

RECORDS AS PHENOMENA:

The Nature and Uses of Medical Records

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SUMMARY

In Chapter I, the approach taken to the study of records is introduced. Sociologists and historians treat records as only contingently true. However, they do not explicate the source of the contingency. They do not address the basic idea of records which makes the contingency possible. The notion that records are only contingently true stems from a conception of fact as a relation between record and event which parallels a conception of language as a relation of words to things. The event is supposed to produce the record but the record (and recorder) are not supposed to produce the event. Various practical problems with records stem from the need to produce this asymmetric record-event relationship.

In Chapter II, an investigation is begun of how the record-event relationship is achieved. It is achieved by the action of "observation". Observation requires an observer's presence but it also requires that the observer's presence not make a difference to the event. If the observer's presence does not make a difference, his record can be analytically identical with the event and therefore the event can be known through the record. The observer's presence is supposed to rid speech of its opinionated character. By being present, the observer need not speak in an opinionated way. He can be a "witness" to the world which speaks for itself. Qua present witness, what the observer can know is time-bound and place-bound. He can know only the "present" time and the "present" place. Records are the kind of speech observers produce about the present, speech which does not affect things but merely "notes" things. Given that observers can know only the present, records become necessary in order to grant permanence to an observer's kind of knowledge.

In Chapter III, the observer-recorder's concept of the present is further investigated. The present in the sense that it can be known is not a moment in time; it is an appearing, self-disclosing thing. Recording, then, presupposes a particular definition of things; things are appearances. Because the event is thought to present itself, the observer need not contribute to it. To say that the observer can see only the present is not to limit the observer to the "physical". It is to limit the observer to anything which can present itself. Finally, it is suggested that the notion that observers can see only one thing at a time can be accounted for in terms of the grounds of observation. The observer sees just one thing at a time since his notion of a thing is analytically identical to his notion of a time.

In Chapters IV and V, an attempt is made to apply the analysis of the grounds of records to problems involved in the use of records by hospital bureaucrats. Bureaucrats seeking to use records face a problem in that they were not present when the records were made (and the event happened) and therefore would seemingly have nothing that is not opinionated speech to say about the record. The bureaucrat's solutions to the problem involve putting his own speech at the service of the record just as the observer puts his speech at the service of the event.

The first specific solution is discussed in Chapter IV: bureaucrats can subjugate their speech and know events indirectly by "relying" on observers, thereby achieving analytic identity with observers. Concern with reliability on the part of bureaucrats (and sociological methodologists) is explained in terms of the basic grounds of observation. It is shown in some detail that bureaucrats do in fact attempt to ensure that "reliable" records are produced.

In Chapter V, the topic is shifted from reliability to completeness. Hospital administrators are concerned with the completeness of records rather than their accuracy. However, the concern with completeness is not an example of goal displacement since, through the concern with completeness, bureaucrats manage to control their own speech, thus attaining the self-same lack of participation that observers attain. By evaluating records in terms of completeness, bureaucrats turn the record into an appearing thing, thus attaining a kind of presence with it.

In the conclusion, two implications of our study for further work are developed. 1. Empirical analysis must be seen not simply as a method for finding out whether theories are correct since the very idea of being empirical precludes even asking some important theoretical questions. 2. Just as record-writing can be thought of as an idea which requires grounds, the speech of social theorists can be thought of as requiring a method. A brief attempt is made to "produce" the speech of Goffman and Garfinkel.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work is just one product of ideas that have been nurtured in me by a relationship that began about ten years ago with two teachers I first met at Columbia University, Peter McHugh and Alan Blum. What is reported here is an attempt to apply to the topic at hand, records, my more or less current understanding of a sociological method which has been evolving as our relationship evolved. Peter McHugh, particularly, has been closely involved in the long process that led to the dissertation. My efforts to look at records in terms of their "idea" began with a devastating but (typically) totally honest critique he made of my first attempt to write about this topic. Since then, he has continually managed to push a sometimes reluctant student toward a deeper understanding of what he was really talking about. This work owes more to him than I can ever adequately say.

The great extent of my debt to Alan Blum will be apparent to anyone familiar with his extraordinary book, Theorizing. His influence was decisive in the approach to the problem of speech which has been taken in Chapters IV, V, and VI. I have also benefited greatly from listening to and watching the unpublished Blum. I despair of ever being able to repay both him and McHugh for the very many hours they have devoted to my education.

