Social Change: Some Cautionary Notes

PHILIP H. ENNIS

RECENT AMERICAN THOUGHT has been obsessed with two themes: change and persistence. Whole new literatures have developed around the study of change. The social indicators movement seeks methods of identifying and measuring changes in the various aspects of the society as it inches or leaps forward. The futures movement, a loose international coagulation of writers, scholarly centers and research institutes in many disciplines, is dedicated to enterprises ranging from forecasting to the imaginative creation of possible future social worlds. The development or modernization literature is concerned with analyzing the opportunities and barriers to the transformations of undeveloped, non-developed, and developing states into modern, industrial, developed nations. The literature on post-industrial change, alternatives and counter cultures seeks to interpret the widely shared sense that the modern state—mainly the Western world but including parts of the Socialist world as well—has entered a new, uncharted, confusing and, above all, directionless period.

The prevalence, speed, and consequentiality of change is so widely accepted that writers calling attention to persistence and tradition seem to be either pedantic academics or musty reactionaries. Insofar as tradition and persistence are counterposed against change and the future, there is a tendency for these words to become reified, to become disembodied forces obscuring the dimensions of each. The specific, concrete social processes which underlie both change and persistence tend to become blurred in this kind of thinking, as do important distinctions about different types of change, types of stability and the relationships between them.

The first part of this article therefore is a brief review of some problems involved in analyzing social change. The second part discusses two cases that may be useful to library planning.

Philip H. Ennis is Professor of Sociology at Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut.

Some Dimensions of Social Change

The first problem is to identify *what* is changing or, more accurately, since everything is in some kind of change process, what particular aspect of society should be paid attention to in *describing* a change. To take a familiar example, what does the "rapid and accelerating growth of science" mean? This phrase is ubiquitous, but does it refer to the growth of the number of practicing scientists, the number of scientific discoveries, the number of scientific books and articles published, or the number of dollars spent on science? Or more complexly, does the expression refer to the spread of scientific techniques and personnel into activities previously handled by traditional means, does it mean growth in the number of newspaper stories or movies about science and scientists, or does it mean that there is a change in the public awareness of science? Clearly there is some correlation between all these aspects, but they are different aspects of "the growth of science." It would be disastrous to the formulation of a specific public policy not to select the specific aspect that is appropriate to the purpose at hand.

It is particularly important to distinguish between changes in the public consciousness of a situation and the actual change itself. An example is the belief that mental illness in the United States has increased enormously in the past half century due to the increased strains and stresses in the culture. The proliferation of mental health programs and the extensive discussions of mental health in the mass and specialized media make it quite plausible for people to believe that the rate of mental disorders has accelerated as our society has become more complex. Yet the empirical evidence simply does not confirm this story. Goldhamer and Marshall's *Psychosis and Civilization* carefully sifts the available data and concludes that for about 100 years, from the middle of the nineteenth century to the 1950s, there is a remarkable stability in the rates of mental illness in the United States.[1] Changes in public awareness of problems appear to be much more volatile than the changes in the actual state of affairs in many areas.

The pollution of the nation's air, water and landscape, to take another case, has been occurring for a long time. While there has been some acceleration, to be sure, in the rate of destruction of these natural resources, there has been a faster shift in the nation's consciousness of the problem. The evidence for this assertion, though not quantitative, is the readily observable increase in the space devoted to the issue in the media of public discussion, in the organized activity of the citizenry and in the action of federal and state legislatures and agencies. It

must be added at once that changes in the consciousness of a problem can alter the rate and extent of the situation's "natural" growth and society's response to it.

These observations are applicable to the library field generally, but more dramatically in interpreting what is meant by the expressions "information explosion" or "knowledge explosion." These summarizing metaphors compress many different kinds of changes. If such metaphors are to do much more than merely scare or comfort people, they must be resolved into their proper units and dimensions.

A second problem related to analyzing change is setting meaningful temporal and spatial boundaries to change. This means paying attention to the question how fast is fast, and how much is much. Too often the words "rapid change" or "massive change" are simply subjective assertions based on privately felt dislocations of familiar coordinates. The clue to this kind of thinking is in the language. When we read, "the entire knowledge system in society is undergoing violent upheaval. The very concepts and codes in terms of which we think are turning over at a furious and accelerating pace. We are increasing the rate at which we must form and forget our images of reality,"[2] we are in the presence of a speed-infatuated mind innocent of the realities of concrete social process and individual psychology. There are simply too many stabilizing influences at work which prevent people from reeling off as dizzily as this writer supposes.

