

Films

MACDOUGALL, D. & J. MACDOUGALL

1980 *Takeover*. Australian Institute for Aboriginal Studies, Canberra. Colour, 90 mins.

Communication problems in social research

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Introduction

Underlying all good social research we may discern a perspective, which I shall call 'the concept of perspective'. The meaning of a statement can be found only within the specific context in which it is delivered. And, in presenting their findings, social scientists must have this perspective in mind. It must be communicated to their public together with the research findings. Otherwise, the general debate on knowledge, on attitudes, can easily get sidetracked. A recent Scandinavian example is the discussion of public confidence in politicians. This discussion took as its point of departure an opinion survey which seemed to indicate a decline in such confidence. But what do different people actually mean by 'confidence'? In which context have they expressed themselves? In saying that they have "lost" confidence, are they trying to 'frighten' the politicians a bit, now that they have the chance, or has there been a real change in their attitudes towards politicians as moral beings?

In this article I intend to discuss how we as social scientists may proceed, in order to communicate to the public that the meaning of actions and statements must be sought within their concrete context.

Social scientists must learn more about the frames of reference of their informants, about how they see the world around them. In order to understand other people's frames of reference, we must avoid the trap of remaining unthinkingly anchored in our own perspectives and frames of reference. As researchers, we must be able to view our own frames of reference as 'objects', not as 'givens'.

Continually we see examples of how easy it is for the social scientist to underestimate the importance, and the difficulty, of communicating this basic understanding. This holds equally for the teaching of social science in universities as for active work in applied social research or other forms of communication. Hence the importance of examining *why* this problem has arisen.

In the following I will touch on some of the main challenges in trying to communicate insight into local cultural contexts, whether through lectures, film or exhibitions. My approach will go by way of an 'un-success perspective' on some of my own attempts at such communication so far.

Perhaps an analysis of my own 'disasters' may indicate something more general:

- 1) it may uncover some general dilemmas in connection with presenting and communicating the insights of social science
- 2) it can reveal 'hidden' features of one's own environment, in this case Norway and the Nordic countries, which I have been confronted by, and thereby,
- 3) it may say something about at least some of the challenges characteristic of so-called 'applied' social research: the researcher as representative/defender of his/her informants vis-a-vis various 'official' institutions and public authorities:

Communicating insight into local cultural contexts

In everyday terms it is tempting to see 'communication' as a process in which a message is sent **from** a sender **to** a receiver, just like water being poured into a bottle. In fact, however, if the receiver is to 'understand', she or he will have to **interpret** the message which the sender is trying to communicate. That means that, for the sender to communicate the desired message, the receiver has to be open and receptive to the message and that the receiver thinks and associates within the same frame of reference as the sender. There must exist some kind of agreement as to how situations, persons and tasks are to be defined, for forms of actions and events to be explained. Without such agreement, what the sender is communicating will be transformed and interpreted according to the receiver's own rules. The message is then not communicated. In the process, one story can have become quite another. And this is easy to ignore.

This situation, where sender and receiver are not associating within the same frame of reference, is especially likely to occur when two different cultures meet. But also in our own complex society we often communicate with people who have developed their own terms of interpretation, in a quite different setting, in a local community different from our own. Here too, their frames of reference may well differ from those held by us.

Nothing would seem to indicate that we carry within ourselves, as part of our more or less diverse frames of reference, what I call 'the concept of perspective'. By this I mean the notion of the existence of different perspectives. We live within (and we live out) our own cultural perspectives, but we lack a 'concept of perspective'. Our own perspectives are firmly embedded; to us they appear natural and obvious.

Indeed, research in the social sciences is based on a recognition of this. For example, to analyze and understand communicative barriers and conflicts between people and groups in society, we must be able to make this distinction. Those in power tend to be strongly disinclined to accept the importance of cultural factors in social management, which is a major factor in maintaining relations of power/powerlessness in our society (Paine, 1986; Eidheim et al., 1986). Thus it is those processes in society which make it legitimate to **ignore** cultural differences which the social researcher is meant to clarify. And this means hard work.

In order to clarify power relations and isolate the main challenges in people's lives, the social scientist first needs to understand how people themselves see their lives, their roles, their tasks, and how this is expressed in human interaction. We must, to the best of our ability, get to know the world the way **they** see it. Against the backdrop of this knowledge of various contexts, we may then, using our analytical perspective, develop theories to explain the processes in various societies.