Although I have been thinking about records for quite a few years, the approach actually taken in the thesis was conceived the year I started lecturing at Edinburgh University. Since then, Gian Poggi has been my principal supervisor. He has made extremely perceptive comments on my work, applying an unerring critical eye to two previous drafts of the thesis. I must also thank him for taking

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PART I

THE GROUNDS OF THE ACTIVITY OF RECORDING

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

The work reported here is an attempt to formulate the nature of records and to consider the implications of their nature for the use of records in a large, modern hospital. Medical records are the specific subject of this study. The hospital studied is typical of modern hospitals in having an abundance of medical records. There are daily notes by doctors and nurses concerning the health of all patients, past and present. These make up the bulk of what hospital personnel call the "medical record." In addition, there are a plethora of records recording most of the important events in a patient's hospital career. Long notes reporting on admission and discharge are entered into the "record" by doctors. When the patient is admitted, he is supposed to have an extensive physical, which is duly described for the record as are any operations the patient may have. Pathologists, social workers, and psychiatrists enter reports of examinations. If a patient dies, that too will be described in detail for the record. If discharged patients are seen in out-patient clinics, reports on these examinations are entered as well. In this study, when we refer to records, it is these medical records which furnish most of our concrete examples. However, as the most distinctive feature of this work is not the subject matter but the way we have decided to approach it, it is necessary to say how we intend to analyze records. The discussion is meant to apply to records in general rather than specifically to medical records.

Instead of beginning with a definition of records, we shall begin with a discussion of what has been said to justify records for sociological use. As we shall try to explain, these justifications turn primarily upon an unstated notion of fact as a relation between record and event, which parallels the idea of language as a relation of words to things. Our concept of what records are will emerge

only after we have considered the idea of a record which is implicit in historical and sociological discussions of records.

Sociologists and historians use records as data which permit them to infer "what has happened." Records are, of course, the historian's major source of data. Collingwood describes history as follows:

History proceeds by the interpretation of evidence: where evidence is a collective name for things which singly are called documents and a document is a thing existing here and now, of such a kind that the historian, by thinking about it, can get answers to the questions he asks about past events.¹

Kitson-Clark writes that "... Documents in official archives are necessarily one of the main ... sources of information for the historian."² Gottschalk writes:

... The history of historians is two things: (a) a process of examining records and survivals, and, (b) a way of "writing up" or otherwise presenting the results of that examination.³

Records are used by historians to get "as close to what actually happened as we can ... from a critical examination of the best available sources."⁴

An interesting point is being asserted but not explicated in these quotations: the facts are not the records themselves, but that which the records report, which is to say there is an implicit suggestion here of some unexplicated relation between the record and the event reported by the record. Collingwood, for example, by asking us to "think about" records in order to learn about events is

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1. Collingwood, R.G., The Idea of History Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1946, pages 9-10.
 2. Kitson-Clark, G., The Critical Historian London: Heinemann, 1967, page 76.
 3. Gottschalk, Louis, Kluckholm, Clyde, and Angell, Robert, The Use of Personal Documents in History, Anthropology and Sociology Bulletin No. 53, New York: Social Science Research Council, 1945, page 8.
 4. Ibid., page 35.

proposing a relation between record and event. However, as an explication of the relation, "think about" is, of course, too vague. In thinking about records one is apparently somehow able to move from thinking about the record to thinking about what the record is "about". Although the record is in one sense a thing to be thought about it is also a special kind of thing, a thing which can be related to other things so as to be "about" them. Gottschalk, by proposing that records can get us "close to what actually happened" is proposing some such record-event relationship. The record is not what happened but can (somehow) get us near to what happened. We shall not object to Gottschalk's or Collingwood's proposals but we shall explicate the record-event relationship which they assert.

Although sociologists are less likely than historians to make use of records, many sociological studies, both classic and modern, have made extensive use of them. The original sources of Durkheim's statistical data in Suicide were presumably written records.⁵ In The Polish Peasant in Europe and America, Thomas and Znaniecki used various types of records, including but by no means only "first person" accounts. They also used court records, the records of legal aid societies, coroners' records, and the case records of a charitable organization.⁶ In the famous Hawthorne studies, Roethlisberger and Dickson relied on written records for some of their data. They offered this account of the usefulness of "daily historical records":

5. Durkheim, Emile, Suicide, London: Routledge and Kegan-Paul, 1952.
 6. Thomas, William and Znaniecki, Florian, The Polish Peasant in Europe and America, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2 vols., 1918.