This same writer illustrates another kind of failure to place change in its concrete setting in his book on *The Culture Consumers* when he makes the following statement: "A survey of 21 museums alone showed an aggregate attendance of 19,370,000 in 1958. Within two years this had climbed to 21,360,000—a gain of more than ten percent. Across the country museums are making room for unaccustomed crowds."[3] The implication here, relentlessly pursued by Toffler, is that we are in the midst of a "culture explosion." The reader, however, is not told which twenty-one cities the survey covered, whether their population growth was more or less than 10 percent, whether the attendance figures represent people coming in by themselves or as part of organized groups, how many people—not visits—these figures represent, or whether they represent adults or children. This kind of error is a common one which can entrap the best intentioned analyst.

As another example, by referring to statistics from 1930 through 1965 for total expenditures for admission to legitimate theater, opera, and entertainments of nonprofit institutions (except athletics)[4] and adjust-

ing these to account for such things as inflation, population growth, and allocation of disposable income, the culture explosion supposedly beginning in the early 1940s simply vanishes. It is possible to assess the speed, scope and meaning of a change in a particular social process only in terms of a joint consideration of the process's own previous rate of change and the changes in related processes. Changes in the growth of national wealth, for example, are understandable only when placed in the relational context of changes in population growth rates, the growth of capital formation, changes in the distribution of income, and so on.

A third problem in assessing social change is the misapplication of categories in such a way as to obscure simultaneous but opposite changes. Misapplication may be due to partisan political persuasion or it may be an attempt at objective description. In any case, the culprit is most often language. Important words can blind an observer to what is in fact happening. Three examples of this misapplication arise in asking the following questions:

1. How are black Americans doing? Summary figures which report that black compared to white Americans are earning less or get less education or are improving faster or slower in this or that respect obliterate the fact that within the black community there is a simultaneous but opposite set of trends. For some blacks there has been an improvement in income, health and education, but for others there is an equally clear increase in the pathologies of poverty.
2. How are women doing? Summary figures which show the steady increase of women's participation in the work force, from 19.2 percent in 1910 to 32.1 percent in 1960 fail to see the simultaneous but opposite trend which reveals that the proportion of women in the professions fell from 42.9 percent in 1910 to 38.1 percent in 1960.[5]
3. How is the sale of paperback books doing? Summary figures which compare total sales figures of paperbacks to hard cover trade books show that from 1959 to 1967 hard cover trade book volume increased from 35 to 48 million units, an increase of 37 percent. During that same period all paperback sales increased from 296 million to 345 million units, a 17 percent rise. One might conclude that the paperback revolution had effectively ended, or at least slowed. Yet this would be erroneous and misleading because the category "paperback" conceals the distinction between the mass distributed "wholesale" and the "adult" paperbound book: the two labels point to quite different content, distribution channels, and audiences. Between 1959 and 1967 the wholesale paperback sales declined in volume from 286 million to 201 million copies, a 30 percent drop, while adult

paperbound books increased their sales over the same period from 10 million to 144 million, a 1,340 percent increase.[6]

These three simple examples illustrate how reliance on the unanalyzed categories of everyday language can disguise the fact that things can go in opposite directions at the same time.

A fourth problem in the analysis of change is more complicated. Thus far, the advice is that if the observer gets the unit of change right, locates the change in its proper temporal and spatial boundaries and the proper metrics, and has broken through the linguistic traps to reach the real categories, then the analysis of social change should proceed in a straightforward way. Sometimes this will work, but most likely it will not.

Social policies have their origins in unlikely places; they have outcomes surprisingly different than those envisaged, and consequences that turn up in places far removed from their origin. The following example taken from a statement by Daniel P. Moynihan begins with an important premise:

