suitable 'catalyst'
which facilitates change but does not alter the end result. The
potential for change exists and change could take place in the absence
of the 'catalyst', though with greater likelihood of conflict. For
this argument to hold we must be able to show that not only the
activity of change but also the meaning of action lies dormant, for
any change in the situation involves changes in the meaning of the
situation; and <u>vice versa</u>. We must be able to demonstrate that this
change in meaning is not initiated by the observer and that it could
occur without his presence.

Now as soon as the observer appears on the scene and

begins to try to understand the situation, the situation begins to change. Whereas formerly it had meaning (or rather meanings) for the insiders and outsiders who constitute the situation, it now has meaning for a significant new outsider. The meaning which the situation has for the observer is his contribution to the situation. As a result, the situation acquires new meaning for the members. The observer interprets what he 'sees' and what he thinks they 'see'; and the members interpret what they 'see' and what they think he 'sees'. At the most superficial level, what is to them an ordinary, everyday event becomes more significant (invested with new meaning) because this stranger regards it as an event worth studying. The situation is beginning to change.

But we are concerned with more meaningful changes: specifically, with progress toward making the situation intelligible. For although a situation has meaning for the members, they may not understand it. And as Laing (1969) points out, they may not see that they do not understand it. Likewise, the situation has meaning for the observer. He too may not understand it but he may think that he does understand it.

I have adopted a schema (Laing, Phillipson, Lee, 1966) in which understanding and misunderstanding are defined as conjunction or disjunction between the direct perspective of one person or group (the way the person or group sees the situation) and the metaperspective of another (the way the other person or group thinks the first person or group sees the situation) on a common issue. Thus, to take as an example a simple situation comprising two actors, A and B, in a dyadic relationship, and an observer, X, we may say that:

(1) A understands B if his view of the way B sees the situation

corresponds with the way B sees the situation:

$$A \to (B \to (A \leftrightarrow B)) \equiv B \to (A \leftrightarrow B)$$

(2) B understands A if his view of the way A sees the situation

corresponds with the way A actually does see the situation:

$$B \to (A \to (A \leftrightarrow B)) \equiv A \to (A \leftrightarrow B)$$

(3) X understands A and B if his view of the way they see the

situation corresponds with the way they actually do see the

situation:

$$X \to (A \to (A \leftrightarrow B)) \equiv A \to (A \leftrightarrow B)$$

$$X \to (B \to (A \leftrightarrow B)) \equiv B \to (A \leftrightarrow B)$$

(4) A and B understand X if their views of the way he sees the situation

correspond with the way he sees the situation:

$$A \to (X \to (A \leftrightarrow B)) \equiv X \to (A \leftrightarrow B)$$

$$B \to (X \to (A \leftrightarrow B)) \equiv X \to (A \leftrightarrow B)$$

The schema may be extended by 'rotating' the triad so
that A and X become the actors and B becomes the observer, or so that
X and B become the actors and A becomes the observer. If A, B and X
understand each other the situation may be said to have attained a
certain level of intelligibility (the 'situation' does not exist
independently of the relationships between them). Other criteria of
intelligibility which have to be taken into consideration are whether
or not A, B and X feel understood, and whether or not they are correct
in feeling understood or misunderstood.

As he becomes involved, the observer begins to get a clearer picture of what the situation means to the society members: and the questions he asks or neglects to ask tell the members something about the way he is interpreting the situation; its meaning for them both modifies and takes into account its meaning for him. For the observer to understand what the members are doing, his view of their view of the situation must correspond, for practical purposes, with the way the members actually do see the situation. This criterion points to Schutz's postulate of adequacy, in which he states that:

"Each term in a scientific model of human action must be constructed in such a way that a human act performed within the life-world by an individual actor in the way indicated by the typical construct would be understandable for the actor himself as well as for his fellow men in terms of common-sense interpretation of everyday life." (1971, p.44)

Schutz adds:

"Compliance with this postulate warrants the consistency of the constructs of the social scientist with the constructs of common-sense experience of the social reality." (loc. cit.)

In other words, the observer's understanding of the situation must be understandable for the society members if his description is to be 'adequate'. If the description does not satisfy this criterion it is doubtful whether the observer can make the situation intelligible to other outsiders (e.g. the social-scientific community).

How does an observer begin to arrive at an understanding
of the situation he is studying? Laing (1969) reminds us that the
definitions of a situation which the people involved give the researcher
do not tell him "simply and unambiguously" what the situation is.
The various definitions of the situation (the question of their veracity
does not arise) are samples of the situation.

".... we cannot take the definition of the situation as
given by the members of the situation as more than a story they tell,
itself part of the situation we are trying to discover. We have to
discover what the situation is in the course of our intervention in
the situation." (op. cit. p.12, italics in original).

As soon as the researcher begins to interpret the situation
he is intervening in it. His definition of the situation is also
part of the situation. As such, it is:

".... an act of intervention which changes the situation
which thus requires redefining..." (op. cit. p.17)

These changes in the meaning of the situation, which are
in fact changes in the situation, could not occur except in the
presence of the observer. We cannot say that this meaning exists
potentially and requires only to be released. Meaning is created at
the moment of comprehension, of 'seeing', of 'being seen', of 'seeing
oneself being seen', and so on.

Sartre (1958) writes of the 'other' as the "indispensable
mediator between myself and me... I recognise that I am as the other
sees me." (p.222) But the act of recognition in this sense involves
an act of creation:

"... the other has not only revealed to me what I was; he has established me in a new type of being which can support new qualifications. This being was not in me potentially before the appearance of the Other, for it could not have found any place in the For-itself.* Even if some power had been pleased to endow me with a body wholly constituted before it should be for-others, still my vulgarity and my awkwardness (for example) could not lodge there potentially; for they are meanings and as such they surpass the body and at the same time refer to a witness capable of understanding them and to the totality of my human reality."** (loc. cit.)

Thus, the meaning of action, and hence the situation, changes with the appearance of the observer (the pun on 'appearance' is apposite) and this change cannot occur except in his presence.

Laing goes so far as to suggest that the observer's definition of the situation "may even be an aetiological factor in creating the situation (he) has defined" (op. cit. p.17) - that is to say, a self-fulfilling prophecy. The meaning of the situation, and hence the situation itself, is different for the members and for the observer. In Sartre's terms, the members interpret the situation as a totalisation: the observer sees it as a totality. The observer is the mediator between the members and the situation perceived by him as an objective totality; and this objectification of the situation, interiorised by each member (the member's view of the way the observer

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* i.e. pure reflective consciousness.

** Checking this reference at the time of writing I discovered, to my consternation, that Sartre uses the term 'catalyst' to refer to the "presence of another in my consciousness". At this point I began to feel that I was contradicting contradictions with contradictions.

sees the situation the members are in) mediates the relation of the members to the observer (Sartre, 1960, p.561). The observer's definition of the situation, interiorised by the members, mediates the way the members act towards the observer. A self-fulfilling prophecy consists in formulating a definition of the situation which brings about a change in the situation to which the definition would be an appropriate response or conclusion (Watzlawick et. al., 1968, p.99). If then, the observer defines the situation as (for example) one in which he is not liked by the members, he may act in a "distrustful, defensive or aggressive manner to which (the members) are likely to react unsympathetically, thus bearing out his original premise (Watzlawick et. al. loc. cit.).

Another crucial point in my argument is whether the so-called catalyst remains unchanged.

It follows from the preceding comments on social action and meaning that if the participant observer, through his involvement in the situation, is an agent of change to the extent that he confers new meaning on an already meaningful situation, then he too will become 'established in a new type of being' by the society members he is studying. Bruyn (1970) writes:

"While the traditional role of the scientist is that of a neutral observer who remains unmoved and unchanged in his examination of phenomena, the role of the participant observer requires sharing the sentiments of people in social situations, and thus he himself is changed as well as changing to some degree the situation in which he is a participant. However, researchers have found that although he becomes changed through his participation, it is important that part of him remains unchanged and detached. Although 'sharing' the

experience, he is not entirely of it." (p.305)

In a dialectical sociology, the view that the observer can and does remain unchanged is untenable. I do not have in mind here any deterministic notion of cause and effect. Change is understood as the reciprocal transformation of perspectives or definitions which two or more persons have of each other in a dialectical relationship. As soon as the observer (or whoever) begins to define what is going on he begins to change the situation. As soon as the members begin to define the role of the observer they begin to change his view of himself, whether or not he interprets their view of him correctly, whether he feels their view is right or wrong, or whether he rejects it out of hand.

The Community Development Worker as Catalyst

The roles of participant observer and community worker sometimes overlap. William F. Whyte (1964) recounts how, during his study of life in the slums of Cornerville, he called together the various street gangs for a march on City Hall to petition for repairs to be carried out on the public bathhouse and for a better refuse collection service in the area. The Biddles (1965) stress the need for competent action-research in community development to provide feedback in the change process. Much of what has been said in the preceding section, therefore, will apply here also.

Community development is an approach to community organisation which places maximum emphasis on the creative involvement of local people in collectively studying problems, making decisions and taking action over issues which affect their lives and the area where they live. The community development worker assists and

participates in all these activities. His strategy may vary at different times and in different situations from the non-directive to the directive. Where there is more than one worker attached to a project in a particular area, each may adopt a different strategy at the same time. It is not only in connection with his attempts not to direct or lead, waiting for initiative to come from within the community, that the catalyst analogy is presented as an explanation of what happens. If this were so it would itself be something of a contradiction, since we know that some catalysts are selective in their influence and that they may indeed direct the reaction towards a particular conclusion while precluding other possibilities.

The study group set up by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation to report on Community Work and Social Change (1968) describes the community development worker as "an enabler, as a sustainer of morale, as an expert who provides information and advice and is skilled in community analysis, research and evaluation, or as a catalyst who improves communication, stimulates awareness of problems and motivates people to take action." (p.66)

Now, the 'stimulation of awareness' is a meaning-giving activity. As we have seen, the meaning which a situation has for a person (whether he is an insider or an outsider) is part of the situation. At any point in time, the situation is part of the meaningful context of the actions of insiders and outsiders. There is a dialectical relation between the situation and the meaning of the situation for each individual which expresses itself as a mutual implication.* Changes in one of necessity lead to/reflect changes in

* see Garfinkel, 1967, pp.38-42 for a striking illustration of how a situation may mean a lot more than is actually said.

the other. By stimulating people's awareness of problems and possible alternative solutions, the fieldworker gives new meaning to the common situation, and in so doing he changes the way the situation is changing.

Community development is a long term process. Its goals are process goals as distinct from task goals (Rothman, 1970, p.24). The process begins with the arrival of the fieldworker, or there may already be some stirrings towards development within the community. At any rate, it is not the intention that the process should end when the fieldworker leaves. The commitment of an employing organisation to a particular area may last only a few years, and during this time the worker will hope to see the start of a process which will continue after his departure to work on a project in another area.

It is not difficult to see how attractive the catalyst analogy is here. A small amount of catalytic substance facilitates the chemical change of a much larger amount of substrate and at the end may be recovered and reused: a single fieldworker, or a small team, facilitates community development in an area containing several thousand people, and then moves on to a new area.

However, the usefulness of any analogy is limited by the degree of similarity between the analogues, and the similarity between community development and catalysis ends here. Catalysts influence the rate of reaction towards a state of equilibrium. In community development, it is not the intention of the fieldworker that he should find the area in a static condition and leave it in another static condition. Development is continuous. The 'reaction' is never complete: the situation goes on changing (that, at least, is the intention).