In other words, we must work actively and consciously to achieve this kind of understanding, which is both an understanding of people's understanding and an insight into a given local cultural context. Then, when we are to communicate our 'findings', the next challenge confronts us: We have to build up in the receiver an understanding of what a frame of reference is. The receiver needs to view our descriptions of what other people do as an expression of other ways of understanding, as cultural elements, not as aberrations. If we can manage to get the receiver to understand this distinction, then we have also succeeded in communicating the message of 'concept of perspective'. If we as social scientists can improve our ability in this respect, it may well become more difficult for those in power to legitimize their own violations of the rights of minorities and people involved in development projects and social planning will gain a better foundation for implementing the information and insights we can provide into their development strategies.

Social scientists, in principle, have an advantage when it comes to criticizing socio-political strategies which are **not** formulated on the basis of insight into local cultures and their social organisation. The situation

of the Sami in northern Scandinavia constitute a good example. If we cannot fulfil this basic communicative task, I would maintain, our efforts will automatically tend to become linked with unintended processes of legitimization. How these processes are produced will be illustrated in the following.

On gaining insight into local cultural contexts in Eastern Niger and on communicating this to different audiences in Norway

In 1970 I began my first fieldwork, in Muslim Eastern Niger. I was interested in development aid policy and was particularly keen to see development work pay greater attention to the life conditions of women. My plan was to examine the local organization of gender roles. And it was during the course of my fieldwork among the Manga and the Fulani of Maine Soroa that I felt for the first time that I was beginning to realize the significance of the concept of perspective.

The first part of my fieldwork was marked by the strong emotions that arise when one does not understand and is not understood. I had completed my basic studies in anthropology and was aware that the people I met were bearers of a culture totally foreign to me. All the same, I still automatically translated and transformed what people communicated to me, by means of my own cultural frame of reference. I relied on the ideals of love, care, marriage, oppression and power that my frame of reference provided, and interpreted what I saw accordingly. I was indignant when realizing that they apparently did not love their children and sent them off to foster parents before the age of two. I was equally indignant when I learned that women would demand payment from their husband for sexual intercourse and to discover how many women apparently preferred a life as free women, supporting themselves on money from their lovers. On the other hand, the married women were indignant that I, as a married woman, would speak with men in public, and so on.

I was experiencing culture shock. Gradually I learnt how to see all the events and actions I was observing as messages and expressions rooted in a frame of reference different from my own. In addition, it became clear that any evaluation of relations of power/powerlessness, or of emotional relations, would have to be viewed in terms of how 'local common sense' defined relationships between people, between men and women. Towards the end of my fieldwork I collected various objects, I took photographs and filmed, so that later, back home in Norway, I could use this material to communicate about local cultural contexts and local power relations.

During my collection of this material I gained control of my understanding of local cultural rules and increased my knowledge of how important social distinctions were expressed. I went to my local informants (tailors), showed them what I had purchased and indicated what I thought it expressed. This enabled them to correct some of my misunderstandings. For example I was told, "A dress like this is worn by married women, but only free women would use the material with which it is sewn up" (Holtedahl, 1973b).

Back home, I began in earnest to analyze the social processes in Maine on the basis of what I had learnt about local values, gender roles, etc. The analysis of local power relations between men and women resulted in an academic thesis (Holtedahl, 1973a) as well as in a popularized book version (Bovin & Holtedahl, 1975). In the latter publication, the situation of women in Niger was compared with that of women in Scandinavia. Through this work two parallel processes of knowledge emerged. I now had an excellent opportunity to view my own culture and our own patterns of gender roles from the 'outside'. I began to feel that my newly acquired knowledge about Niger and the perspective on Norwegian gender-role patterns ought to be of interest to a more general public. In lectures I gave in connection with exhibitions of ethnographic artifacts and photographs from Maine, and in the films I made, I wanted to communicate to my audience the main points of my book.