> In a system, everything relates to everything. If one part is changed, all other parts are affected. It thus becomes necessary to think of the total effect, not just the partial one.
>
> This fact has an important corollary. Given the interconnections of things, it follows that there is no significant aspect of national life about which there is not likely to be a rather significant national policy. It may be a *hidden* policy. No one may know about it; no one may have intended it. But it is a policy withal. (In the course of the 1960's, for example, the Selective Service System emerged as a national youth policy of pervasive, enormous, and, in almost every respect, calamitous consequence. In effect, the draft meant that youth of higher social status would in considerable measure be excused from fighting in a difficult and dangerous war. Almost certainly this contributed importantly to a sequence of events which led large numbers of this group into unprecedented opposition to society as a whole.) Yet Selective Service was never seen as a youth policy. From the first it has but one object, to maintain the Armed Forces at a lesser cost than would be required if the members thereof had to be induced to serve by the same kind of inducements that operate in the labor market generally. Not infrequently, the strongest proponents of the draft have been persons who wished to see the money "saved" by it used for important social services to help the less advantaged. They certainly never considered that in the process they might be sending just such persons to war, while exempting more privileged youth.[7]

Given this unfortunately pervasive entanglement of things, it takes concentration and a little luck to make sense of the full origins and consequences of social change.

Two Cases of Social Change

We now turn to two specific instances of social change. They both deal with the cultural scene, but not with the surface play of one event succeeding another. The analysis is directed instead to everyday institutional arrangements whose ordinary operations are not very visible to the public and not deliberately engaged in altering the content of our culture, but whose activities produce, often inadvertently, the puzzling contour of the present.

THE MARKET MECHANISM

The first case illustrates one of the most basic engines of change in our society—the market mechanism. The distribution of goods and services and the allocation of political power devolve in large measure on the legally protected rights of individual choice whose aggregate outcome operates as social choice based on some decision rule. In politics a majority, or 51 percent, is characteristically the rule. In the economy the rule is generally that any given percentage of the demand commands that percentage of the supply. If 80 percent of the market wants beer and 20 percent champagne, eight out of ten bottles produced will be filled with beer—if Adam Smith's invisible hand is pouring.

In the economy and to some extent in the polity, demands are both volatile and manipulatable. There is thus a relentless pressure to anticipate, to keep up with and to shape the ever-shifting pattern of the public's aggregate wants. The result is pervasive change. The most familiar kind is the endless and unpredictable parade of short-lived fashion changes. On a slightly larger scale there are changes which can rapidly alter the form of a whole market structure, in the way that the invention of the better mouse trap retires the old one to a museum. The author does not know why it is the case, but this kind of market situation tends to be all or nothing, feast or famine. The almost total demise of network radio as a major presentational form of mass popular entertainment with the emergence of television is another case of the same thing.

At a still greater level of complexity, the market produces, or rather is implicated in producing, major cultural changes which alter the life style of large sectors of the population. Rock music's appearance in the mid-1950s has created a new life style for many of the young. The story is not simply that Elvis Presley wandered into town and led the kids off on a mad dance like the Pied Piper. The story has its roots in the everyday workings of the advertising, radio broadcasting, music publishing,

phonograph recording and entertainment industries. From the 1920s forward these industries have been entwined in the creation and distribution of popular music. From folk sources and from the traditions of urban commercial entertainment, vaudeville and the musical theatre, these industries had gradually abstracted, rationalized and neatly packaged three main product lines and several subsidiary lines. By the end of the 1940s, the major ones were known as the popular, the country and western, and the rhythm and blues markets. The popular market was the dominant one, serving the nation's white mass market audience. The country and western market was a commercial amalgam of rural white Southern (hill billy) music and western, cowboy music serving mainly the white Southern and Southwestern populations. The rhythm and blues market was the commercialized form of black blues and dance music. Each had its own separate audience, its own performers, its own distribution system, its own distinct musical content.

Music in all three of the markets began to be phonographically recorded and distributed in the early 1920s. Indeed it was the commercial success of the recording industry that helped shape the music into the three distinct forms. Slowly over those years white popular music and country and western music, both live and recorded, were increasingly exposed to the public via the radio. Yet paradoxically the major commodity of the music business was sheet music. It was only after the Second World War, with the decline of the big bands, the drop in sales for home pianos and other musical instruments, and the growth in the number of independent radio stations throughout the nation that a peculiar and almost unrelated set of events took place which decisively changed the way popular music reached the public.