The role of the fieldworker in community development is seen by Rothman (op. cit.) as: "one of facilitating a process of problem-solving and includes such actions as helping people express their discontents, encouraging organisation, nourishing good inter-personal relationships and emphasising common objectives". (pp.28-29) "The practitioner gears himself to the creation and manipulation of small task-oriented groups, and he requires skill in guiding processes of collaborative problem-finding and problem-solving." (p.29) "The practitioner functions as an enabler and catalyst as well as a teacher of problem-solving skills and ethical values. He is especially skilled in guiding and manipulating small-group interaction." (p.34)

Rothman also cites a definition by Biddle and Biddle (1965). These authors refer to the fieldworker as an 'encourager' and see him as one who is "responsible for initiating a growth of initiative in others". (p.82) In their view, the job of the fieldworker breaks down into several sub-roles: (1) encourager-friend (2) objective observer, analyst (3) participant in discussion (4) participant in some action (5) process expert, adviser (6) flexible adjuster to varying needs for prominence. (p.71)

Not only, then, is the fieldworker required to play a variety of roles, according to circumstances and at different times, but some of these would appear to be in conflict with others. This in itself is not a contradiction. The inconsistency lies in the use of the catalyst analogy to explain some of these functions.

These partial definitions of the role of the community developer have to do with meaningful action. Providing information, improving communication, stimulating awareness of problems, motivating people to take action, helping people express their discontents,

emphasising common objectives, guiding processes of collaborative problem-solving, analysing, advising - all these functions of the fieldworker come under this category. The catalyst analogy does not increase our understanding of any of them, since it is inapplicable to meaningful action, for reasons which I have already outlined. This contradiction does not arise in the case of other descriptive labels, such as enabler, sustainer of morale, expert, teacher, encourager.

The Biddles attach considerable importance to the choice of a label with which to tag the fieldworker:

"Many names have been advanced by the spokesmen for community development. We have come to prefer 'encourager' rather than many others (some of which we have used in the past) as, we seek to avoid certain implied meanings. 'Teacher' implies the determination to instruct. 'Change agent' may suggest a prior decision on changes to be brought about. 'Catalyst' implies no change in the worker who brings about development in the participants. 'Consultant' suggests the expert who supplies the 'correct' answers.... 'Helper' is vague. 'Stimulator' may imply prodding of the unwilling. 'Enabler' is better; but we believe 'encourager' is clearer." (op. cit. p.81).

This raises an interesting question: does the label which the fieldworker attaches to himself or has attached to him by others influence his actions? If he thinks of himself as a 'helper', presumably he will act differently from a worker who sees himself as a 'consultant'. And what if he sees himself as a 'helper', while they treat him as a 'consultant'?

I have pointed out that, in a chemical reaction we assume that the change has no meaning for the reactants and the catalyst. In

the case of social action, on the other hand, not only is the inter-
action meaningful, but also the labels which are attached to the
various actors have meaning. The label which an individual attaches
to himself or is given to him by others is part of the situation in
which he finds himself. Stated more fully, the situation is
constituted by actors who have meaning for themselves and for others,
and whose actions are meaningful for themselves and for others. An
actor's meaning, which consists of his meaning for himself (direct
identity) and of his meaning for others (meta-identity) is the
synthesis of a dialectic of reciprocal perspectives; likewise the
meaning of his actions, which consists of their meaning for himself
(subjective meaning) and of their meaning for others (objective
meaning)*. The relation between the actor and his actions, or between
the meaning of the actor and the meaning of his actions, is expressed
as a dialectic of mutual implication** (there can be no action
without an actor, and an actor is not an actor unless he acts).

Although an actor is not identified with his actions
(though he may be identified by them), any change in the meaning of
one will result in a change of meaning in the other. This means that
the label which the fieldworker attaches to himself or has attached
to him by others will influence the way he and they interpret his
actions; and the way he and they interpret what he does will, in turn,
affect the way he sees himself and the way they see him. If he sees
himself as a 'helper' he will behave accordingly; and if they, too,
see him as a 'helper' they will accept what he does in terms of this
label. If, on the other hand, they see him as an 'expert' or
'consultant' (as they may do if, for example, he replaces another

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* see: Laing, Phillipson, Lee, 1966, and Schutz, 1971, 1972.

** see: Bosserman, 1968

worker, employed by the same agancy, who was cast in this role) they
may interpret his actions as a failure to carry out his job properly.
And if he repeatedly finds himself called upon to give advice as an
'expert', he may begin to redefine his role in the community.

The way the fieldworker sees himself is a composite
definition which takes into account what he thinks others think of
him. The way he defines his role is related to his attitudes toward
the people with whom he comes into contact and his intentions, and
these will affect the way he acts towards people and hence the way
they will respond to him and to his efforts.

Let us suppose that he chooses to call himself an
'encourager':

"If the worker acts as though he believes people are
unworthy, not to be trusted, or selfishly motivated, his influence is
not likely to awaken generous initiative. If he acts as though he
believes people have constructive ideas (often despite evidence to the
contrary) and potentialities for development beyond their present
limitations he is likely to prove more encouraging." (Biddle and
Biddle, op. cit. p.58)

We have already noted the possibility that an observer's
definition of a situation may prove to be a self-fulfilling prophecy.
Now we see that the community developer's definition of his own role
may have a similar effect, causing the situation to change in a
desired way as a consequence of his act of labelling himself.

There are two possibilities: either the fieldworker
defines his role in a way which is consistent with the way the

community members see him:

$$A \rightarrow A \equiv B \rightarrow A; \quad C \rightarrow A; \quad D \rightarrow A.....n \rightarrow A$$

or he defines it in a way which is inconsistent with the way they see

him:

$$A \rightarrow A \not\equiv B \rightarrow A; \quad C \rightarrow A; \quad D \rightarrow A .... n \rightarrow A$$

If there is an inconsistency, the likely outcomes are, either that he

will adjust his view of himself, or that they will adjust their view

of him, or that he will leave. In the first case, the worker is

changed ('established in a new type of being'); in the second, change

occurs in the community, and the change could not occur in the absence

of the fieldworker (since the community members are changing their

view of him).

        In fact, the fieldworker's view of himself, like that of

any person, undergoes change all the time. Usually such change is

consistent, that is to say that his view of himself today is consistent

with (though it may be different from) yesterday's view. The definition

of his role by others changes his self-definition, whether it is

included completely or only partially, or totally rejected. However,

the fieldworker's adjustment of his view of himself, necessitated in

the case of an inconsistency between his view of himself and their

view of him, must be consistent with the trend of his changing view of

himself.

        Whatever label he chooses or is chosen for him initally

is the starting point of definitions and redefinitions of his role,

by himself and by the community members. These definitions of his

role are part of the situation. Therefore each redefinition is a

change in the situation.

Now let us suppose that another fieldworker arrives who chooses to think of himself as a 'catalyst'. Because the label (like any label) has meaning, the meaning of the situation is changed. But this is not an example of a self-fulfilling prophecy. The situation does not change in a way which confirms the worker's conception of his role as a 'catalyst': this is logically impossible. By labelling himself a 'catalyst', the worker introduces new meaning into the situation. It is absurd to imagine that this change in the meaning of the situation could occur in the absence of the fieldworker. Thus, the very act of labelling himself, or of being labelled a 'catalyst', breaks with two of the criteria of catalysis: namely, that there should be no change in the catalyst and that the reaction should be possible in its absence.

Political Catalysts

The supposedly 'politico-catalytic' function of certain factions in society is a central theme in Marcuse's An Essay on Liberation (1972):

"It is of course nonsense to say that middle-class opposition is replacing the proletariat as the revolutionary class, and that the Lumpenproletariat is becoming a radical political force. What is happening is the formation of still relatively small and weakly organised (often disorganised) groups which, by virtue of their consciousness and their needs, function as potential catalysts of rebellion within the minorities to which, by their class origin, they belong." (p.57)

"The radical transformation of a social system still depends on the class which constitutes the human base of the process of production. In advanced capitalist countries, this is the industrial

working class. The changes in the composition of this class, and the
extent of its integration into the system alter, not the potential
but the actual role of labour. Revolutionary class 'in-itself' but
not 'for-itself', objectively but not subjectively, its radicalisation
will depend on catalysts outside its ranks. The development of a
radical political consciousness among the masses is conceivable only
if and when the economic stability and the social cohesion of the
system begin to weaken. It was the traditional role of the Marxist-
Leninist party to prepare the ground for this development. The
stabilising and integrating power of advanced capitalism, and the
requirements of 'peaceful coexistence', forced this party to
'parliamentarise' itself, to integrate itself into the bourgeois-
democratic process, and to concentrate on economic demands, thereby
inhibiting rather than promoting the growth of a radical political
consciousness. Where the latter broke through the party and trade
union apparatus, it happened under the impact of 'outside' forces -
mainly from among the intelligentsia; the apparatus only followed suit
when the movement gained momentum, and in order to regain control of
it." (p.59)

"Without losing its historical role as the basic force of
transformation, the working class, in the period of stabilisation,
assumes a stabilising, conservative function; and the catalysts of
transformation operate 'from without'." (p.60)

The image which runs through these passages is of
minorities which, in some way which Marcuse does not explain but
merely labels, bring about a "radical political consciousness" in the
majority. This relation between the smaller number and the greater
number is the single, tenuous correspondence between the term catalyst
as used by Marcuse and as used by chemists and biologists.

The reference above to "catalysts of rebellion" is a contradiction in terms, as is the notion that the revolutionary class breaks away from a state of equilibrium (under capitalism) as a result of the 'catalytic effect' of the intelligentsia. We know that a catalyst "increases the rate of approach to an equilibrium position which is ..... possible in its absence" (Ashmore, 1970, p.10) and that it cannot alter the position of the final equilibrium (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1957, p.20). The aim of the rebel is to go against the equilibrium of the status quo. The aim of the revolutionary is to overthrow the status quo. It makes no sense to speak in terms of a process which involves progress towards equilibrium (i.e. catalysis) when attempting to explain progress beyond the "stabilising and integrating power of advanced capitalism".

Nor is it possible to imagine that there could be a revolution in the absence of some group or faction which embodies a revolutionary consciousness (Marcuse's 'catalysts'). Revolutionary leaders, writers and thinkers are not infrequently identified with the revolution. In a chemical reaction, the catalyst is not even written into the equation.

Marcuse implies that the Marxist-Leninist party has failed as a 'catalyst' in the radicalisation of the revolutionary class. What he describes is, in fact, a progress towards equilibrium (i.e. a catalytic effect) as a result of this party's attempt to parliamentarise itself. Marx's dialectic, on the contrary, has no place for equilibrium (and hence 'catalysis') in its vision. The negation of the negation, the sublation (Aufhebung) of the principal societal contradiction, the supersession of capitalism, immediately gives rise to new contradictions which will have to be resolved. The

annulment of private property is merely the first step in the

transcendence of alienation.*   As Fischer (1963) points out, alienation

is an inherent factor in man's historical development, which "needs to

be continually overcome". (p.81) After capitalism, man will find (has

found) new ways to alienate himself. The human project is one of

continual alienation and the search for transcendence. Society is not

a steady-state.

Thus we see that there is a contradiction between the

way Marcuse uses the term 'catalyst' and the way it is used by

chemists and biologists. There is a further contradiction between

his use of it as a label and his description of events which the label

is intended to signify: the term implies a movement towards a state

of equilibrium; Marcuse uses it to denote a movement away from

equilibrium, and even goes so far as to suggest that a particular

faction has lost its 'catalytic power' because it has become too

concerned with stability.

The possibility of a further contradiction, between

Marcuse's analysis in terms of 'political catalysts' and the actual

events which his analysis purports to describe, cannot be discussed

within the space of this essay. The interested reader is referred

to Woddis (1972, pp.294-312).

Ideas as Catalysts

Louis Wirth, in his preface to Mannheim's Ideology and

Utopia (1936) puts forward the view that "thought is a catalytic

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* see: Meszaros, 1970, p.45; Marx, 1964, p.134

agent that is capable of unsettling routines, disorganising habits, breaking up customs, undermining faiths and generating skepticism." Subsequently, this sentence has been taken as the manifesto of the sociological journal Catalyst, published by the State University of New York at Buffalo.