This (the record) was designed to give a complete account of the daily happenings in the test room: what changes were introduced, the remarks made by operators ... the daily problems with which the investigators were concerned, and all other observations that might be of value in interpreting the output curve ... This record was invaluable in reconstructing the history of the testroom.⁷

Like historians, then, sociologists are using records in order to determine "what happened", and like historians they are therefore relying on a relationship between record and event without explicating it.

Among the many kinds of records used in more modern studies have been Navy records in an investigation of the causes of airplane accidents,⁸ plant records in an investigation of worker morale,⁹ medical records in a study of imaginary insect bites,¹⁰ and court records in an analysis of delinquency rates in the U.S.S.R.¹¹

While noting that records are but one of the many possible data sources for sociologists, methodologists often recommend that records be used in sociological research. Riley suggests that certain types

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7. Roethlisberger, T.J., and Dickson, William, Management and the Worker, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, page 27.
 8. Lodge, G.P., "Pilot Stature in Relation to Cockpit Size: A Hidden Factor in Navy Jet Air Craft Accidents", American Psychologist, 1963, 17, page 468.
 9. Hyman, H., and Katz, Daniel, "Morale in War Industries", in Newcomb, T., and Hartley, E., editors, Readings in Social Psychology, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1947, pages 437-447.
 10. Kerckhoff, Alan, Back, Curt and Miller, Norman, "Socio-Metric Patterns In Hysterical Contagion", in Sociometry, 28, no. 1, March 1965, pages 2-16.
 11. Connor, Walter D., "Juvenile Delinquency in the U.S.S.R.: Some Quantitative and Qualitative Indicators", in the American Sociological Review, April, 1970, 35, no. 2, pages 283-297. For summaries of studies which have used written records see Webb, Eugene, Campbell, Donald, et al. Unobtrusive Measures, Chicago: Rand McNally, 1966, pages 53-111.

of records make available facts which cannot be obtained by most research methods:

... Medical, psychoanalytic, or social-work case records ... may serve as "expert" records of complex human relationships and processes, affording insights not open to the lay investigator who himself attempts to gather such technical material.

Moreover:

... Available data can be used as the basis for research on interaction - and on the very type of continuing private interaction that is usually inaccessible to direct observation.¹²

Selltiz also notes some of the advantages researchers can gain by using records.

(Records) ... have a number of advantages in social research, in addition to that of economy. A major one is the fact that much information is collected periodically, thus making possible the establishment of trends over time. Another is that the gathering of information from such sources does not require the cooperation of the individuals about whom the information is being sought, as does the use of questionnaires, interviews, projective techniques and, frequently, observation.¹³

Although Riley and Selltiz are more interested in discussing the advantages involved in the use of particular kinds of records than in outlining general features of all records, more issues concerning the record-event relationship are implicit in what they say. Riley's second point assumes that a record (at least from the viewpoint of the researcher to whom it is "available") is not direct observation. She is pointing to (but not explicating) a feature of records, namely, that in looking at a record one is indirectly

12. Riley, Matilda White, Sociological Research, I, A Case Approach, New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1963, page 243.

13. Selltiz, Claire, et al., Research Methods and Social Relations, London: Methuen and Company, 1965, page 316.

looking at some other thing, in this case private interaction. But how does a record make such interaction accessible? Why is the record best seen not as a thing which is itself accessible but as a thing which makes other things accessible? Selltitz tells us that periodic collection makes it possible to establish a trend over time. Presumably the existence of more than one record (through periodic collection) is not the trend over time which Selltitz has in mind. In some unexplicated way, what is important about the recorded information is not that it is itself in time (even though it is periodically collected) but that it can tell us about other things which may form trends over time. The record, in that it permits us to "establish" things, is somehow outside time (eternal?) and yet it can tell us about other things (events?) which are in time.

Selltitz also notes that gathering information from records does not require the cooperation of the record's subjects. The absence of the need for cooperation amounts to another implicit statement concerning the record-event relationship. Cooperation is not required in that the record-event relationship is not between one speaker and another (who would have to cooperate) but between a speech (record) and what the speech is supposed to reveal (the event). The record has somehow made the subjects of the record, even if they are persons, into things which reveal themselves to readers of the record, whether the subjects like it or not. Reading records may not require co-operation but surely reading records and writing records involve some kinds of operations whose rules of procedure deserve to be specified. Selltitz and Riley do not try to explicate the characteristics of records or describe how they are produced and read. Other writers have focused on the disadvantages of records but we

shall find that they are no closer than Riley and Selltitz to a consideration of the issues we wish to discuss.