The new independent radio stations required inexpensive programming material, advertising revenue and a broadcasting format that could attract a large and diverse audience. The answer to all these needs was found in the disk jockey, a new occupation that gradually took shape during the late 1930s and early 1940s. The disk jockey played popular records (each about three minutes long) interspersed by "spot" commercial announcements. He held the program together by his "personality." The needs of the broadcasting, advertising and the music industries met and were satisfied in a new way by the disk jockey. He created local audiences and markets for local stations including a local market for popular music. The appearance of disk jockeys in cities all over the nation thus inadvertently broke the control of the New York-centered distribution system of popular music. At the same time, the

disk jockey strengthened the record companies relative power as compared to music publishers by exposing and selling the single record as opposed to the sheet music version of the tune. Disk jockeys shaped local listeners into devoted, responsive and enthusiastic record-buying audiences.

Insofar as some disk jockeys concentrated on predicting and making hits they sought out that segment of the audience most interested in popular music. These were, of course, young people, teen-agers mainly. The disk jockeys went to where the kids were, invented record hops, brought them into the radio stations, championed and celebrated the youngsters. They told the disk jockey which of the new records they liked and in return the disk jockeys played back those records on the programs in massive doses until they (or some of them) did in fact become hits. This system of rapid feedback and force-feed worked well and efficiently for the music industry. What the teen-agers first signalled they liked, the rest of the audience subsequently liked and bought. It worked as long as the tastes of the teen-agers were the same tastes as those of the much larger number of older kids and adults. However, by the early 1950s those tastes began to diverge. The reasons are complex but, in brief, the rhythm and blues and the country and western markets each in different ways burst their boundaries.

Large numbers of American blacks during and after the Second World War had moved into Northern cities. Because the war had improved their economic position, the market mechanism, always responsive to such situations of opportunity, had responded with a great expansion in the production of rhythm and blues records. The major record companies were slower to act than a whole new group of small and energetic record labels. They flooded the ordinary distribution channels for black music—the juke box, the small record shop, the drug store with a record department (and loudspeaker blaring into the street). About this time, the late 1940s, the radio broadcasting industry realized the market potential of black audiences and responded as did the white stations, with popular music (black) and disk jockies. The number of stations programming black music increased rapidly. The irony was that some white teen-agers began to listen. There was no segragation for the radio audience even though many white stations had firm if sotto voce policies to "keep that nigger music off the air." Country and western music was also expanding out of its regional base and saturating much radio programming in the West and Middle West. At first records that became big hits in rhythm and blues and country and western were

copied by white popular singers. The music industry's response was not organized conspiracy, but was simply the result of individual attempts to get the next big hit. White singers, vocal groups and bands were recorded doing music that at first copied the black material, cleaning up the earthy lyrics and smoothing out the roughness of the music.

In the early days of rock and roll, 1953-56, it was smaller record companies and marginal talent that exploited the emerging taste changes. The days of the Brill Building (the locale of the traditional New York music publishers) and big record companies' A & R men (artists and repertoire—the resident producers of pop records) were numbered. After they had mass produced several years worth of teen-aged performers singing teen-aged lyrics, the structure of the music industry and its audiences began to change.

Within the industry rock and roll music became a focus of the conflict between the old establishment and spokesmen for an increasingly self-conscious young audience who responded enthusiastically but selectively to music directed towards their own still inchoate life style. It was in the air generally, but the Beatles made the most decisive break in commercial terms. Young performers could be their own composers and lyricists, speaking more deeply and more variously about the experience of the young in musical terms that were by now (1963) in a familiar idiom—that of black rhythm and blues and that of white country and western. Soon older kids, perhaps the very same college kids who had earlier rejected Patti Page and Perry Como for the Drifters, Chuck Berry, or Buddy Holly, gave enough support to the contemporary folk strain of singers like Bob Dylan (mediated by the Byrds), to allow enough commercial support to that vitalizing moment, the San Francisco Sound of 1965. The Jefferson Airplane, the Grateful Dead, all their progenitors, peers and successors in the United States and in England were the symbols of a widening age-graded social cleavage giving language, dance, community, and ultimately, a political consciousness to what was once merely a commercial audience. The institutional situation that gave skeleton and muscle to these culture changes was the gradual shift in power away from the distribution side (the record companies) to the performer-composer. The live concert, dances, the festival gave the performers both the economic strength and the audience support to tip the power away from the established sections of the music industry. This is not to say that the adult stream of the music industry is dead. It existed and flourished throughout this entire period. The industry moreover has recaptured to a considerable extent the reins

of the rock world. The story is clear nevertheless. When a new audience with its own needs and interests is discovered by a cultural system driven by the market mechanism, that mechanism will respond even though the managers of the system may hate and fear what they are offering. Both the music industry and the adults condemned rock and roll. The immediate consequence was to further widen the gulf between kids and parents, to give greater consciousness to the youth, and to create social structures which defended and advanced their sundry causes.