Wirth does not expand this notion in any way which throws light upon his use of the catalyst analogy. However, those familiar with the preface may feel that it is consistent with the deterministic view of social action which he holds:

"The literature of social science amply demonstrates that there are large and very definite spheres of social existence in which it is possible to obtain scientific knowledge which is not only reliable but which has significant bearings on social policy and action. It does not follow from the fact that human beings are different from other objects in nature that there is nothing determinate about them. Despite the fact that human beings in their actions show a kind of causation which does not apply to any other objects in nature, namely motivation, it must still be recognised that determinate causal sequences must be assumed to apply to the realm of the social as they do to the physical. It might of course be argued that the precise knowledge we have of causal sequences in other realms has not yet been established in the social realm. But if there is to be any knowledge at all beyond the sensing of unique and transitory events of the moment, the possibility of discovering general trends and predictable series of events analogous to those to be found in the physical world must be posited for the social world as well. The determinism which social science presupposes, however.... is of a different sort from that involved in the Newtonian celestial mechanics." (Reiss, 1964, pp.134-5)

I do not intend to get bogged down in a critique of determinism in social theory since this has been done by others (see, for example, Filmer, Phillipson, Silverman, Walsh, 1972). I must, however, comment briefly on this passage since Wirth's assumption that social action is, in some way, deterministic might be taken to support his concept of thought as a "catalytic agent" on the grounds that the analogy is consistent with his view of society. If social action is a sequence of causes and effects, then may we not suppose that it is possible that some kind of 'social catalysts' do exist?

Certainly we can see the principle of causality at work in some types of human behaviour (for example, operant conditioning, aversion therapy). But such reflexive responses are not based on the kind of causal connexion which Wirth has in mind. He speaks of motivation as the causal factor in social action and in this lies the flaw in his 'model'. We can describe certain types of behaviour in terms of causes and effects but it is erroneous to extend this to motivated acts. To do so is to commit what Ryle (1968) has called a category mistake: that is to say that causes and motives belong to two different logical categories. Causes belong to the same category as effects, motives do not.

"Motives are not happenings and are not therefore of the right type to be causes... the general fact that a person is disposed to act in such and such ways in such and such circumstances does not by itself account for his doing a particular thing at a particular moment." (op. cit. p.109)

All my actions are causal in the sense that they have physically determinate consequences. The sounds which I utter, falling upon your ears cause you to hear. My gestures cause electromagnetic

variations in your visual space which, in turn, stimulate your retina,
setting in motion a sequence of causes and effects in your optic
nerves. But at this level all my actions are meaningless and are not,
therefore, the concern of social science. You do not hear and see _me_.
Wirth proposes to subsume motives under the same logical type as causes
and effects in order to deal deterministically with social action.
But social action is essentially meaningful. My motives do not cause
my behaviour. They are the reasons which I give, to myself and to
you, for my actions. They make my actions meaningful, for myself and
for you, whether or not you interpret my actions as I intended. There
is a reason why I behave as I do, and my behaviour may furnish the
reason for your actions, but my motives do not cause my behaviour any
more than my behaviour causes your intentions. Motives are meanings
and meaning is anything but determinate. The meaning which an act
has for us is not caused by that act. The relation between them is of
an altogether different kind.

Wirth commits a second category mistake when he says that
thought is a catalytic _agent_. Thought is not a 'thing', it is an act
carried out by a human agent. Whereas a thing or a person is an agent
when it or he or she acts, an act cannot be an agent simply because it
is an act, enacted _by_ an agent.

Furthermore, thought is an intentional act (Schutz, 1971,
pp.102-3). Thought is always _of_ something which goes beyond the
thinking agent and his act of thinking. What we think of a particular
object/person/situation is part of what we mean by 'the meaning which
the object/person/situation has for us'. So far, the study of the
catalyst analogy as it is applied to certain individuals or groups who
may be responsible for social changes suggests that it does not

provide an adequate explanation of those changes if we take into account the meaning which the changes have for those involved. If we conclude that such individuals or groups, as agents, should not be labelled 'catalysts', then we must also conclude that the meaningful acts of these meaning-giving agents cannot be catalytic.

Our thoughts change and so we change: we change and so our thoughts change. My thoughts may be changed by my thoughts of your thoughts. Your thoughts may be changed by your thoughts of his thoughts.... and so on (though there is no immediate experiential contiguity between your thoughts and mine, or his). If I think of my thoughts as 'catalytic' I introduce new meaning into my thinking. This thinking changes my thought in the same moment that it changes my view of myself and of the way I think.

MEDIA AS CATALYSTS

Jean-Paul Sartre, in an interview in the Guardian (10.3.73) talked about his plans for a new left-wing newspaper called Libération which would be the "catalyst" for an "anti-hierarchic, libertarian stream of consciousness which hasn't yet channelled itself into a force."

It seems odd that a philosopher who has explored the dialectics of society in such depth and emphasised the need for social science to emancipate itself from natural-scientific concepts should choose here to make use of a natural-scientific analogy. In the light of the present study, it is questionable whether catalysis is an appropriate concept in social action - and communication is the most social of actions.

A similar reference was made by John Green, a member of the Cinema Action group, writing in the journal Marxism Today:

"Cinema Action was begun by a small group of Marxists who had been stimulated by the way the film medium was beginning to be used by the working class and left-wing in France, particularly at the time of May 1968.

Cinema Action saw clearly that what was first needed was to create an awareness amongst workers of the necessity of having their own means of information and communication, and consequent upon this, for the working class to make its own films about its own struggles. In other words, Cinema Action sees itself as a catalyst for such a development."

In both these examples the same general comments concerning the use of the term 'catalyst' apply as in the discussion on Marcuse's concept of political catalysis, outlined in his Essay on Liberation. Of these, the most relevant here is the inappropriateness of a term which denotes an agent of change in an equilibrium reaction in a dialectical (Marxian or otherwise) theory of social change.

The view that media - newspapers, radio, film, television - can help to 'catalyse' social change owes more to community development theory than to media research. One reason for this is that such ..research has concentrated mainly on the effects of the mass media (which, being part of the established order appear committed to maintaining it) and has not kept pace with the trend towards the use of various media at 'grass roots' level, as a means of social intervention. The proliferation of community newspapers made possible by offset lithography is one manifestation of this trend: experiments in the use of film and portable video equipment in community

development are another.

The National Film Board of Canada pioneered this latter
field when, in 1967, it set up the Challenge for Change programme.
The aims of this project are to "improve communications, create greater
understanding, promote new ideas and provoke social change." A
quarterly newsletter is published which contains reports on their work.

In the first issue (Spring 1968) we read that film is
"considered to be a potentially powerful catalyst to induce social
change" (p.7) and that this assumption underlies all Challenge for
Change films. Indeed, George Stoney, formerly Executive Producer,
has described Challenge for Change as "a programme designed to use
film as a catalyst..." (1972, p.9). Virginia Stikeman has written:
"Film is a catalyst that can bring people to an initial stage of
dialogue and awareness.... film can serve as a catalyst to discussion...
a catalyst in the process of social change". (1970, NFB mimeograph,
Film as Catalyst). The film-maker is involved not only as an observer
and artist, but as a "social catalyst" (newsletter 5, Autumn 1970,p.2).

Later, when, for reasons of expediency, the Film Board
began using portable video cameras and recorders in place of 16mm film
equipment, the catalyst analogy continued to provide the model for
their approach.

In order that we may get a better idea of the context in
which the analogy is used, I shall quote at length from three reports
which have appeared in the Challenge for Change newsletters. The first
article, written by Dorothy Hénaut, Producer of Regional Projects, is
taken from issue no.7 (winter 1971-72) and is a review which attempts

to put into perspective three separate projects (one using film, two with video). The title is <u>Powerful Catalyst</u>. The second article - <u>In the Hands of Citizens</u> - appeared in no.4 (Spring-Summer 1969) and is a fuller account of the second project described in the review article. It was written by Dorothy Hénaut (before she became Producer of Regional Projects) and Bonnie Klein, who were the two NFB people involved in the project.* The third report - <u>VTR in Drumheller</u> - is also taken from issue no.7 and is an account of the third project referred to in the review article, written by Anton Karch, a community development worker. I have included the reports within the text of this monograph rather than as separate appendices, because this seems to me to be their logical place.

I. <u>Powerful Catalyst</u>

"Film-makers have been accustomed to regard a film as their own personal expression or vision of people and events. They believe they must have absolute control over the process from shooting to editing, in order to create a proper work of art. They seldom watch an audience viewing their film and rarely think to show their subjects what they look like on the screen. They are trained to think in terms of the product - not of the process or of the effect they are having on subject and audience. If, however, we wanted to use film to break down communications barriers, we would have to be concerned with all these elements. Clearly, a new kind of film-maker had to be found.

"Fortunately, Challenge for Change producer John Kemeny found in film-maker Colin Low the ideal man for the job. One of the

* A film, <u>VTR St.-Jacques</u> was made about the project and is available from the National Film Board.

most prestigious film-makers at the Board, Low had participated in the NFB's Labyrinth presentation at Expo 67 and produced many outstanding works of art. Still, he was deeply concerned about the problems of human society and was ready to commit himself to finding a new way to use film as a tool in creative social process.

"Aware of the power of film in people's lives, Low insisted on a guarantee from some neutral institution for long-term commitment to the region where he hoped to undertake a pilot project in community film - Fogo Island, off the coast of Newfoundland. In the summer of 1967, Memorial University's Extension Department, under the dynamic leadership of Don Snowden, agreed to provide that guarantee. To ensure continued access to film, the Department set up a film unit trained at the NFB and Fogo Island to work closely with community development workers in the field.

"Fogo is a rocky island of some 5,000 inhabitants spread out among 10 outport villages with such names as Joe Batt's Arm and Seldom Come By. Fishing was in a slump. Some 60 per cent of the population was on welfare, and ashamed of it. The provincial government was seriously considering relocating the entire population. But the island has a 300-year history; the people are proud and attached to their homes. Community development worker Fred Earle hoped to help them find ways to stay, with the support of an existing Improvement Committee, some local leadership and new film crew led by Colin Low. The barriers were distance, religious factionalism, and hopelessness, adding up to a severe lack of communication among the islanders.

"When Colin Low and the film crew arrived, the people were told that footage would be shot only with permission, that the

people on the screen would be first to see the rushes and would
be able to have removed anything they did not like or felt ashamed of.
People relaxed when they found they need not fear "making mistakes".
They were encouraged to suggest locations and subjects for filming.
And they were promised that none of the films would be shown outside
their villages or outside the island without their permission. The
first concern was to improve communications on the island - to help
people know and understand themselves better.

"In all, 20 hours of film were shot, cut down to six and
screened back, a month later, to the people. Low felt strongly that
most kinds of structuring would lead to distortion, so the films
were shaped as linear chunks of reality: Low was determined that the
film-maker's art would not come between the people and their
understanding of themselves. The films showed people struggling to
understand their problems and deal with them, and also silhouetted
the activities and values that attached the people to their community.
The Children of Fogo, for instance, made me finally understand why
people would want to remain on that barren rock.

"Discussion followed the first showings of the films
around the island. A growing feeling of community began to break
down the isolation of the villages. Sometimes discussions revealed
divisions that could not be dealt with right away. But people also
began to identify common problems and to talk seriously about
common solutions. The community development worker provided continuity
in the process. A new motel and pub in the center of the island
also helped - it became an important forum for discussions.