In brief I wanted to show that in the local context of Maine, it is economic, political and religious conditions that determine the typical career of a woman. Interaction exists between life as a married woman living in seclusion and life as a 'free' woman. Once I had begun to understand the local context, the existence of 'houses for free girls' revealed itself as an important resource for women who were married. Because many married women leave their husbands and establish themselves as free women, these houses, this institution of 'free women', represents a threat to all husbands. Your wife may leave you if you do not treat her properly. Other important resources are found in the two separate communities of women: the community of married women living in seclusion and the community of free women. Both networks serve as important bases for the financial enterprises of various individual women as well as for their more general activity in local politics.

This, indeed, turned out to be a difficult nut to crack. At exhibitions I told audiences about the lives of men and women in Eastern Niger, their attitudes, values and activities, but soon discovered that my public had one basic reaction: "How exotic and immoral!". People were reacting in

exactly the same way as I had done when I first started my fieldwork. Hence, to avoid the risk of exoticism and the trend towards delivering value-based judgements and explanations, I increasingly began to appeal to the audience's own experience and their knowledge of Norwegian culture. For instance, I stressed the similarity between Muslim betrothals and weddings for girls in their early teens, and the religious ceremony of confirmation in Lutheran Norway. Both these institutions serve as ritual markers of the transition from childhood to adult life, albeit with different consequences for girls and for boys. And I underlined the similarities between the position of free/divorced women in Niger and that of young, unmarried women in Scandinavia. The only real difference, I would point out, was that our girls do not openly ask their boyfriends to pay them for sex!

In all this I was applying concepts from our own cultural framework, as in the popularized book (Bovin and Holtedahl, 1975), in order to show how the various elements in the foreign culture were interwoven in a kind of pattern. Nevertheless, I could still detect unintended reactions from my audience: "Are you saying that women in Niger really live a better life?"; "Can they choose their husbands freely?"; "They have a much worse deal than we do!"; or, "Why don't the authorities ban purdah?". In other words, I had **not** succeeded in communicating the concept of perspective. The receivers' frame of reference remained intact, 'information' went the wrong way. My audiences were getting their own stereotypes confirmed and worst of all, they probably felt that they were learning a whole lot! What I had done was, without sufficient reflection, to appeal to the frame of reference of my Norwegian public, whilst at **the same time** trying to demonstrate how inadequate it was. If people were to be able to learn anything about local context, I would first have to succeed in transmitting an understanding of the fact that what I presented required **local** knowledge. They would have to perceive what I was relating as elements of a frame of reference different from their own. What understanding had people gained from reading the book? One could fear that many of them simply saw it as an attempt to legitimize prostitution in Scandinavia!

My intentions were to 'shift' the attitudes and understanding of my public to avoid reactions such as "...poor Muslim women who either have to live in seclusion or as prostitutes" and "how immoral of them to demand money for sex" and instead have reactions such as "those women have an efficient network which they use for solving important economic and political problems". In terms of developmental strategies

and concrete projects, this would mean that approaches based on these two forms of understanding would necessarily be quite different. As an extension of the first view we find strategies like "...abolish seclusion and prostitution". But developmental strategies based on my findings would emphasize building on existent communities of Muslim women in attempts to increase the participation of women in new areas of society. Unfortunately, it was this kind of insight which I had failed to communicate. Later, when making a film (Holtedahl et al., 1975) using material from Eastern Niger, I intended to learn from my experiences and mistakes. I felt that I now knew what would happen to the receiver. My film would have to be composed in a way which would definitely teach people the 'concept of perspective'.

I tried to build up the film so that the public would be provoked (as if through some kind of artificial culture shock) and thereby become aware of the difference between the two contexts, the Norwegian and that of Niger. I decided to show how one local ethnic group looked down on another one, and, at the end of the film, to characterize the position of Norwegian women in the way a 'biased', ethnocentric African might do so. For instance, to most Africans it seems very odd indeed, that so many Norwegian women end their days in institutions and homes for elderly people.

When I showed the film in various women's organizations, the reception was a mixture of annoyance and surprise. The annoyance arose because I had presented Norwegians as a people who did not take care of their elderly. My viewers began to defend themselves, explaining why things might appear like that to an outsider. In the extension of this followed a discussion on value differences between cultures. Maybe this showed I had made some progress? These women in Norway had perhaps begun to have a closer look at their own frames of reference? At the same time, they felt 'accused' of having 'inadequate' frames of reference, but then, feeling accused and misunderstood might be the first step on the way to 'seeing oneself as the misunderstander'?