In newspaper and book publishing this kind of thing is also happening. Underground newspapers evaded the established structure of the news industry but the book industry, in a much more competitive situation, opened its flanks to assault. The public library has apparently stood apart from all these changes. Have the youth and the blacks, and the other new and old minorities simply walked around the library as they have walked around the vestiges of other structures which have suffered marginal institutional exhaustion, or is there new life yet to be seen in the public library?

AMERICAN SYSTEM OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

The second case of social change is even a more classic case of marginal institutional exhaustion. It is well understood that social movements have a limited life cycle. They are born in a situation of strain, grow in crisis, and die of defeat or of success. Their organizational forms often litter the social landscape long after their inner life has ended. It is not well understood that the established institutions of modern life may also have an analogous life cycle. The case to be discussed here is the American system of free public education. The charge that the schools are dying or dead vies for public attention with the insistence that the public schools can and should offer to all children a high quality education irrespective of their race and economic condition.

It would be a mistake to diagnose these emotion-laden assertions as evidence of the total failure of institutional arrangements to meet social purpose. By many criteria the schools are unquestionably successful. A recent report shows that over 99 percent of children six to twelve years of age are enrolled in school.[8] This is babysitting at an unprecedented level of efficiency. The fact that the college population has grown at a rate far faster than the population as a whole attests to the success of the public schools in providing higher education. There are undoubtedly other such "successes," but the failure bias in our culture directs

our attention to the points where the schools are under attack.

It is at socially critical points, at the margin of change in other words, that we find two kinds of institutional exhaustion. On the one hand a basic American value is achievement—people are to be judged and rewarded on the basis of their performance. Formal education is the main road to achievement. Therefore, the ideology says, education must attempt to provide the tools of achievement, especially to those children who lack parentally inherited resources. Another American value sanctions the right of families and larger social groupings to maintain their own customs, life styles, and social identities. Insofar as school is an extension and continuation of family socialization, families of a similar background try to keep their schools restricted to their own children. Thus these two equally legitimate values clash in the schools. Which is the higher priority, who you are or what you can become? This struggle of ascription versus achievement, as the sociologists say, strains the meaning and uses of the public schools. The sudden growth of free schools and alternative schools in the cities of the North and East and the implacable resistance to school desegregation in the nation epitomize the exhaustion of the present school arrangements.

In recent years a crucial symptom of the schools' failure has become more visible; this is the basic question of literacy. Next to venereal disease, illiteracy is the social disease least tolerable to our society. Reading is regarded as the skill most essential to educational achievement. The extent of illiteracy is widely thought to be the measure of a society's educational health. Only recently has critical attention been turned to those measures. The traditional measure of literacy in this country has been based on the yes-or-no census question referring to the language spoken in the home, "Can you read and write that language?"

In 1900 the illiteracy rate was 10.7 percent, by 1940 it had declined to 4.3 percent, and the most recent accounting by the census reports that in 1969 the illiteracy rate for the population over fourteen years of age has dropped to 1.0 percent.[9] At first glance these statistics are another accolade to American education. Yet evidence is accumulating that illiteracy is far more prevalent than indicated. A recent report of two nationwide studies indicates that about 13 percent of Americans over sixteen years "cannot read well enough to fill out application forms for Government Medicard or public assistance, a bank loan or even a Social Security number."[10]

These revisions in the estimates of illiteracy raise several important

questions. The first has to do with the identifiability of social change. Instead of a slow, steady elimination of an undesirable social trait through the ordinary application of education, the more accurate perception now seems to be one of an inadvertently and invisibly produced *increase* in this social trait through the ordinary application of the very institution designed to remove it. How accurate are these new estimates?

Many technical problems require solution before the extent and distribution of illiteracy can be fully assessed, but certainly the *definition* of illiteracy is critical. If the census use of the simple question "Can you read and write?" is too crude in one direction, then the measures used in the recent surveys reported above are too crude in the other; that is, if "18½ million people cannot read well enough to get along in daily life,"[10] this definition of illiteracy is too demanding, since those millions are surely getting along somehow. The notion of illiteracy obviously requires reconceptualization. Given the disparity between the census and the recent reports of illiteracy, the first requirement is a base line study that can set a minimum standard of literacy analogous to minimum standards of health and safety. Beyond this minimum, the situation is much more complex. It is not likely that either one test or a series of measuring instruments can evaluate the levels of reading competence that an individual needs to carry out the diverse social role he is called upon to enact in everyday life.