"The films had shown that people wanted a fishermen's

cooperative fish plant, to replace the private plant then in operation. Efforts to convince the government to help them had been to no avail. The film-makers speculated that showing some films to the provincial Cabinet might help if the Cabinet was willing to respond, via film, to the islanders. The Fogo people thought it was worth a try. The response on film from the Minister of Fisheries led to later meetings between islanders and Cabinet members. The fishermen had gained a good deal of confidence in themselves and the result was that, within a short time they got help in starting their co-op. Now, in 1971, they are looking forward to a larger, modern plant where they can process not only traditional cod but many other varieties of fish they take in their nets. Right now, fresh sole is chilled and shipped out daily.

"A major problem on the island was the size of the fishermen's boats. Traditional grounds were fished out and the men needed larger motorized boats for longer excursions. Jim Decker's longliner showed the way - built with a loan of labor from half a dozen neighbors. Now Jim is head of a boat-building co-op that has produced 27 longliners to date, an astounding number when, in fact, they had expected to build only three or four.

"These accomplishments generated further confidence and action. A consolidated high school is being built to serve families used to education divided by religious denominations. The need for welfare has reduced considerably and young men are now able to consider staying on the island, rather than being forced out.

"One thing we cannot say is: the films did it. Some inspired leadership and hard work on the part of many islanders are

factors that still stand out. Certainly film does not loom large in the people's memories as they look back proudly over the accomplishments. I think we <u>can</u> say that film broke through the bad habits of non-communication and misunderstanding and liberated the people from apathy. With the fresh film view of themselves, they evaluated their own capacities and energies and put them to work. Essential to the success of film as a catalyst is the manner in which the films were put together. They were not made to sensationalize. They were not made to build confrontations. They were made to build bridges...

"This time in an urban environment, we placed ½-inch videotape equipment in the hands of the St. Jacques Citizens' Committee, a militant group of low-income citizens in Montreal who had already proved their dynamism by founding a citizen-run medical clinic in the heart of their slum neighborhood.

"They promptly formed a film/videotape sub-committee and set about learning to use the equipment. Although diffident at first, they soon developed strong ideas on how to use this medium to further organize their community. They took it out into the streets and interviewed people to learn more about the neighborhood and how the people saw it - and to encourage residents to talk about what they might like to change. An edited half-hour tape catalyzed discussion at the beginning of a series of public meetings. The video approach worked: people plunged right into the heart of the meeting without fear of expressing themselves. They also learned a lot by viewing themselves in action during meetings and discussions.

"The most serious problem encountered during this experience, aside from a couple of run-ins with "authority", was the

amount of time necessary for videotaping, especially the editing process. A citizens' organization takes a great deal of energy from its members, and people who are working full time and organizing in their off-hours have trouble finding all the time necessary to utilize the equipment to the maximum. Whenever community problems come up, everyone is mobilized to solve them and the video gets put aside. Which is a pity, because sometimes the problems stem from misunderstandings that could be resolved by judicious use of the mirror machine. Nonetheless, time is the most important factor....

"Now that we had tried video with an already organized citizens' group, what about putting video into the hands of a community development worker who is entering a new area?

"We had been invited to do a video blitz in the Drumheller Valley, a disaffected mining area in Alberta. The former mining economy had been transformed into a merchant center for the surrounding farm lands, and a new federal penitentiary was a major resource. But many of the valley dwellers were squatters living on the slim resources of their pensions.

"Before entering the valley, we needed assurance of a commitment to continuity in the project and found it at the University of Calgary, where the School of Social Welfare and the Division of Continuing Education were both interested in the use of video as a community development tool. In the summer of 1969, they hired a community development worker, Tony Karch, to work in the valley for a two-year period. In the Fall, Challenge for Change people spent a month with Tony, getting the project started and sharing their past experience with him. After much trial and error, the project finally jelled as described in the following saga of Rosedale:

58

"Rosedale is a little village four miles from Drumheller;
it had neither local government, water, sewers nor gas. The
population, of whom many are retired miners, seemed to have no hopes
except to live out the rest of their days in their little gardens
or the local pub.

"In the winter of 1970, a handful of people got together
and formed a citizens' committee. Shortly after, they attended an
evening of closed circuit television in the neighboring town of East
Coulee. There they met Tony Karch, who had been working in the
valley for the past few months.

"The Rosedale Citizens' Committee immediately invited
Tony to work with them and to give them access to the video. They
changed their name to the Rosedale Citizens' Action Committee.

"The first step a small group of people has to take is
to reach other people in the community. So the group went out into
the community with the video equipment - to customers in stores, to
people in the pub and in the street - and asked them what they thought
of the situation in their village: did they like having their
outhouse right next to their well, did they like hauling water, did
they think it was just that, in a gas-rich region, they had no gas?
Each person interviewed was told he would see the tape right away and
could censor it if he wished. The result was that people spoke
freely and with confidence. They were also on familiar terms with the
people behind the cameras and microphones, who were very like
themselves, and they did not have the feeling of being intruded upon
by strangers.

"Answering questions for the camera got people thinking. Then the committee edited all the tapes down to a one-hour show and announced an evening of television called "Rosedale: A White Mans' Reservation?" in the local community hall. Over half the population showed up to see itself. The discussion afterward was heated and relevant. By the end of the meeting sub-committees were formed for gas, water, sewers, industrial development, recreation and community improvement. As one old man said to me, "I've been playing cards with these guys for years and we didn't know what the other guy was really thinking about the place until we had to speak out for the camera."

"The meeting was also taped and the tapes were edited into "minutes of the meeting" to be shown at the beginning of the next public meeting. People plunged deep into the heart of the next meeting and did not waste time with old half-forgotten arguments; the organization advanced rapidly.

"Now that the discussion had really progressed, people decided that Rosedale would benefit from a giant weekend cleaning bee. The whole population turned out to clean their own houses and lots, to clean along the roadways and to empty vacant lots of rusting cars and other debris. This was a visible physical action that greatly heartened the people and gave them faith in what they could do if they all got together.

"They turned next to creating a public park from a piece of wild territory beside the Rosedale River. Scythes, axes, saws and lawnmowers went into action and, in a single weekend, grass, weeds, nettles and bushes were cut, an old shack was removed from the site,

outhouses were built, electricity was brought in, picnic tables were built, picnic stoves were hand-made and installed, and parking areas were made. Videotapes of these activities reflect the community pride that was already growing.

"In the meantime, water, sewer and gas committees were busy pushing the privincial government. Pressures were fierce, negotiations were tough, but the committee felt confident that they were backed by the community. Their persistence got results at last - gas and water lines have been installed.

"The industrial development committee made contact with a small company willing to install a factory in a local schoolhouse, phased out of operation by the consolidated school system. When the School Board began premature demolition of the building, an irate Citizens' Action Committee soon obtained not only a halt in demolition but compensatory repairs as well, so that the deal could go through. For the past year, the factory has been providing a number of jobs in the Valley.

"Burgeoning belief that the group can accomplish a good deal was reinforced when the government closed down a road on which several people lived. The residents' angry reaction carried so well to the responsible government agency that the road was immediately reopened.

"A fire engine was given to Rosedale, and the citizens organized a building bee for a fire hall to house it. Since that time, an upholstery shop and a small supermarket have been opened. A beer garden that opened in the summer of 1971 has become a social center for the whole Valley.

"Rather than being parochial about their accomplishments, the people of Rosedale have come to the realization that in order to bring about significant changes to the Valley, all the people in the Valley must get together.

"In experimenting with the foregoing pilot projects, Challenge for Change has proved that the media can help bring about significant changes in attitudes and understanding that lead toward real social change.

"But how can all the communities in need of this kind of help obtain it? The finger points straight at the local broadcasting and cable-casting media. They are already in the locations. They have the power and the technology to catalyze community dialogue and to plug contemporary man back into his community....."

II. In the Hands of Citizens

"The Fogo Island project used film to catalyze community development by opening channels of communication where few existed. Through film people talked to each other and talked to their government representatives. In Newfoundland, the cameras have passed from NFB hands to the NFB-trained hands of community development workers at Memorial University of Newfoundland, a first step in the process of decentralizing the communications media.

"The videotape recording (VTR) project in Saint-Jacques is an attempt to extend to its logical conclusion the conviction that

people should participate in shaping their own lives, which means among other things directing and manipulating the tools of modern communication necessary to gain and exercise that participation.

"The Comité des Citoyens de Saint-Jacques, a dynamic citizens' organization in one of downtown Montreal's many poor areas, was founded in March 1968 at a public meeting called by a handful of concerned citizens with the help of a community organizer from the Urban Social Redevelopment Project. At the meeting the citizens agreed that bad health was their most immediate problem. On receiving no help from provincial and civic authorities, the citizens decided they would take the affair into their own hands. They rented an apartment in the area, renovated it themselves, and recruited medical and dental workers who were interested in the idea of a citizen-run community clinic. By October, they opened their clinic five nights a week.

"There seemed to be a convergence between the needs and ideas of the Citizens' Committee and those of Challenge for Change, and we approached the Committee with the idea of a project exploring the use of videotape recording equipment in community organization. The Committee recognized its potential effectiveness as an organizing tool, and formed a VTR-film group. This group has eight members, of whom six are from the neighborhood and two from the NFB (the authors of this article), so the term "we" is used here to refer to the VTR-film group. This group has carried out all actions with the video equipment. All important questions of policy are brought by the group to the Citizens' Committee as a whole for decision.

"We held our first meeting in November 1968, and discussed the various possibilities for using the VTR equipment. The

most important thing that came out of this discussion was the firm

consensus that the VTR equipment should be used to serve the aims of

the Citizens' Committee, and should not distract the members from

those aims. The broad objectives of the Comité des Citoyens de

Saint-Jacques are to work as citizens to gain as much control as

possible over their own lives. The main job of the information team

to which the VTR group is attached, is to sensitize the inhabitants

of the area to their common problems and to communicate the Committee's

hope that together they can act to change their situation.

"Students sought to ally themselves with the Citizens'

Committee. With mixed feelings of suspicion and need, the Committee

organized a teach-in and fund-raising blitz in all the community

colleges and technical schools in the area. We used the VTR equipment,

both camera and playback, which we set up in the cafeteria of the

school. We played tapes of citizen meetings, then taped the students

while we explained to them the activities and aims of the Comité des

Citoyens and requested their support and donations. These tapes were

then played back on the monitor.

"The most interested students took camera and mike in

hand and went from classroom to classroom eliciting funds from students

and teachers alike. The whole operation was surrounded by all the

aura of glamor and gadgetry of this new technology. It was fun.

"We were still floundering around, testing possibilities

and uses of the equipment, when the Information team proposed a week-

long information and organizing campaign for the end of January. The

aims of the campaign would be to inform the residents of the community

of the existence of the Committee, to stimulate debate on their

collective problems, to gain new and active members, and subsequently
to decide on new projects. The format of Operation Snowball (thus
named because it starts small, but can turn into an avalanche!) was
to include a press conference on Monday, a series of five public
meetings in various areas of Saint-Jacques from Monday to Friday,
with a big fête populaire on the Saturday night.

"This was exactly what the VTR group needed to give it
some direction. We proposed to prepare a half-hour program on the
problems of the people in the area, which would be shown at the opening
of each meeting. Building on the existence of the clinic, the theme
of the campaign was, "Why are we sick?". This led to exploring the
causes of ill health: bad housing, unemployment, inadequate welfare,
sparse recreation facilities, low-grade education, and bad medical
care. We did some practice shooting. It was in December and January,
and the bitter cold required special techniques, such as covering the
equipment with blankets to keep it warm if we wanted to interview
people on the street.

"In early January we drew up a tight schedule, and
divided ourselves into two- or three-man teams to cover the various
problems. For the section of the program dealing with medical care,
two of the members of the VTR group went into the out-patient
department of one of the large municipal hospitals, to talk to the
people in the waiting room. Within ten minutes the director of the
hospital hauled them into/office, confiscated the tape, and demanded
that they come back and erase it. After a discussion with the other
members of the Committee, it was decided to comply with the hospital's
wishes, because the Committee had chosen neither the subject nor the
terrain for a confrontation. But we fully measured the effect this

simple recording device could have on an authority that did not have faith in free information.