Disadvantages involved in the use of records are as common a theme in the literature as advantages. Many writers have warned of the danger of "bias" in records. In his discussion of documents, Cicourel writes:

Historical and contemporary non-scientific materials contain built-in biases and the researcher generally has no access to the setting in which they were produced; the meanings intended by the producer of a document and the cultural circumstances surrounding its assembly are not always subject to manipulation and control.¹⁴

and Douglas warns:

... the official statistics on suicide are probably biased in a number of ways ... such that the various sociological theories of suicide will be unreliably supported by these official statistics.¹⁵

Sjoberg and Nett alert us to sources of bias in the records of government officials¹⁶ and newsmen.¹⁷

Bias, of course, is not just the simple matter of outright dishonesty. As most writers on the topic see it, there are also more subtle dangers inherent in the use of records than the possibility that the records are blatantly dishonest. Even relatively honest records may present only a one-sided view of the events they purport to describe. Cochran has warned of the danger of

14. Cicourel, Aaron V., Method and Measurement in Sociology: Glencoe: The Free Press, 1964, page 143.

15. Douglas, Jack, The Social Meanings of Suicide, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967, page 191.

16. Sjoberg, Gideon and Nett, Roger, A Methodology for Social Research, New York: Harper and Row, 1968, page 163.

17. Ibid. page 164.

subscribing to records which present a sentimental version of reality:

By taking the written record that was easiest to use and most stirring from a sentimental or romantic stand-point, that is, the record of the Federal Government, the American historian prepared the way for one of the major misconceptions in American (history) ... the primary roles of the central government in our historical development.¹⁸

Goode suggests why lower class persons may be underrepresented in written records, thus leading to incomplete pictures of the past:

... So high a percentage of past populations were made up of people with odd histories. A high percentage were illiterate and in any event not important enough to figure in written records, or in the conversations of people who did write diaries, letters, and books.¹⁹

Furthermore, if one depends upon records for one's knowledge, there will be certain periods about which one cannot know anything at all:

A fortiori, the past of generations long dead, most of whom left no records or whose records, if they exist, have never been disturbed by the historians touch, is beyond recall in its entirety.²⁰

When literacy is low, not only do fewer people record their private or public thoughts, and create fewer documents ... but all documents are socially less important in such a period, and thus less likely to survive.²¹

Although there are obvious differences between discussing advantages and discussing disadvantages of records, both kinds of discussion do have at least one thing in common. In both cases, the record-event link is being assumed rather than explicated. That the many methodological difficulties just mentioned have to be

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18. Cochran, Thomas, et al., The Social Sciences in Historical Study, New York: Social Science Research Council, 1954, pages 160-161.
 19. Goode, William, "The Theory and Measurement of Family Change", in Eleanor Sheldon and Wilbert Moore, eds., Indicators of Social Change, New York: Russell Sage, 1968, page 312.
 20. Gottschalk, et al., op. cit., page 8.
 21. Goode, op.cit., page 314.

dealt with at all suggests that there is a contingent relation between any record and what the record is meant to do, namely reveal facts. Perhaps this point seems obvious, but it is odd that the standard in accordance with which the relation comes to be contingent remains both unexamined and unformulated. From Goode's, Gottschalk's, and Cochran's accounts, for example, we may gather the following: events may or may not have records; events without records cannot be known; some records of events fail to be good records. Again we have the assertion of a relationship between record and event and we have this relationship as a contingency. Still missing is an explication of what exactly the relationship is, how it has come about, and why it is a contingent relationship. Thus Goode relies on the fact that records must "survive" but does not tell us why they must. What, to take just one of many possible questions we could address to his account, is the difference between event and record such that events do not have to survive and records do? Is the record a substitute for the event, the survival of the record somehow insuring the survival of the event? Perhaps this formulation is correct but if so we have additional interesting issues to address. What kind of thing can adequately substitute for another thing given that some things (including some records) can be poor substitutes? What features of events make substitution necessary and what features of records make substitution possible? Furthermore, if some records can fail to be good substitutes, by what standard do we differentiate good from bad substitutes?