The average adult in his role as breadwinner, father, homeowner, consumer, voter, automobile driver, bowler, patient, and so on, has a variety of contacts with print. Some are fleeting, almost unrecognizable as reading, but others require more sustained work. The mix of reading skills that a person needs varies, of course, with the particular set of social roles he occupies. Since these are so varied it is difficult, if not impossible, for the schools to offer training in all the different kinds of reading requirements used in adult life. Given the continual press of technological change, the schools are not very likely to keep up with the changing content required nor are they going to be able to keep up with the different types of print skills that will be needed. The creators and users of technology do not wait for the schools to catch up. They must cope with the literacy needs of the day.

To do so we find a peculiar double dynamism operating in the society which constantly, but relatively unobtrusively, re-equilibrates the match of literacy *needs* in any social role with the literacy *skills* available to the population who enacts that role. On the one hand, there has

been considerable change in the mix of literacy skills available in the population at any given moment. Thus, for example, there is some evidence that a great reservoir of literacy skills is being rapidly created as a result of the dramatic increase in the number of very young children who have had the opportunity of attending nursery school in recent years. A recent census study reports that "compared with October 1964 . . . nursery school enrollment has increased by 73 percent."[11] The same study also reports that college enrollment over the same time period has increased by 46 percent. These figures clearly indicate that the population as a whole has a much higher literacy potential than five years ago, even if that potential will show up in the adult world at two quite different times. For some sectors of the population, however, there were no such gains; in fact there is likely to have been a net deficit in the literacy potential among young Negro males during this time period. This inference can be made from the known facts about the decline in reading scores and IQ tests over the course of a school career for poor and for Negro students, and from the startling increase of unemployment among young Negro ghetto residents (from 23 to 30 percent over the years 1960-68 compared to a new low of 4.3 percent for all central city residents over the same time period).[11]

The other half of the dynamism is the changing levels of literacy *needed* to carry out various social roles. These too have been undergoing a mixed pattern of change, some increasing in the level of literacy required, some decreasing. All across the diversity of social roles there are simultaneous and complex changes in *both* the need for a given level of literacy and the literacy skills available. Moreover, there is in addition a varying but active social response to the preceived discrepancies between the literacy required and literacy available. An example is a situation where the *need* for literacy is increasing but the availability of literacy skills is either stable or not growing fast enough, i.e., the needs of a citizen in dealing with the political implications of modern science.

Science and technology together are producing changes so rapidly in the way the world will be or can be, and in such technical language, that large sections of the public are effectively illiterate in appreciating these changes. The social response to this discrepancy is the creation of what we can call "institutions of translation." They are typified by the formation of specialized science writers in the popular press (with the attendant rituals of briefing, tutelage of reporters by scientists, and the formation of national science writers organizations), and the shifting of

journalism school curricula toward a more scientifically oriented body of instruction. A second situation is at the opposite end, where literacy requirements are declining along with a decline in the availability of literacy levels. Such a case is that of routine factory jobs where there are political and social pressures to hire poorly educated residents of the black ghetto. The institution of translation here is the deliberate lowering of credential barriers to hiring, that is, a deliberate social response to bring the literacy levels available into harmony with the literacy levels needed to carry out a particular social role. In this case the disharmony is located within a great American disease, "creeping credentialism."

Still another example where literacy skills are static but where the needs for literacy are increasing, is that of traditional occupations recently infused with technological advance or social complexity. For example, the increasing affluence of the nation, coupled with the expanded opportunities for investment, demands different kinds of insurance, and the pressure for future planning for children's education and adult retirement have moved the insurance salesman, who formerly simply used traditional and familiar techniques to sell a limited range of life insurance policies to his clientele, toward the role of financial counselor. Some insurance companies have had to devise extensive and complex manuals of instruction for their sales staff, manuals typically based on a computerized programmed learning model. Generally, industry has increased its internal education budget rapidly over the past few years.