"Having learned this lesson, we decided not to waste time on confrontation by trying to shoot inside the Welfare or Manpower offices, but instead to interview the people coming out of these offices. Our strategy was amply rewarded with some frank, stark statements from welfare recipients and job applicants.

"For the housing segment we started out by shooting exteriors, but the cold rapidly sent us into the corner restaurant. This proved a good tactic, for we started a discussion with the owner and one of his customers, learned a great deal about the neighborhood, and were introduced to a woman who lived in "one of the worst slum buildings in Montreal". She invited us into her home, to show where part of the ceiling had fallen down last July.

"The material was edited down from about four hours to forty minutes. At first, members came to the Film Board to do the editing - by electronic transfer - with the NFB technicians. This travelling, as well as the necessity to do this during working hours, was most unsatisfactory, and subsequently we brought the tapes to the Board with notes from the group on exact footages for editing.....

"The VTR group did some interviewing in the streets on the day of the meetings, inviting people to come and see themselves on TV. These tapes were run, unedited, a half-hour before the start of the meetings, as people were coming in.

"The public meetings were held in school halls or church basements. We placed six 23" monitors around the room with about 20 chairs in a half-circle in front of each. The active members made a point of spreading themselves among each group.

"When the 30-minute video presentation was over, each group moved its chairs into a circle and plunged into a discussion. Having seen people like themselves on the familiar TV screen, discussing their problems with utter frankness, removed much of the reticence and timidity people have in a group of strangers. They simply said, "I guess this is the place where I can talk freely," and talked at length of problems shared and possible collective solutions.

"The Committee had refused to propose some special project at these public meetings because it felt strongly that new members, who would be participating in any new action, should also participate in deciding what that new action should be. The consensus at the end of the week's discussion was that immediate action should be taken on housing, a food cooperative, recreation, welfare and baby-sitting services. At the next regular meeting of the Committee, new work groups, comprising many new members from Operation Snowball, were set up to organize these actions.

"We recorded on tape a number of meetings of various types, but we found that people rarely had the time to view the tapes afterwards. The few members who have taken the time to view old tapes have gained a good deal in self-awareness and in understanding of others, as well as a historical perspective on their progress.

"When the Welfare team organized a large demonstration,

the action was taped and was shown that night at an evaluation session. The participants were excited and thrilled to see their demonstration on the screen, and used the opportunity to view the action in a different perspective and to evaluate it. A few attitudes began to change, especially towards the police, who are held in some fear but who behaved quietly and without menace during the demonstration.

"One of the things that has disturbed the VTR group is that we have been too privileged in using the equipment. It is now being further democratized. For example, members of the VTR group have joined each of the various other work teams, to help them use the VTR in their actions. Anyone who expresses interest in joining the VTR group has always been welcomed.

"The Committee has just obtained a meeting place, the Maison des Citoyens, and we intend to run tapes there, which will allow many more of the members to view the tapes and will help new members catch up with the others. Future plans include using the video to improve communications between the various working committees, placing the viewer in local shops and taping discussions with people in the neighborhood, and recording future actions. There is also the possibility of taping reports and research on various institutions in the city, and the hope of preparing programs that might be broadcast on public television.

"In March we taped a meeting of the film-VTR sub-committee evaluating the use of the video equipment. The following are quoted from that discussion.

"We were not very interested in ourselves when we started."

"But it helped me a lot to know myself. You see how you function."

"It helped me gain more confidence in myself. It's important to know who you are."

"It develops your critical senses. You become two people - he who acts, and he who watches himself act."

"The people we interviewed on the street - I really felt they wanted to get a message across. They wanted other people to hear about their problems, to share them. People feel pretty isolated."

"I think the people hoped their message would reach the powers-that-be. They had never had the chance, before."

"When we watch the tapes, we don't just learn to know ourselves better; we also come to understand others better. After that, it's much more fun to work together."

"Could we have stopped people in the street and questioned them, the same way, if we had not had the camera and microphone? I don't think so. It's a good pretext for talking to them."

"When people were interviewed, they became interested in the Committee. Then they came to the public meetings and became involved and eventually joined the team."

"During the public meetings, with the video program, I had the impression that people really recognized the face of the neighborhood. And they had felt very isolated from one another."

"People are suspicious at first. They don't know if they are free to talk. The video program showed people talking freely, so they saw how far they could go themselves."

"Their experience with video - conceiving, shooting, editing and presenting their own programs - made the citizens particularl aware of the myth of objectivity in mass media reporting and sensitive to conscious and unconscious manipulation. They have become a less gullible public.

"Ordinary citizens have a good deal of difficulty in getting their opinions expressed in the information media. Articles or programs about the Committee that have appeared in the local media have almost invariably been distorted pictures. The press seems incapable or unwilling to comprehend the nature or aims of the Committee.

"On one occasion, the citizens discovered that journalists, who talk loudly of freedom of the press, consider themselves immune from interviews or cameras; they became angry when they became subjects for the citizens' cameras during the press conference for Operation Snowball. They were unwilling to be recorded as individuals, and became even more hostile to the citizens.

"Hopefully, by using the $\frac{1}{2}$" video equipment enough, a citizens' group could eventually propose to their local TV outlet that they make their own programs about themselves and their programs, to inform the population-at-large about their lives and aims, and to help bring about needed changes.

"Unfortunately, $\frac{1}{2}$" video cannot be transferred to the 2" broadcast video with any degree of technical satisfaction, for the moment. Perhaps technological advances will overcome this obstacle in the near future.

"We hope video does not become a mystique. "Communications", with all its glamor and mystification, can become an end in itself rather than a means toward better human lives. Some may want to use it to divert people from their social goals. It could become one more way of avoiding real social change.

"It should be clear that community self-awareness and inter-communications are powerful leavening agents and can set off an unpredictable chain of reaction. There must be a real sense of continuity, and a commitment for continuity, if film and video are to be used for real social gain rather than social disaster. Communities cannot be used as guinea pigs for technology. Technology must serve the communities.

"In Saint-Jacques, a strongly organized Citizens' Committee guaranteed responsibility and continuity. These same video techniques could be used in the early stages of organizing by a community organizer who is committed to stay in the community a certain length of time. Social continuity is essential.

"Video should not be used in a vacuum, and it should not be used to divert citizens from their social aims. Video equipment does not create dynamism where none is latent; it does not create action or ideas; these depend on the people who use it. Used responsibily and creatively, it can accelerate perception and under- standing, and therefore accelerate action.

"The Comite des Citoyens de Saint-Jacques could have accomplished any of their actions without the video equipment. We could not say that at any time it made the difference between success

and failure. But it made good things better, and helped people to grow. It is a useful tool."

III. <u>VTR in Drumheller</u>

"The Drumheller VTR project started in August 1969, as a joint undertaking of Challenge for Change and the University of Calgary. The project was designed as an action/research program to determine the impact on a community of this new technology as a tool in the community development process.

"A joint committee consisting of two NFB people, two university representatives and the field worker were to make up the VTR committee for the project. Initially, they were to meet every week in order to maintain constant communication and provide ongoing support, feedback and guidance, and to maintain professional standards of method and technique.

"After initial arrangements had been made, I was engaged as field worker by the University and was then introduced to the project by NFB staff from Montreal. I had been a community development "grass roots" worker and was familiar with the Challenge for Change concept, having shown their films to other groups where I was working. It was again emphasized that NFB was not concerned with documentation so much as with observing the impact of ½-inch VTR equipment on the community development process.

"Before doing any taping at all, I spent two-and-a-half months in the Valley, making contact with as many individuals and

organizations as possible, pre-interpreting the nature and scope of this "experimental communication and social action program". This is the gist of what I told people: "The National Film Board's Challenge for Change program, along with the University of Calgary, is going to be working in this area. It will be an experiment in using closed circuit television to facilitate community dialogue. We will be talking to people all over the Valley about the Valley. We will ask them what they think are the good things, what are not too good, what do they hope for themselves and the Valley."

"I would almost always be asked questions like "Why was Drumheller chosen?" or "Will this be shown on CBC?". The closed circuit aspect, the instant replay and the built-in self-editing procedures were always commented on. "These tapes will be used here in the Valley only. After an interview, each person will be shown his tape and will be able to cut out any or all of the interview." These ground rules were built into the project from the very start. Permission to use portions of an interview was always sought after the replay of the interview.

"The equipment, along with a Challenge for Change representative and a technician, arrived from Montreal after I had been in Drumheller for two-and-a-half months. Considerable publicity was given to the beginning of the "taping blitz" in both newspapers and the radio. The blitz was to be general and inclusive, with efforts being made to provide all segments of the community with an opportunity to have their say before the cameras. The direction and decision as to where, when and who to tape was in the taping team's hands. Many concerns and issues were raised, but the team asked the questions and determined the format. Questions such as "What about the job opportunities?" and "Has the penitentiary affected the

community?" were _our_ questions and the person interviewed responded accordingly.

"Much information was gathered but it soon became evident that the direction the edited tapes would take would be entirely the prerogative of the taping team. The areas of concern that emerged were broad and extensive, ranging from tourism, urban renewal, welfare, youth, old age pensioners and lack of industrial development to the penitentiary and the dying of outlying coal mining communities.

"The use of the equipment accelerated my entrance and acceptance in the community. It was like a very impressive calling card.

"If, in fact, this experimental project was a community development project merely using a new tool, the $\frac{1}{2}$-inch VTR, this initial broad base was quite legitimate if the taping was used to help the area focus on special areas of general concern. It would be so easy to select any of the above areas and through our decision say yes, this or that is of vital concern and something should be done to alleviate or change this condition. This was a great temptation because considerable material was on hand to move in a number of directions, focussing on any of many vital concerns and issues that could have created noise and reaction.

"The danger of viewing this undertaking in a journalistic manner was great, and caution was required to refrain from putting together edited tapes merely to appear busy and meet the expectations of many mambers of the community who were convinced that the presence of the worker meant the NFB was making a film and the worker was

gathering background material, using VTR.

"No amount of explanation appeared sufficient to overcome this widely held misconception that this was indeed a film undertaking.

"I decided to put together two different edited packages from material gathered to date. One centered on the question of the youth in the area, and the other on an outlying community that had the last operating coal mine - a community that in 1951 had 3,000 people and now has fewer than 500. The youth tape was prepared while the NFB members were still in Drumheller, and the East Coulee tape was edited after the NFB people left. Both of these tapes could be considered non-threatening to the power structure of the Valley, and, therefore, would provide an opportunity to determine what impact the tapes would have in rallying people to look at specific concerns.

"The youth tape was the first, and it very quickly brought large numbers of youth to view edited tapes of random youth interviews and created an intense level of dialogue. The willingness of the youth present at the first showing (about 30) to share their honest feeling with outsiders was surprising to me. The out-come of the first showing was a second invitation to meet with the Youth Club and share the tapes that had already been done with the Club executive.

"The young people were anxious to view tapes of themselves and their friends. The conversation that followed did not dwell on the contents of the tape, but rather took off from them. The tape then provided a focal point, and precipitated an openness that would not have been possible had I related to the group without the use of

VTR. The novelty and entertainment value for the young people was certainly high and it would have been pleasant to pursue this youth taping, but this would have been my own evaluation of what is worthwhile in terms of issue-probing. I offered my assistance in helping the young people to use the VTR for their purposes, but did not actively pursue their acceptance. A number of young people spoke of getting organized to follow through on this offer, but nothing happened following the last session. I left it at that.