Later I showed the film to an audience of anthropologists in Denmark. This audience, however, reacted by asking for a **different** film: "Why haven't you taken up class contradictions? What about imperialism and how it has affected rural society?" To judge from their reactions, it would seem that they had spontaneously interpreted the film as an expression of my political views. I was a cultural relativist in the worst possible sense of the term. "She thinks that oppression exists only if people themselves see it!". Their reaction reflected the frame of reference

particular to that small world of anthropologists, to their subculture there and then. They were searching for their own 'signs' of power and oppression, without finding them. They did not appear to have learned anything from un-successful attempts at communicating and maybe they had never even reflected on such problems.

This reaction underscored what I have mentioned above: social scientists tend to underestimate the necessity of, and the challenges involved in, transmitting the 'concept of perspective'. They cannot manage to keep a grip on the concept of perspective when they really need to. In any case, these anthropologists lacked the experience that would have made my 'less ambitious' project, with its specific provocative intention, meaningful to them.

The forms of oppression that imperialism takes, must be discovered and revealed from case to case. But what can you do with a perspective on imperialism, unless you also have a more general concept of perspective? Is it at all possible to communicate meaningfully with people affected by oppression, and develop concrete strategies, without also understanding how the international dynamics are transformed in the local contexts? After all, it is these very processes of transformation between global and local systems that we are to reveal **and** communicate.

As our point of departure for discussing the film we should have had a clear definition of the situation. We should have agreed that this was my attempt to communicate a basic element in social analysis and that I was looking for their reactions to it. Whether or not it actually would have helped if I had introduced my remarks by pointing this out, must remain a matter of conjecture.

To continue my story, representatives of Norwegian development agencies were also shown the film without any introduction on my part. Their reaction was yet another variant on the theme described above: the film was not **informative** enough. "We get to know so little about what is actually going on down there in that village!" This reaction also indicated that I should have provided a 'framework' for the film by explaining that I intended it to be seen as an attempt at communicating the 'concept of perspective'. I should have said something like: "This is an attempt to tell you about a special way of posing questions about relations in our own society and in other societies. It is not a journalistic description of how people actually live down there". But I was afraid that a 'description' like that would lead to the same kind of 'learning' as the lectures I had given in connection with the exhibitions.

Why then, do social scientists not tackle this basic problem in com-

munication? Let me merely indicate one hypothesis. Our identity is important. In a society as complex as ours, we have difficulties in constantly trying to have our identity confirmed. It is simpler and easier to obtain acknowledgement of one's political or moral identity than finding confirmation of one's own professional standing. This even applies at an institutional level for the universities (Cf. Berger & Kellner, 1981).

On communicating the 'concept of perspective' to students

Within my own university department I have for years had similar problems in connection with a seminar on gender roles. These seminars tended to turn into fora for the exchange of opinions in which both students and teachers were more occupied by placing each other in the landscape of the politics of power and gender, than with establishing a social scientific definition of the given situation. All this is naturally connected with the already established culture within this department, with the management of identity and how the entire curriculum of courses was set up. When there was no agreement as to this being a basic prerequisite for social research, then communicating it could not be taken seriously either. For example, in connection with the introductory courses in social science, I saw that many students were reading the theory books in the same way as they would 'read' what the teacher would communicate. They would treat what was going on as points of view, rather than the representation of analytical perspectives. Berger and Luckman's book (1972) was, for instance, often interpreted as, "... an excellent description of Western society". When basic methods and research tools are presented and illustrated with reference to everyday examples from our own society, examples well-known to most of us, the reader is easily tempted to evaluate the presentation as an applicable or non-applicable description of Western society. And yet the intention was for the students to evaluate the concepts presented in relation to possible studies of any society, anywhere. This holds true for a large amount of the literature within the social sciences. Often, it is not until you have your **own** experience of transforming 'impressions' into data that you have a sufficient basis for finding an evaluating the tools in question. My conclusion thus was, that too much energy was being spent, by students and teachers alike, in participating in 'communicative' and reading exercises that did not lead to a cumulative learning process for the students. In 1980 I tried to take the consequences of this. I started an experimental project in order to attempt to communicate the 'concept of perspective' by making films. The title of this experimental project was "The use of film to chart how

gender is seen and expressed in some school and leisure-time settings in Northern Norway” (Danielsen & Holtedahl, 1983).