There is another side to the development of institutions of translation. Thus far we have discussed the *response* of those in charge of the reading situation. Yet the one who is to do the reading, be he an uneducated Negro ghetto dweller or an outmoded insurance agent, surely develops ways of accommodating to the inundating world of print, or conversely, to its absence, that allows survival if not success. These ways, which collectively might be termed functional equivalents of print, are important to identify. At one level such functional equivalents are a fundamental part of middle class life. Many people learn how to learn about things they have not read about. Lower class people undoubtedly do the same, that is, find their way around the barriers of print. One study on illiterates reports that among the people studied some had "no one who could read in their present family situations, although several indicated they had a 'reader' whose services they could borrow if necessary to read mail."[12] It would not be surprising to

discover that those in the upper reaches of literacy—scientists, intellectuals, and public policy makers—also find shortcuts to doing their literary homework.

The social process that results is, in principle, simple. Just as those in charge of a social role's literacy needs develop institutions of translation in order to reach down to their constituency's inadequate literacy, so too does that constituency reach up to the needs of their role through a variety of functional equivalents of print. This dual search for communication is often a changing one and can only be understood fully when placed within a larger framework, one that systematically confronts the two main elements of the literacy equation—availability of literacy skills and literacy needs.

What emerges from this perspective is a reconceptualization of illiteracy into the problem of *role competence with respect to the expectations and requirements of print use.* The articulation of the schools' reading programs with these complex sets of role competences may be adequate for a large range of the full literacy spectrum. But it is with critical sectors of that spectrum that the schools are insufficiently responsive to change and earn thereby the designation of marginal institutional exhaustion.

The message is clear: To understand social change and to prepare for it require intensive knowledge about the ways people use language in order to keep score on their activities and intensive knowledge about the workings of everyday and unglamorous institutions. If change is in the minds of men, where indeed it is, the roots of change are to be found in the almost unmindful, or at least limitedly mindful, routines of everyday life.

References

1. Goldhamer, Herbert, and Marshall, Andrew W. *Psychosis and Civilization: Two Studies in the Frequency of Mental Disease.* Glencoe, Ill., Free Press, 1953, p. 92.

2. Toffler, Alvin. *Future Shock.* New York, Random House, 1970, p. 139.

3. ———. *The Culture Consumers; A Study of Art and Affluence in America.* New York, St. Martin's Press, 1964, p. 17.

4. Baumol, William J., and Bowen, William G. *Performing Arts, The Economic Dilemma; A Study of Problems Common to Theater, Opera, Music, and Dances.* New York, Twentieth Century Fund, 1966, p. 46.

5. U. S. Bureau of the Census. . . . *Thirteenth Census of the United States. . . .* Vol. 8. Washington, D.C., U.S.G.P.O., 1913, Table 1, p. 238; ———. . . . *Fifteenth*

Census of the United States: 1930. Vol. 5. Washington, D.C., U.S.G.P.O., 1933, Table 1, pp. 20-21; and ———. *Census of Population: 1960.* Vol. 1, pt. 1. Washington, D.C., U.S.G.P.O., 1964, Table 83, p. 1-214 and Table 87, p. 1-216.

6. Ennis, Philip H. "The Library Consumer." *In* Ralph W. Conant and Kathleen Molz, eds. *The Public Library and the City.* Cambridge, Mass., M.I.T. Press, 1971. (In press.)

7. Moynihan, Daniel, quoted in: National Goals Research Staff. *Toward Balanced Growth: Quantity with Quality.* Washington, D.C., 1970, p. 6.

8. U. S. Bureau of the Census. *Current Population Reports: Population Characteristics* (Series P-20, no. 222). Washington, D.C., U.S.G.P.O., Oct. 1971, Table 1, p. 12.

9. ———. *Current Population Reports: Population Characteristics* (Series P-20, no. 217). Washington, D.C., U.S.G.P.O., March 1971, Table A.

10. *New York Times,* June 8, 1971, p. C21.

11. U. S. Bureau of the Census. *Current Population Reports: Population Characteristics* (Series P-20, no. 179). Washington, D.C., U.S.G.P.O., March 4, 1969, p. 1.

12. Brown, Don. "Educational Characteristics of Adult Illiterates: A Preliminary Report." *In* National Reading Conference. *New Frontiers in College-Adult Reading* (Fifteenth Yearbook of the National Reading Council). George B. Schick and Merrill M. Kay, eds. Milwaukee, Wisc., 1966, p. 64.