"East Coulee: nine tapes were made in this dying coal-mining community, 15 miles east of Drumheller. Again, as in the youth tapes, the direction of the interviews and subject matter was my choice. I decided to make an edited tape and have a public showing. The fact that I made these decisions is emphasized, because community development methods were in fact not part of the on-going process. At this point we were being perceived primarily as film-makers, and not as social change agents. The East Coulee public meeting had over 200 in attendance and proved the turning point in the Valley project. The tapes were generally well received. The direction of the discussion that followed unsettled and confused many, but brought encouragement and enthusiasm to others. The tape was called "Will East Coulee Go the Way of Wayne?" Wayne is a ghost town that was in much the same situation ten years ago that East Coulee is in today. The essence of the evening's discussion was that if this community were to avoid the fate of Wayne, it must organize and take steps to stop the decline. The community members present reflected the town's make-up: elderly people, some coal miners, welfare recipients and many children. The response to the question "What are you going to do about your dying community?" was limited. This community had no formal organization of any kind - and it appeared that most people

had accepted this condition and the fate of their community. The VTR
had brought the community together, but the community failed to
respond to the challenge of taking some action to bring about change.

"The East Coulee experience, though it did not elicit an
invitation to become involved, did bring residents from other parts
of the Valley, and I was asked to meet with a committee from Rosedale,
a community four miles east of Drumheller. At the first meeting with
the committee of five, I explained my purpose in the Valley in terms
of the VTR in a communications/community development context. Here
was an invitation from a community group to assist them in meeting
some specific community goals. Broadly outlined, the goals were
"community betterment, to make Rosedale a better place to live."
"We have no water, no gas, no sewer, no job opportunities, we want
to change things."

"The invitation from the Rosedale committee changed the
nature of my role in the Valley. Up to this point I had facilitated
dialogue and provided people with an opportunity to discuss issues
and concerns on a random basis. The Rosedale community had a
minimal structure, a community hall committee, which appointed the
citizens' committee that invited my participation. This participation
was not to be as an NFB film-maker, but as a community development
worker, with the added dimension of $\frac{1}{2}$-inch VTR input.

"I offered to make the equipment and myself available
to the committee with a clear understanding that I was to be a
facilitator, and that the taping would be done by the group members.
After a brief equipment-orientation period, the action committee
proceeded to tape the citizens in the community. The questions were
put to their fellow citizens and the camera work was done by the

committee members. Who to tape, where to tape, when to tape, what to tape was decided by the committee and not by me.

"Eleven tapes were made and edited down to an hour by the committee. The effect of the activity of the cameras, the discussions and the process was exciting to the community. In East Coulee, the discussion had focussed on the NFB people - "those outsiders asking questions". In Rosedale the discussions focussed on the content that emerged from the questions raised by their neighbors. The intensity of the dialogue reached a high point very quickly and peaked on the night of the first public showing of the tape produced by and featuring Rosedale citizens. The hall over-flowed with people who had come to see and hear their neighbors. The attention and personal involvement in responding to interviews with neighbors and friends were extremely intense. The feeling of unity and cohesiveness was marked. Smiles of recognition and nods of approval ran through the audience. "You're right George", or "That's telling 'em Pete".

"The discussion in small groups, following the tape showing, fully supported the action committee's progress on their behalf and gave a unanimous mandate to the committee to act on the community's behalf. The evening's procedure was also taped by the committee and replayed in edited form at the next meeting. Committees were set up, and gradually the need to use the VTR became increasingly less as the committees became involved with specifics, although an awareness of the availability of the VTR equipment remained in the minds of the action committee. Twenty-eight citizens were now on a variety of committees, with the leadership coming from the original action committee members.

"The town has been cleaned up and signs have been erected outside the town limits; mercury vapor lights have been installed, and a park for picnicking and camping built; the gas line is in; a road has been opened after being closed down; the water main has been installed and a plastics factory has moved into the abandoned school. All of these physical changes have been brought about in a relatively short period of time. Most important, the community has gone through a process that has given the members a sense of accomplishment and pride in their new-found abilities to bring about change.

"In looking back on this experience, I believe that while VTR does not basically change the community development process it does seem to accelerate it, at the stage of entrance into the community and, most significantly in the process of bringing the community together and giving its members a feeling of unity and strength."

* * * * *

It has been necessary to present this material at such length because nowhere is the term 'catalyst' explicitly defined: we have to try to understand what is meant by examining how the term is used.

The term is applied to the film-maker when he uses film not as a means of self-expression but as a means of encouraging and enabling other people to express their views. This involves their active participation in film-making at all stages of production in a dialogue with the film-maker and with the audience. The film-maker does not decide what they should do: he helps them decide what to do

do by sharing with them his experience of what can be done technically using the equipment available. He may also train local people how to use the medium themselves in order that the work may continue when the film-crew leaves. In this role he has certain things in common with the community development worker - hence the catalyst analogy. (It is interesting to note, however, that in the third report - VTR in Drumheller - written by Anton Karch, a community worker, the catalyst analogy is not used.)

The term is applied to film and video when they are used in the way described above to: "break down communication barriers"; to "bring people to an initial stage of dialogue and awareness"; to "help people know and understand themselves better"; to "facilitate community dialogue"; to "liberate people from apathy" and from their inhibitions about expressing themselves; to "build bridges" between people: when they provide a focal point for discussion; when their use is related to immediate objectives and can help to clarify those objectives; when they "induce social change".

The question is: do the references to catalysis help us to understand what happened? Or are they merely a 'gloss' over social changes which are not properly understood?

What actually does happen is not very clear: "one thing we cannot say is: the films did it". Then what did they do? Were there no changes on Fogo which can be attributed specifically to the use of film? Certainly, it would be very difficult to establish even a tentative correlation between the use of media and goal-achievement, and the authors have no illusions about this: "Video equipment does not create dynamism where none is latent.... The Comité des Citoyens de Saint-Jacques could have accomplished any of their actions without

the video equipment. We could not say that at any time it made the difference between success and failure". This appears to be the justification of the catalyst analogy: here we have a 'reaction' which is possible in the absence of the 'catalyst' but which is facilitated by it in a way which does not affect the outcome. Karch gets quite close when he says: "I believe that while VTR does not basically change the community development process it does seem to accelerate it..." However, this rather contradicts his statement that: "The tape...precipitated an openness that would not have been possible had I related to the group without the use of VTR." A comment from the St.-Jacques report echoes this: "Could we have stopped people in the street and questioned them, in the same way, if we had not had the camera and microphone? I don't think so...." Karch also refers to an event in the Drumheller project which clearly goes beyond the concept of catalysis: "The invitation from the Rosedale committee changed the nature of my role in the Valley".

In fact there are changes which can be attributed specifically to the use of film and video and which could not have taken place without them. These are alluded to but not explicated in the reports. Such changes occur in the meaning of social change, the meaning of collective action, the meaning of achievement. We know that meaning cannot exist potentially and that, therefore, changes in meaning cannot be explained by analogy with catalysis. This reveals the contradiction in using film and video as "catalysts" to "create greater understanding" since catalysts do not create anything.

I shall comment briefly on some of the points raised in the reports and suggest that the catalyst analogy does not fully account for them.

(i) <u>Filming</u>

What does it <u>mean</u> to have people walking around with cameras and microphones, asking questions? If it is an everyday occurrence it will probably not mean very much. At least its meaning will be known and so people will not ask: "What does it mean?" Its meaning will be part of the meaning of the situation. If, as in these three projects, it is a novelty, it will have a different meaning and people are likely to ask: "What does it mean?" They will be aware of a change in the situation as a result of this new activity which they do not at first understand because it does not fit into the meaning which the situation has for them. Why are they doing it? What is it to be used for? The introduction of anything new into a meaningful situation changes the meaning of the situation, and the change is specifically attributable to the novelty.

Looking through the viewfinder of a camera we do not see what we ordinarily see. Putting a frame around our world alters our perception of it. Even if we are in familiar surroundings we see things which previously escaped our gaze. The meaning of our situation changes. The camera brings about a change in our perception because it limits our perspective. Within the field of vision which the lens allows, events which passed unnoticed acquire significance. But even more is excluded. Editing begins in the viewfinder. Pointing a camera is an intentional act. The cameraman selects what he wants to see and what he wants his audience to see. This is his definition of the situation and, as such, it is part of the situation. He, too, is part of the situation (whether he is an insider or an outsider). He acts in the situation in such a way as to change it by changing its meaning. What he sees and what the audience sees, mediated by the medium, is only a sample of what is going on. What

he shows us may seem to us to be very meaningful. But we should

not assume that this is all the situation means. What we are shown

may appear all the more meaningful because of what we are not shown.

The situation may even seem to have a different meaning altogether,

if we are not aware of the context, that is to say, everything

significant which is not included in the sample.

Imagine, for example, a discussion between twenty or so

people which is being recorded on videotape. One person says

something with which most of the others disagree. After a while

they play back the tape. At the moment when the controversial

statement was uttered, the camera zoomed in to give a close up of the

face of one of the people who agreed with the speaker. The shot shows

him nodding his head thoughtfully. The effect of this is to give

a rather different picture, to an outsider, of what the situation was

from the way the people involved experienced it. It gives, in this

case, a false impression of consensus. Watching the tape, the group

members begin to realize how VTR can misrepresent them, or (if one

of them is operating the camera) the extent to which they can

misrepresent themselves by using it. There is no such thing as an

'objective' recording.

(ii) Editing

Editing involves further changes in the meaning of the

situation. Precisely, it involves changes in the meaning of the

film or videotape which has already altered the meaning of the

situation (it may have confirmed or disconfirmed the meaning which the

situation had for insiders and outsiders). The way you obtained the

sample may have changed the situation (were you nice to the people

you interviewed?). As you run through this raw material you may

have only a vague idea of what the situation is. Gradually it becomes clearer to you - or you may begin to realize that it is more complex and confusing than you thought. Some bits seem 'more important' than others; that shot would 'fit in' better later on - it would make 'more sense'; you cut out 'uninteresting' bits. What are your criteria? Your ideas become more definite. You make your first cuts. But your ideas may change throughout the editing process. You may not have a complete picture in your head of what the finished thing will look like. As the selected sequences are rearranged a new definition of the situation emerges. The edited version is not a picture of the situation 'as it is' but a definition of the situation as it appears to you and as you want it to appear to others. The situation is changed (in ways you might not have expected!) by this definition which, since it is part of the situation which it defines, requires that the situation be redefined.

(iii) Viewing

Consider the statement: "20 hours of film were shot, cut down to six and screened back, a month later, to the people." (Powerful Catalyst) This sentence alone could serve as the brief for an extensive phenomenological study of meaningful changes. How did the film-maker's view of the situation on Fogo change as foot after foot of film was exposed? How did the islanders' views of the situation change (a) during filming and (b) after the screening of the edited version? What did filming mean to them? What did the films mean to them? How did the film-maker's view of the islanders' views of the situation compare with the way they actually saw the situation (i.e. did he understand them)? Did they understand him? Did they understand themselves?

The claim that: "... the media can help bring about significant changes in attitudes and understanding that lead toward real social change" (op. cit) also requires explication. How exactly do media help bring about these changes? To say that they act as 'catalysts' does not make it any clearer. It is not a question of causes and effects but of relations between perspectives. How are our perspectives transformed by media? How does the way I see myself/you compare with my media image of myself/you?* How is my definition of the situation (which may not include all that the situation means to me) limited by the medium which I use to define it? Do media differ in the ease with which it is possible to distort situations? For example, with film it is possible to record an event and then edit it so that the order of some of the sequences is altered or even to record several different events and edit them together in such a way that they appear to be happening in the same place at the same time. The nature of the medium and the technique of editing are such that the 'inexperienced' viewer is given no visible or audible metacommunicational clues to punctuate what he is watching (he may be able to infer these but his inference may not always be correct). With half-inch videotape, on the other hand, editing is not nearly as slick and when carried out on simple equipment the edit points are visible as frame roll at the beginning of each sequence.** Thus the viewer is in no doubt as to the amount of restructuring of the situation which has taken place.