All of the students attending the seminar were to follow the same set of instructions. First, they were to select a group of informants. Then they were to confront these informants with the attitudes which they, the students, originally held about these groups. They were told to formulate their attitudes as to what kind of groups these were, what conditions affected their daily lives and which activities they themselves felt were linked to their identity as boys or girls. The next step was for the informants to give their responses to these statements. The students were to return to the seminar and present their own assumptions, and those of their informants. Then we were to start a discussion on how forms of understanding are constituted in social processes. The teacher was to demonstrate the use of an analytical perspective to the students by means of an on-going ‘transformation’ of material into data in a process of hypothesis formulation. Only then would the theory be introduced, in this case mainly that of Berger and Luckman.

By having the students themselves involved in a learning process over time, I hoped that they would be able to experience the development in work on hypothesis formulation, from the initial vague assumptions and through to more precisely considered hypotheses. The students participating in the project split into various groups. By the end of the project we had the impression that most of them had indeed grasped the concept of perspective, and thus also had a more concrete idea of what an analytical perspective is within the social sciences.

Some students objected to having to learn what we were trying to communicate, and thereby perhaps failed to learn how to use an analytical perspective. They were keen enough to take part in the project but they were basically convinced that the perspective I was presenting was useless when it came to what they thought one ought to do, namely reveal the **true** (supra-individual) factors of oppression. They defined **my** approach as positivist.

Now, let me briefly sketch the work process in one of the groups: the riding school group. This group chose to work with a group of girls who went to a riding school in Tromsø. Most of them lived in a nearby suburb. In words and in images, the students formulated their immediate assumptions, i.e. on the basis of their own frame of reference, as to what the riding school meant to the girls in question. They ran along these lines, “The riding school is a nice and cosy place for you girls to be.”, “The riding school has a smell of nature”, “At the riding school you’re in

touch with ‘real’ reality – live animals, horses, horse dung, wooden buildings...”, and “At the riding school you are part of a community”. Implicit in such statements lay also other assumptions regarding the girls and how their lives were outside the riding school. These were also presented and illustrated: “The suburban setting is inorganic, lifeless, unpleasant, and produces crime”.

The first images and films that the students made put flesh on the bones of these initial hypotheses in the following way: In the film shots of the suburbs, not a single person was to be seen. The camera moved slowly up and down the monotonous walls of one house after the other, building after building, all of them with square, black windows. The scenes from the riding school were colourful, full of life and sound and ‘close’: girls in close contact with the horses, girls riding along the shore in the late afternoon sun...etc.. After a few weeks of dialogue and observations, however, the students’ “images”, in both senses, of the riding school and the suburb as factors in the girls’ lives had changed. Now the films were shot from the suburbs, in the home of one of the girls. We see a colourful living room with plush-upholstered furniture and lots of potted plants. We can hear pop music in the background, together with the overall hum of some 5-6 girls who are sitting around in the sofa group, reading weeklies and chewing gum. All in all, we get a different impression from that given by the first round of pictures taken by the students. The impression is now of a suburb quite different from before. The girls now seem to be having a lovely time!

The students’ impressions of the girls have changed. Through conversations they have learned more about just how **the girls** experience their suburb and how **they** experience the riding school. When they showed the girls their first shots, and presented their first assumptions to them, they discovered, by how **the girls** reacted, that they would definitely not have ranked things in the way they did. In the suburb you can meet informally, you can exchange news and gossip and get to know your friends better – friends from school, from the neighbourhood, from the riding school. By contrast, at the riding school there were lots of strict rules, rules that you had to stick to, rules that formed the basis of an hierarchical social system. Some girls are allowed to ride on their own, others are not. Some girls have to muck out and groom, others saddle up the horses and teach beginners how to ride.

This then led to a discussion in which all the participants could hold up the frames of reference from the students (in the various groups) and their informants as representing two **different** types of empirical reality

– as parts of two sets of frameworks. In turn, this resulted in a discussion of the extent to which the informants themselves could tell us something about the factors that led to limitations in their life situation – and whether the students' assumptions might not be just as good as those of their informants.

