

# Video Enclosing

Social networks are like human beings. They have moods, values, communications processes and energy flows that read-out their condition. They grow and regress in the service of their own survival. Our network shared a dream and took on video as tools and toys to activate our survival vision. We came to video via McLuhan, with fantasies of a kinetic carnival and with a lot of help from our friends.

The sense of shared alienation from institutions and the comradery of growth and joy led us to design an alternate institution called the Center for the Study of Social Change. This institution was to supply the organizational base for various modes of exploration, one of which was exploring the uses of video in its myriad potentials.

Our first video network adventure was a conference at a state university which was trying to design an Institute for Youth Politics. The meeting included faculty, administrators, and incoming students as well as various resource people ranging from high school students to "star" intellectuals to state legislators to local social agency personnel. A wide, diverse, non-homogeneous range of political, ideological and spiritual commitments constituted the spectrum of participants. We were there to "make a video tape" of the proceedings, to facilitate group process with video, and to participate freely in the proceedings as we saw fit.

The usual socio-technical problems were encountered, such as lighting peoples' space (we decided not to) and breaking into social spaces with gun-handled instruments. We worked carefully at our invisibility and felt relatively successful.

In this first video-space process lesson in 1968, we encountered: (1) the relationship of peoples' fantasies to the realities involved in their attempt to design an institution; (2) problems of intersystem adaptation (staying within current legal, social, cultural boundaries, and agencies for the design of activities the Institute would be involved in); (3) problems of extra-system alternatives (the design of social, political, economic and cultural activities and institutions as ways for young people to explore new modes of living and playing). Our video system collected the thunder and lightning of

the brain storming sessions and as video does, remembered.

The edited tape of the first day's proceedings, which was only partially seen by its non-leaders late that night, focused on a number of inter-group conflicts and the extra-system conflicts, e.g., state institutions cannot be involved in political activities, colleges give grades mainly for recognized work, not exploration, etc. The tape brought an onslaught of depression and anger to our relation with the leaders of the conference. As the discussion about the tape progressed, we experienced again those social mechanisms of communication which allow for various forms of disagreement to be collectively forgotten. It is the case that the limits of remembering will determine the membership in a group. Since it is difficult to sustain selective forgetting during playback, the feedback of these video tapes stalled out the proceedings of the group because the 'normal' consensus-making processes of the group, i.e., forgetting we forget, reinterpreting and agreeing we didn't, etc. could not occur. We were accused of editing in a depressingly relevant manner.

The memory ultimatum was delivered the next morning when the Dean of the school housing the institute came to delineate the respective limits of the university, the school, the institute, and the conference. The Dean was confronted by his own liberal fantasy when he saw a tape of himself saying, "children, be free!"

We believe that many of man's current pathologies are located in the hierarchy of contexts. Double bind theory and its therapeutic counterpart have demonstrated that "schizophrenia" is located in communications systems, the context of the individual. In reforestation, after a fire, the control over the proliferation of saplings and their growth is the new forest growing. The rigidification of social feedback systems into social structure and/or institutions set the limit for internal change and pulls to a halt structural and/or intra-systems changes.

The power of video can be easily co-opted if one must fall within the limits of hierarchical context, or if one becomes the scapegoat in such a situation. Pathogenetic systems notoriously use blame systems to control remembering and to bypass crises.

Social processes that have remembered irresolvable conflicts spend much time in deep depression and

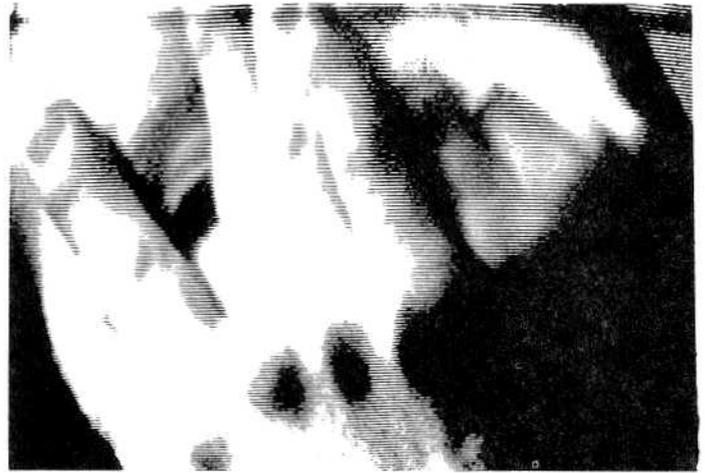
other forms of obsessive behavior. Social processes that have remembered irresolvable conflicts need malleable memories for a synthesis of negotiable positions.

Our predicament was that we were there to facilitate recall, recognition and design. The more our tapes revealed the self-destructive selection of their memories of their own trajectories, the more we were seen as the destroyers. Yet, we believed that it was precisely in going beyond this self-destructive editing of memory via tape which would facilitate the design process. In this case neither we nor the video could enter the tightly defined limits of the social conditions we were in. We left, out of mutual agreement not to be the scapegoats we had become.

We concluded, from this experiment, that facilitating social change with video must somehow entreat people to change as they get insights into their patterns of communication, a process controlled by the sets of limits imposed by the hierarchical contexts of the very institutions seeking change. You cannot pay attention simply to the content of information, feedback, etc., but must also pay attention to hierarchies of contexts as limiting information, feedback and change. In hierarchies of contexts, the hierarchy makes the difference between adaptive change, within the limits of the hierarchy and a change of the hierarchical limits themselves.

The uncertainty, fear and depression created by the environment was partially the result of trying to relate to the situation with anachronized epistemologies and partially because our ontologies force us to face it alone. Continued fixation to ontologies of loneliness and 'one at a time' epistemologies, or the schizoid-like reactions of constantly changing levels (e.g., attacking the messenger as the message or making it just an intellectual exercise) will not do. The positive feed condition is analogous to our technological situation, in as much as the damage done by technology will require new forms of technology to alter the destruction. The positive feed is 'our problem' and our environment and is needed to make a new set of generalizations that will control (negative feed) that ecology. Our current ontologies, epistemologies and socially structured relations do not suffice in our communications and control of the pace of change.

The paradox described above, of needing the feed



to create a new sense of being, knowing, relating, etc., but feeling very uncertain and uncomfortable was related in subsequent video experiences and has brought our jobs to a temporary halt. Our events were microcosms of the conditions we live.

We felt we were creating attitudinal changes and that did not suffice to help people deal with problems that were located in the social contexts (e.g. institutions, peer groups, networks, families, etc.) their 'problems' were embedded in. We have come to the position that information and 'new' information structures do not in themselves 'make you free'; that relevant changes in social contexts are where the resistance lies. The current ways of 'knowing' and 'being' that keep us locked in fantasies and illusions that are destroying our ecology (as us) are the rigid, long feedback loops that communicate the control over our environment - our social institutions.

The 'new' ways of 'knowing' and 'being' that our environment created and re-presented are basically short-term feedback loops that are necessary so we can relate our experience to new designs. But they are not sufficient to create new forms of social organization (longer feedback loops, that will sustain the ongoing change of those new habits of communication about us and how we know and change our ecology).

Our current trajectory is to work with whole networks over longer periods of time, helping them to help us design new ways of living and relating that can be sustained by ongoing social processes. We feel it is necessary to go beyond aggregates of loosely connected people to groups that have sustained supportive relations that will create new collective consciousness.

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