The Comité des Citoyens de Saint-Jacques asked themselves: "Why are we sick?" This question was their initial definition of the

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* see Jardine, 1972, for an account of a project which developed this theme. (Project diary, f.2.7.72)

** Recent developments in electronic editing facilities on some half-inch machines tend to reduce this 'problem'.

situation (i.e. there was a problem). Now, the fact that they thought there was something wrong was part of the situation. Each videotaped interview represented a further definition of the situation which changed and was changed by previous and subsequent ones. Editing the tapes involved another redefinition of the situation. Each redefinition and re-redefinition represented a change in the meaning of the situation and hence of the situation itself. The situation became more meaningful as the tapes were viewed and discussed, on the basis of which action was taken to change the situation. None of these meaningful changes could have occurred unmediated.

"You become two people - he who acts and he who watches himself act." (In the Hands of Citizens) In other words, the medium becomes a quasi-other. One is both subject and object for oneself, without the mediation of another person but through the mediation of the medium which 'establishes the subject in a new type of being' (i.e. as object). I have already noted (under the Participant Observer as Catalyst) that the catalyst analogy does not explain this phenomenon, which is essentially a meaningful change and, as such, is an act of creation.

"We don't just learn to know ourselves better, we also come to understand others better." (op. cit) The same general comment applies here. The statement implies that certain meaningful changes take place, none of which could happen in the absence of the so-called catalyst.

The islanders of Fogo, the Comité des Citoyens de Saint-Jacques and the Rosedale Citizens Action Committee were all involved

in situations which were meaningful to them - and they did not like what these situations meant. With determination and help they organised themselves and acted to change their situation. Communication was an important part of this action as they "began to identify common problems and to talk seriously about common solutions". Indeed, without communication there could be no collective (i.e. social) action. We may say, therefore, that communication was essential to the realisation of the aims of these groups. To say that film and video acted as 'catalysts' implies that all the changes could have occurred if these media had not been used. But some medium of communication is necessary. Are all media, therefore, catalysts? If we defend this view, we must also defend its corollary, namely, that changes in meaning can occur independently of any means of communication, whether between groups or between persons or between a person and himself. Communication, simply because it is meaningful, is not comparable with molecular interaction. We cannot, therefore, compare the media with which we communicate, and without which communication would be impossible, with catalysts: such a comparison is meaningless. Nevertheless, the analogy seems to have caught on.

Peter Lewis, writing in New Society (9 March 1972) discusses the Minister of Posts and Telecommunications' decision to grant a special licence to a cable (relay) TV company operating in Greenwich, London. The licence (the first of its kind in Britain, though four others have since been granted) permitted the company to originate programmes in the area covered by its cable network, in addition to relaying BBC and ITV broadcasts. An important condition attached to the licence was that the programmes were to be "specially designed to appeal to the local community in the area served".

This proviso does not specifically require the cable operator to encourage community participation in making programmes. However, Lewis argues that without participation the experiment would be just a scaled-down version of broadcast television: programmes would be made about the local situation, but the chance to do something about the situation, using cable TV as a means of communication, would be wasted. He puts the case for an approach to community programming based on the work of Challenge for Change and takes as an example the St.-Jacques project. Although the description of the project is largely in his own words, he writes that video can "act as a catalyst" for action and change. The analogy is, apparently, taken for granted since it is not explained.

John ('Hoppy') Hopkins and friends at the Institute for Research in Art and Technology (now the Centre for Advanced Television Studies) were among the first people in this country to experiment with portable video equipment in a community context. Their attachment to the catalyst analogy can be traced back to a short, unpublished paper* dated 1969, in which communication is referred to as a "catalytic activity" which may be "greatly facilitated by the use of portable video equipment".

In 1971, the Home Office commissioned Hoppy, Cliff Evans, Steve Herman and John Kirk to produce a report on Video in Community Development. The report was published in 1973 and mainly comprises examples of work done in Canada and the USA. The major part of the text is an anthology of descriptive accounts of projects, drawn from a variety of sources including the Challenge for Change newsletters.

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*Social Matrix and Interface: subsequently published in Hopkins, Evans, Herman and Kirk (1973): Video in Community Development. London. OVUM.

Reviewing the book in Time Out (February 23 - March 1, 1973) Andy Farjeon summarised his interpretation of the ways video has been used in community development, thus: "...the process of completing a tape or programme acts as a catalyst to further action." (Note that this is a reference not to the medium itself but to the way the medium is used.) In the same article, he quotes an interview with Hoppy: "We seem to be setting paradigms, figuring out ways in which energy should or could be generated and then making that information available to other people. Some of the channels we have found so far are writing research reports to catalyse other people's work, making software.... for distribution on both film and videotape, making a product that comes under the heading of art, and some news reportage material."

By now, the reader should be able to guess my comments before I make them. Indeed, there is little point in spelling them out because nothing at all is spelled out in these references. The term would appear to have/handed on from one author to another to
been
become a natural part of their vocabulary. When no explanation of the term is offered we can only refer back to its natural-scientific derivation and, for reasons already stated, find it unconvincing in the present context.

Whereas Peter Lewis proposes a participatory approach to cable TV programming, advocating that cable should be a community facility rather than just a local one if it is to avoid some of the pitfalls incurred by its national and regional 'big brothers' in the broadcasting world, Brian Groombridge, in his book Television and the People (1972) argues for the reorganisation of broadcast television itself along similar lines.

The subtitle of the book is <u>A Programme for Democratic</u> <u>Participation</u>. Groombridge's thesis is that: "The functioning of all modern states depends upon their communication resources and modalities", and that, consequently: "States which purport to be democracies need to be specially sensitive to the connection between their viability and their use of the media". (p.17) (Actually, this is only half the story: in most modern states, government is dependent upon the media to the extent that the media are dependent upon the government.)

Democracy is defined by Groombridge as "a system of government which enables the people to have an active say in and control over the formulation and implementation of policies which affect their personal and social destinies". (p.49) He traces what he sees as an historical, cyclical development from representation to participation in democracy and considers that the democratisation of television is of secondary importance to the present need to revitalise democracy. But (and this bears out the dialectical relation between media and government) when programming is committed to "democratic invigoration, television itself becomes more democratic". (p.219) Television, in his opinion, serves democracy by providing information about issues of concern. He believes it can serve <u>participatory</u> democracy by "advertising the causes and frustrations that provoke protest, by maintaining the vigilant suspicion of those in authority which is a classic function of the Fourth Estate, and by providing pressure through magnifying popular manifestations of displeasure with authority." (p.123)

However, television fails in its democratic duty in several ways. It distracts and distorts; it distracts us from what matters with entertainment and it distracts us by distorting what

matters into entertainment. (p.107) This criticism, though frequently overstated, is not without some truth. Television also fails by failing to realise that providing information, by itself, is not enough. Although the audience may be aware of what is happening outside their living rooms, they are not necessarily aware of what they can do about it. Information does not lead to action if it does not point the way to realistic alternatives and suggest ways in which these alternatives might be realised. (p.125) For this reason, television should not be taken in isolation: it should be integrated with other media and with social agencies and educational institutions. It should not leave the debate high and dry but offer practicable objectives for social action.

Groombridge suggests that TV needs to be both interventionist and neutral and that neutrality is essential if intervention is to be effective. (p.172) At present, TV is neutral only within "a subtly shifting area of mainstream disagreement". This neutrality must be extended to all groups and factions in the name of democracy. (p.173)

".... television must be neutral if it is to be a trusted vehicle shared by all the Alternative Societies within society, all the Counter-Cultures within the culture. But it also has to be interventionist. It can be both, and the dissolution of the apparent paradox - a more active, interventionist role for television as a chief instrument of a participatory democracy - will readily occur to anyone familiar with the theory and practice of community development. Community development workers accomplish change by enabling the people among whom they move to clarify their own objectives, improve their own relationships, overcome for themselves the obstacles in their way. The community worker is not primarily a leader, inspiring people with his goals; he is primarily a catalyst, helping them to diagnose

clarify and implement their own. His neutrality is consequently an

essential asset, not an embarrassment. For the same reason, television's

neutrality and objectivity* is one of the chief advantages it already

possesses which will enable it to be the effective carrier of other

people's voices, not its own." (p.174)

I feel that I scarcely need point out that the term

'catalyst' is an inappropriate label with which to tag the community

development worker: in helping people to "diagnose" and "clarify"

their own objectives he is doing something which is not fully

explained by this analogy.

Groombridge goes on to describe several British attempts

at participatory programming, but in his search for a model which

more closely illustrates his proposal he draws also on examples from

the USA, Canada, France, Sweden and West Germany. In one such example

he again refers to catalysis, this time applying the analogy to the

medium of television itself:

"The Whole Town's Talking was an early experiment in

community-based television by Iowa State College, Ames, Iowa, an

enterprising state-supported land-grant college, and the first

institution of higher education to be licensed by the Federal

Communications Commission (1950). The object of the series was to

bring together each week representatives of some particular Iowa

community to discuss a serious local problem which would interest people

in other parts of the state because they shared it. The representatives

were encouraged to consider alternatives, weigh costs and arrive at a

decision on a course of action which they recommended to their

* The question of the 'neutrality and objectivity' of television
  does not concern us here.

community. The very first broadcast in the series was from Cambridge, Iowa, a small 'town' of 600 inhabitants with a serious school problem and (according to the college report) a reputation in the state for 'the worst type of community apathy'. At first Cambridge citizens resented and resisted the intrusion of television, but whether or not they should participate in the programme became itself an issue for democratic decision in a town's meeting, and ultimately twelve people (selected because they were articulate and because they represented the actual range of opinion in the town) appeared in the programme. An introductory film sequence showed them at their daily work so that viewers could see them as particular individuals with their own problems arising from the schools crisis, not simply as mouthpieces for different viewpoints. Then the cameras recorded their discussion: television acted as a catalyst by enabling factions which would have nothing to do with each other to talk together, by encouraging in them the self-confidence to press for reforms on teachers and administrators, and by giving them more than a mere role-playing experience of arriving at a decision by majority vote. They and their fellow citizens moved from apathy and stalemate to agreement and action."
(pp.189-90)

There is really very little to be said about these two excerpts from the point of view of this monograph. Certainly, Groombridge's thesis does not rest on the catalyst analogy. The two references are almost incidental to his main argument which is, as I have summarised it, that: democracy must become more participatory; television has an important part to play in this revitalisation; it c can achieve this through participatory programming; and, in so doing, television itself will become more democratic. As in the Challenge for Change reports, Groombridge uses the term as a second-hand concept

'bought' from the literature on community development. It is this particular approach to social action and change which provides the framework for 'participatory programming'. The catalyst analogy appears to have been included in the 'job lot', a rather worthless item among other, more useful ideas.

Communications and Community Development was the theme of a conference organised in May 1972 by the Institute of Extension Studies at Liverpool University, in association with the BBC and the ITA (now the IBA). Representatives from television, radio, the Workers Educational Association, community councils and the community press, together with community development workers (both those employed by voluntary organisations and by local authorities), video groups, street theatre groups, sociologists, social workers, adult educationists and planners met to discuss the role of media in community development and the lessons which the media can learn from community development. Of the many papers circulated at the conference three are of direct relevance here since they contain further examples of the use of the catalyst analogy.

Lesley Johns, of Intermedia, in a paper on cable television* wrote that it has "the potential to be the generator of community dialogue and to act as a catalyst to community action". Steve Herman, of the Centre for Advanced Television Studies, wrote**: "Video has the potential for catalysing community dialogue and can become an important tool in community development". Now, it seems to me that these two authors are talking about basically the same kind of media function.