Although the two main problems with records noted by methodologists seem to be observer bias and the absence or incompleteness of records, other problems are also mentioned. Cicourel has suggested that the researcher may not be able to understand the records from other periods

or cultures.²² Webb and many others have described how the presence of a record-writer may influence the event to be recorded;²³ Phillips worries that record writers may be "too remote from the event",²⁴ and Madge that the erratic qualities of our sense organs may lead even relatively unbiased observers to perceive and attend badly.²⁵

One way to inspect the opinions of sociologists and historians about records is to distinguish between those who think records provide relatively good data and those who think records provide relatively bad data. At one extreme, Garfinkel can argue that records are almost always bad data:

Any investigator who has attempted a study with the use of clinic records, almost wherever such records are found, has his litany of troubles to recite. Moreover, hospital and clinic administrators frequently are as knowledgeable and concerned about these "shortcomings" as are the investigators themselves.²⁶

At the other extreme, Shera can state that:

The official public records of highly civilized countries probably more nearly approach perfect evidence than any other form of documentation.²⁷

In between are many methodologically inclined sociologists and historians who have discussed the dangers inherent in the use of

22. Cicourel, op. cit., pages 154-6 for a summary of his views.

23. Webb, op. cit., Passim.

24. Phillips, Bernard, Social research: strategy and tactics, New York: the Macmillan Company, 1971, page 148.

25. Madge, John, The tools of Social Science, Longmans, London, 1953, pages 120-122.

26. Garfinkel, Harold, Studies in Ethnomethodology, Englewood Cliff, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1967, page 191.

27. Shera, Jessie Houwk, Historians Books and Libraries, Cleveland: The Press of Western Reserve University, 1953, page 17.

records and, also, methods for reducing the dangers. A general theme of most discussions is that there are both advantages and disadvantages in the use of records as data. Whichever side is taken, however, the important point for us is the existence of an implicit standard to which we must refer in order to decide whether a given record or all records are factual. In other words, both sides are relying on something without explicitly talking about it. They are relying on conceptions of what makes the record good, of what makes the record factual. Therefore, we shall be discussing the logically prior issue, namely the possibility of making the claim that records are factual, whether or not that claim is rejected in any given empirical case.

The analysis will consist of an explication of the grounds or underlying ideas which make it conceivable that records could reveal facts. If the analysis is adequate, the grounds described will form the foundation both of arguments that records are factual and of arguments that records are not factual, in the same way that the grounds for seeing a killing as premeditated murder will be found in the arguments of both prosecution and defence attorneys. The very impulse to investigate the grounds of the claim that records are factual suggests that we conceive of the claim as problematic, a matter which those we have discussed themselves propose in their writing about records. The claim is problematic not because it is either true or untrue, but because, as we see it, the claim represents certain unstated ideas about records, facts, and events which are important for understanding the nature of social science, record-keeping, claims for truth, rejection of such claims, and other related matters.

Researchers who use records in their studies and methodologists who discuss problems inherent in records share a basic commitment to conceiving of records as sources of data, however inadequate, which permit inferences, albeit not certainty, about the real world. In this study, our interest is in investigating the grounds for using records as data and the implications of those grounds for the use of records within the context of a hospital. In terms of this interest most methodological discussions concerning records are inadequate because they beg our question: they presuppose the grounds which make it possible that records could be facts and investigate, instead, whether given records are facts. We would prefer to examine how the possibility of records as factual - non-factual is established. For example, Gottschalk offers rules for deciding whether records are truthful. He writes:

(1) Because reliability is, in general, inversely proportional to the time-lapse between event and recollection, the closer the document is to the event it narrates the better it is likely to be for historical purposes. (2) Because documents differ in purpose ... the more serious the author's intention to make a mere record, the more dependable his document as a historical source ... (3) Because the testimony of a schooled or experienced observer and reporter ... is generally superior to that of the untrained and casual observer and reporter, the greater the expertness of the author in the matter he is reporting, the more reliable his report.²⁸

Gottschalk also notes that "official histories must be treated with caution"²⁹ and that "... there are laws and conventions which oblige witnesses to depart from strict veracity."³⁰

Gottschalk sees these rules as principles to be followed by competent researchers. For us, the very existence of these rules generates questions. Why is reliability always a trouble in research

28. Gottschalk, op. cit., page 16.

29. Ibid., page 22.

30. Ibid., page 41.

based on records?³¹ What is the connection between records and recollection?³² What is the connection between records and events?³³ Why does the character of observers always become an issue in research using records?³⁴ What is the relationship of records to the ideal of "veracity"?³⁵