By now we were deeply engaged in a fruitful discussion of what an analytical perspective is. Now we could take up the theories presented by e.g. Berger and Luckman (1972) as to how people's frames of reference are created. We would begin meaningfully to talk about how we can reveal roles and status in different environments; how we can formulate hypotheses about the dominant societal rules in people's lives – and what forms them. That romantic ride into the sunset does indeed have a meaning to the girls – but, unlike the initial assumptions of the students of there being a close sense of community at the riding school, what the girls saw as the central element here was the possibility of being **alone**. For once, the riding school and its strict hierarchy could be forgotten.

Now we could launch hypotheses by means of theory – hypotheses regarding which features of the riding school setting (tasks set, money, surroundings, time) characterized the development of specific 'riding-school-girl' roles. Similarly, we could develop hypotheses about how an 'empty' suburban flat could become an important **resource** for the girls in formulating their own rules for being together.

In a continuation of this study, the students could have enquired into whether what the girls learned in this different settings could be put to use at school, or whether they might represent dilemmas for them in their everyday lives or in the future. In the process the students had had their initial hypotheses invalidated. They had begun to get some insight into how the lives of children and young people are formed. They had grasped the concept of perspective. In the course of the learning process itself, they were confronted with basic problems of research ethics. The learning context which we had created, the definition of situation which was developed, ensured that also this theme could be taken up fruitfully. And that was as far as we got in this project.

It is easy to get sidetracked if university teachers and students disagree as to whether the teacher is there solely to transmit information to the students. Often the teacher will see himself mainly in such a role, whereas the students may well find this unfair and oppressive.

I myself feel that our 'transmission' to the riding school group was successful, because I feel that they did not experience 'being right' and thereby seeing themselves as my equal as a teacher and transmitter. For

the students to have 'been right', they would have had to receive confirmation of their original hypotheses. They did **not**, and this they realized.

I also feel there were various other reasons why the transmission or communication of the 'concept of perspective' was successful. For one thing, they used images to 'establish' their first working hypotheses and promote discussion with the girls from the riding school. Talking about the film shots made it clear that the students and the girls interpreted the sequences in quite different ways. Another reason was that we were involved in a three-phase communication process: teacher – student – informant. In the teaching situation, the students experienced themselves as informants, because I thematised the content in their **own** frames of reference. They experienced this as a provocation, which in turn led to a kind of 'self-defence' similar to that of the women in the women's organizations mentioned earlier. Was I trying to say that their frame of reference was inadequate? I think this feeling of irritation became a qualification which they could then transfer to irritation on behalf of their own informants. Their relationship to their informants had features in common with my relationship to them. In the process, the students developed a keen sensitivity on behalf of their informants, and thereby a sensitivity towards their differing frames of reference. Agreement as to my position as communicator or transmitter was a necessary precondition for recognizing and accepting the learning process. Then the students could ask whether receiving messages, also in academic and professional terms, must necessarily always involve a hierarchical relationship (cf. Strathern, 1987).

Yet another reason for the success of this project can be found in the meeting and interplay between groups at the gender-role seminar. Being able to contrast experiences and images from the work done by the different groups served further to promote the students' own growing awareness of their own frames of reference and those of others. Comparison of different empirical bases proved directly **useful** in testing out a common theoretical way of thinking. By means of discussions, participants organized the various material they had collected. In the social sciences, as elsewhere, making discoveries means cumulatively transforming your own frame of understanding. A social scientist is not simply an 'empty bottle' into which 'objective' insight is poured if only s/he can approach his/her informants the right way.

For a few students, however, the project was not a success in my terms. In the end they were **more** convinced than ever, that a relevant understanding of how macro society influences young people cannot be

revealed through 'that kind of' work. This, I believe, can be explained as being caused by disagreement concerning the communication situation. There was no general agreement that I, as the teacher, was to convey a general theoretical and methodological understanding of how understanding fundamentally starts. The students perceived it as accepting a hierarchical relationship, and as if they were involved in something which theoretically was opposed to a materialist understanding of society. They did not accept my emphasis on a comparative approach in the social sciences.