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* The Use of Video in Community Television

** The Video Process in Community Development.

But there is a contradiction in the terminology (between 'catalyst' and 'generator') used to describe this function.

In the third example*, Robert Jones, the Education Producer at BBC Radio Merseyside, quoted from a press release for a programme called City of Tomorrow, produced by Radio Stoke-on-Trent, in which the station manager, David Harding, referred to the "catalytic effect which local radio can have in joining people together in new groupings for new ventures".

In all three cases, the description of the role of media is rather vague. Presumably, we are supposed to infer the rest from our 'understanding' of what is 'meant' by catalysis. But it does not really explain anything although (again, presumably) these writers think it does. As in much of the literature on community development, the term is used to camouflage woolly thinking.

The taken-for-granted view that media, when used in the specific context of social change, can have a 'catalytic' effect contradicts McLuhan's twofold thesis which is stated in the aphorism: the medium is the message; and in the apparent malapropism: the medium is the massage.

The meaning of the first statement is that the message, or content of any medium is always another medium. Meaning is always expressed in mediated form - the various kinds of language, verbal and non-verbal, with which we communicate with others and the various kinds of language, again verbal and non-verbal, with which we

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* Local Radio - Its Role in Adult Education and in the Community of Merseyside.

communicate with ourselves. There is no meaning without a medium of expression. (By 'expression' I do not mean that we have to be able to express to others, or even to ourselves, exactly what we mean or what a situation means to us before we can describe our actions or the situation as meaningful.)

To say that a particular medium acts as a catalyst implies, among other things, that communication is possible without that particular medium, but that it is in some way facilitated by the medium. Thus, film and video were not essential to the <u>Challenge for Change</u> projects: these media did not "basically change the community development process" although they did "seem to accelerate it". What, then, was the essential element in these attempts to improve understanding through better communication? The message? This, as McLuhan argues, is in fact another medium. Does it, too, act as a catalyst? If so, then the words and actions which were the content of the <u>Challenge for Change</u> films and videotapes must also be considered inessential and merely facilitative. Extended to the point of absurdity we see that all social action meets this criterion of catalysis.

What if we suppose that only certain media are catalysts while others, the content of the 'catalytic media' are the very stuff of social action? We are then obliged to categorise media into 'catalytic' and 'non-catalytic' types. We could say that a particular film 'catalysed community dialogue' but that the content of the film was an integral part of the dialogue. Such a categorisation, however, hangs on a distinction between medium and message which is not absolute. The words 'contained' in the film themselves 'contain' meaning. The film which 'contains' the words and actions may itself

be part of the 'content' of a television programme. Where should we draw the line?

The meaning of the second statement - the medium is the massage - (which is often wrongly 'corrected' to the first statement) is that media "work us over completely" (McLuhan, 1967, p.26). More than this, they "work over" the message. All media change meaning (for example, they may confer meaning by excluding meaning) and the changes are due to their inherent characteristics. Furthermore, the change from one medium to another involves a change, sometimes only slight, sometimes of considerable consequence, in meaning. I drew attention to this when discussing the Impossibility of Practising What You Preach. The point is that all media alter, in varying degrees, the relation between what is given to perception and what is constituted in perception. A 'visual statement' about an event has a different meaning from a 'verbal picture' of that event. In the one, we must fill in for ourselves what is not described; in the other, we have to imagine what is not shown. The change in meaning which results from a change of medium is not caused, in a deterministic sense, by the change of medium: nevertheless it could not change in the same way but for the change of medium. Such changes must be explicated in their own terms if we are to understand them and how they come about.

Media are, then, by definition essential to communication. We cannot even conceive of the possibility of communicating except through some form of mediation (the act of conception is itself mediated). Communication is social interaction of the most meaningful kind - that is to say it is intentional and understood as such, though the intent may be misunderstood. It is, therefore, that type of action

which bears least resemblance to molecular reaction.

At the time of the North Kensington video project (1970-71: see introduction to the project diary) we, too, had a vague conception of ourselves as 'catalysts'*. I cannot remember exactly how or when this came about, but we knew something of what was happening in Canada from the Challenge for Change newsletters and also from three Canadians who were involved in our project, and so I suppose it was inevitable that we should come across the catalyst analogy somewhere along the line.

We did not attempt to define the term in any of our reports, but I think we assumed that it meant something which facilitates change without becoming involved in the change process and which, since it is not itself changed, may be used again. Translated into terms of social action, the analogy signified to us the intention to work with people and to help them use the medium usefully for their own ends rather than to lead or direct or initiate action or even to take any of their causes as our own. It signified, too, the intention to remain 'neutral', not radically affecting the situation, not being radically affected by its changes, merely facilitating communication where, for whatever reasons, more traditional methods had not succeeded. Finally, it signified the intention that the production team should phase itself out at such time as it was felt that the project could be run entirely by local people (this would involve training them to use the equipment). The production team would then move on to set up a new project in another area.

I have written "the intention" and not "our intention"

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* see Architectural Design, May 1971, p.266

because, although we adopted the label, our initial intentions as set down in the feasibility study for the project (November 1970) differed in some respects from the above aims. This report grew out of an urban studies brief and the goals and strategies which it outlined had more in common with social planning than with community development. (see Rothman, 1970, p.24). There was far more emphasis on solving social problems 'from the outside' than on helping people to express their own problems in practical terms and then to choose between alternative courses of action. Of the above intentions, only the last, namely to phase ourselves out once the project was in operation and running smoothly, was written into the feasibility study.

There was a further disparity between our stated aims and the events recorded in the North Kensington project diary. This was due chiefly to insufficient resources of equipment and funds which resulted in the premature demise of the project. However, even in the work which we did carry out, we deviated from our original intentions. We were not nearly as systematic in our approach as we had planned, and working very much on a day to day, ad hoc basis, we were deviated from these intentions by the opportunities which presented themselves.

Thus, although we labelled ourselves as 'catalysts', the term was, in effect, meaningless, bearing no relation to our own reality (neither to our intentions nor our actions): and it could hardly have been otherwise since catalysis (our conception of which, in any case, was only partly correct) does not account for intentional action. However, as long as the label was taken for granted it discouraged more exacting enquiry into the meaning of 'our situation'.

We used the label when describing our work to others.
For example, an article in the Kensington and Chelsea Post reported
that North Kensington Television "acted as a catalyst in the
formation of the Nottingwood House Tenants Association". The reporter
got his information from a telephone interview with one of the
members of the project group. No attempt was made to define the label,
though a few details of this particular project were included in the
article. A fuller account was contained in the project diary:

"....some people living in a large block of council flats
were trying to form a tenants' association to pressure the council
into carrying out much-needed improvements to the building. We were
invited along to the first meeting. The day before the meeting
took place, leaflets were distributed to every flat. However, only
a handful of people turned up. After some of them had voiced complaints
and related experiences of individual dealings with the council, it
was felt that, to carry any weight, a tenants' association must have
stronger backing from a larger number of tenants. One of the main
problems was to bring tenants together at a time which was convenient
to as many people as possible.

"We suggested that perhaps a video show in the central
courtyard one afternoon could be made a focal point for a meeting.
We recorded a tape with some of the residents and showed it in the
courtyard on the following Sunday. In the space of an afternoon it
attracted quite a crowd who came to see what was happening and stayed
to watch the videotape which was repeated several times. While this
was going on we went around with the portable video recorder asking
people what they thought about the tape and about the idea of forming
a tenants' association. Out of the gathering came a commitment from
a number of people present to form an association. A committee was

subsequently elected and they began holding weekly meetings."

Whereas the quotation from the newspaper article is intended as an explanation of what happened, in fact nothing is explained by the term 'catalyst'. The diary excerpt, on the other hand, while having no social-scientific pretensions, succeeds in conveying what happened in terms which are readily understandable because they are meaningful to most people.

During the 20 or so months between the end of the North Kensington project and the beginning of our work in Bentilee, it seemed to me, from the books I was reading, that 'social catalysts' were social facts. Nevertheless, it bothered me that so few of the authors I read explained what they meant by the term. It was not easy to tell, by comparing their uses of the term, whether they were all talking about the same thing. The analogy did not make their writings any more understandable to me. I began to wonder what they meant. The foregoing semantic analysis has been an attempt to penetrate the confusion. As a result, certain basic inadequacies and contradictions which inhere in the catalyst analogy have come to light.

Conclusion

My critique of the catalyst analogy is grounded in a dialectical-phenomenological approach to understanding social change. I believe this approach to be fundamental in social science. Nevertheless, as with other methodological approaches, it represents a limited point of view (though less restricted than some). I do not claim that analogy, per se, is an invalid conceptual device in the pursuit of intelligibility. There are some things in our experience which we can

explain in no other way.*

But no analogy is completely watertight. Pushed to its limits, analogy breaks down sooner or later. Pushed beyond its limits, it becomes a 'gloss', an example of lazy thinking which in fact conceals what it purports to explain. When this happens it becomes a barrier to understanding. We may say that an object or an event, A, is sufficiently like object or event B in certain respects to allow an explanation of one in terms of the other. But we cannot say that object or event A is object or event B. In order to explain B in terms of A we must have an adequate concept of A; and vice versa.

The catalyst analogy is invoked by social scientists and others to explain certain social events. It is used in different contexts with varying degrees of analogical appropriateness. Whatever the degree of similarity between natural-scientific and social-scientific events, the latter are not fully reducible to the former. Sooner or later, therefore, any attempt to explain social events in natural-scientific terms is bound to prove problematic. This stage is reached when we begin to consider the meaning which social action has for society members. While it may be useful for some purposes to exclude a consideration of meaning in a theory of society, we cannot pretend that such a theory will provide us with anything like

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* Whereas the human and social sciences frequently employ concepts and methods derived from natural science, in the natural sciences themselves certain elements or functions may be personified in an attempt to explain them. Maxwell's Demon is one example: "An imaginary figure pictured by Maxwell to illustrate a concept in gas kinetics. A tiny being was considered to operate a trapdoor in a partition between two chambers. This 'demon' opened the door whenever a molecule of a particular kind approached the door and so effected separation of a pure gas from a mixture." (Van Nostrand Chemists Dictionary. p.455)

a complete picture of what is being studied.

The meaning of social action is a central concern of social phenomenology. I have 'bracketed' the concept of catalysis and regarded its meaning as problematic where others have taken it for granted. This exercise has led to the conclusion that the analogy is an inadequate concept in social science when we direct our studies towards meaningful action. I have said that the term is meaningless in such a study - but this is not strictly true. Rather its meaning becomes impossibly strained when the analogy is stretched to include meaningful events. The discrepancy between the meaning of catalysis, on the one hand, and on the other, the meaning of social change indicates a need for a dialectical _Aufhebung_ which will resolve the contradiction.

I have concentrated almost entirely on the contradictions and inadequacies inherent in the catalyst analogy. But just as no analogy is a completely adequate explanation, no analogy is completely without meaning. The authors of the various passages to which I have referred would doubtless defend their respective uses of the catalyst analogy in the context of their own writings. A dialectical understanding of society requires that we clarify _both_ terms of the analogy in order to get at the similarities and dissimilarities between the two. The _Aufhebung_, or synthetic movement of the dialectic will then lead to a more adequate understanding, based on an understanding of the relative meaningfulness of the analogy. This I have tried to do.

A further possibility is that the term 'social catalyst' should not be interpreted analogically at all. Should we forget about analogy and apply the term, in its own right, to certain kinds

of social change? This would establish the term as a semantic
convention in social-scientific writing, denoting a particular
function in social interaction. Its meaning would then be agreed
upon, in general, by social scientists. Such a redefinition, however,
would require consistency in the use of the term in the literature,
and this we do not have. The one thing all the above excerpts
have in common is vagueness. We cannot tell from the meaning-contexts
of these passages whether there is a consistent thread of meaning
which links them together. Nowhere is the term explicitly defined.

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