Conclusion

My interest in communicating the 'concept of perspective' arose from my own experience in using film, objects and images in communicating the results of my research. I had had negative experiences. I had discovered a problematic area in the production of knowledge sought by the social sciences. And, once you have noted one unsuccessful point in communication processes, you tend to start noticing many other important processes that in general receive little attention in the social sciences. You may ask: **exactly** what was it that was communicated? And this means taking the first step in search of a way towards a more successful strategy of communication.

When we see reports from Africa produced by various charities and development agencies – or at least this is how I feel – the presentation is often guided by the desire to arouse our feelings of pity and compassion to an extent where we actually learn very little indeed. In addition, when we invoke pity, we may 'lose' the message, even if people may well feel they are learning something. No, I am not trying to say that I do not realize the importance of communication about the sufferings of other human beings. My point is rather that our final products, be they lectures, exhibitions, books or films, make no contribution towards amending the audience's ethnocentric way of 'learning' about other groups and other societies.

The conclusion to be drawn from my use of film in communication must be that it is a difficult – if not impossible – job to communicate by means of film alone (and to a one-time-only audience) any critical knowledge about foreign cultures. Instead, what we must do is to provide the conditions for a learning process based on **several** meetings with the same public. Such a process requires active engagement on the part of the public, i.e. a dialogue with the public. It must be important to gradually build up this kind of competence. Communication analyses of the

type I have outlined in this paper should go hand in hand with our work in forming developmental strategies and strategies for regional planning. Might it not be just as important to planners to have grasped the concept of perspective as it is for them to have detailed knowledge about their own administration? Once we have learned about local context our moral judgements will necessarily have to stand trial, which, however, does not imply that we should abandon them. Instead we could say that contextualised understanding comes first and moral announcements may follow. I would join Rabinow (1986) and Foucault (1980) in saying:

We need to anthropologize the West: show how exotic its constitution of reality has been; emphasize those domains most taken for granted as universal (this includes epistemology and economics); make them seem as historically peculiar as possible; show how their claims to truth are linked to social practices and have hence become effective forces in the social world. We must pluralize and diversify our approaches; a basic move against either economics or philosophic hegemony is to diversify centres of resistance; avoid the error of reverse essentializing; Occidentalism is not a remedy for Orientalism.

I feel that the analysis of my own experiences has provided at least some insight into what we take for granted: in women's organizations, that "we take good care of our elderly"; among anthropologists, that "we have the right perspective"; among development personnel, that "we know **what kind** of information we need about people!" In all these fora, work on communicating the "concept of perspective" was not easy.

If, however, we can implement an experimental process, e.g. in connection with university teaching, we have a chance to reach much further. Our students can gradually learn how to build up a perspective on the basis of their/our own codification of our own frames of reference. Such an experimental situation makes it possible for us to identify the processes that create barriers to communicating our perspective, which also may imply that we occasionally lose sight of it.

What, then, are we up against? In administration, in development agencies, at the university? We are asked to provide neat, concrete solutions to questions concerning proposals for more technical solutions to plan schedules. Too often we lack the necessary time, the requisite conditions. In my opinion, we shall have to increasingly insist that these necessary conditions should be fulfilled, so that we can communicate

our perspective. It is our moral dilemma that it is tempting **not** to take on the task that implies that one is assessed as a professional and not as an 'amateur', who communicates ideology-based superficial insight. The sad thing is that neither the audience nor the students let us know if we do not succeed in communicating our main message. This is vividly described by Berger and Kellner (1981). Or, as Rabinow says,

We owe these less glamorous, if more immediately constraining, conditions more attention. The taboo against specifying them is much greater than the strictures against denouncing colonialism. ... The micro-processes of the academy might well do with some scrutiny." (1986)

Your anthropologist colleagues question your ideology, your students want to be your equals. And in a way, those who do not want to accept the premises of the project are right: when you gain acceptance of your point of view, you also (at least in certain contexts) gain influence. Thus we are faced with the paradoxical situation in our academic world, that if we succeed in communicating our conclusions without the "concept of perspective", then we are fighting a battle of professions, protecting our specific competence and becoming exclusive in our knowledge. If, however, we **insist** on communicating this, and then succeed, we will, willy-nilly, "...accumulate both symbolic capital and 'high' structural position" within the academic world as Bourdieu has shown in his analysis of French university circles (1984). Have we any choice?

Notes

* translated from the Danish by Susan Høivik.

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