More basically, what is the nature of records such that Gottschalk and others must formulate rules about their use, and what are records such that these particular rules might seem reasonable? In other words, we neither accept nor reject Gottschalk's rules. Instead, we want to understand the grounds which make these rules seem necessary and reasonable. Reliability, for example, is associated with time for Gottschalk. What socially enforced idea of time does Gottschalk conceal ("time-lapse" is cryptic to say the least) which makes it possible to be "close" in time and which enables this kind of temporal access to be more adequate for truth than distance? We need a rendering of the standard normative order of social science which methodically selects and distinguishes truth-producing scientific recording, apparently on the basis of presence and absence.

In rule 2 above, Gottschalk asks that the authors seriously intend to make a record. The notion of seriousness here creates more problems than it solves. We can, for example, treat with suspicion any author who seriously intends to make a record, there being all sorts of bureaucratic and political records felt to be untrustworthy for this very reason. Think of the difference in this case between "he intended to make the record" in Gottschalk's sense, whatever that is, and "he deliberately set out to make that record."

31. See especially Chapter IV below.

32. See Chapter II.

33. See Chapter III.

34. See Chapters II and IV.

35. See Chapters II and V.

What do we presuppose of the serious author who intends to make a record, then, distinguished from the one who deliberately makes the one he does; and why is the one who is not serious less likely to produce a truthful record, given that Gottschalk probably wants us to be disinterested rather than politicized and the casual recorder might be the most disinterested of all?

Continuing on to the schooled observer, as distinct from the casual reporter, we might ask what Gottschalk expects from the former. Perhaps he is expert, in the sense that the historian could read the document with the understanding that it had been written with his historian's standards in mind, that it was written by someone of whom it could be said that he knew what he was doing - he is history's representative insofar as the historian/reader can ignore temporal distance through a surrogate presence.

Gottschalk admits that these rules are not hard-and-fast. Others can argue, for example, that official histories make the best records,³⁶ or that nearness to the event can lead to bias.³⁷ Therefore we can also ask: what is the nature of records such that Gottschalk's rules need not apply, such that closeness to an event can sometimes be a hindrance and official histories can be the most informative records? And, more basically, is there a rule or principle which would make necessary both Gottschalk's rules and the exceptions to them? We suspect that there is and, furthermore, that Gottschalk is relying on it in making his definite assertions about records.

All the features of records which have been listed in passing so far: that they can make good data, that they can be biased, that it

36. Shera, op. cit., page 17.

37. Dalton, Melville, "Preconceptions and Methods in Men Who Manage" in Hammond, Phillip, editor, Sociologists At Work, New York: Basic Books, 1964, page 74.

matters if they are missing, that it matters who has written them, that they make possible inferences but not certainty about the real world, are phenomena which we will subject to analysis. To treat these features as phenomena is to neither accept nor reject them. We will not deny that records can make good data or that they can be biased. Instead, we will attempt to provide the grounds which account for all of these features of records. We have already noticed, along with Gottschalk, that records can be adequate or not. Gottschalk is interested in poor records as poor history, of course, in that inadequate records become a feature of inadequate historians, that inadequate recorders become features of inadequate records that become features of inadequate historians - i.e., the collector is a feature of that which he collects. So Gottschalk must provide (tacitly) for differentiating his collecting from the problematic status which he concedes attends any historico-sociological research even when that research follows his rules. Gottschalk can formulate his own history as an instance of good history through some (unexamined) characterization of the record as requiring presence and disinterest. The observer, he tells us, must have a particular relation to time (presence) and must produce in himself a particular orientation (disinterest). But Gottschalk never questions the reason for collecting in the first place. If he did he might be able to formulate the idea which generates both the adequate and the inadequate and thus could be relieved of the stipulation that his rules are themselves inadequate to a defence of the adequate record. We shall try to find the general rules that provide for both Gottschalk's rules and the exceptions to them.

Given our commitment, we will not be able to stop with methodologists' descriptions of the features of records. Even the work of

ethnomethodologists seems inadequate to us because it, too, presupposes the grounds of the activity of recording. Blum and McHugh's description of ethnomethodology makes the relevant point in another context:

Ethnomethodology seeks to "rigorously describe" ordinary usage, and despite its significant transformation of standards for conceiving of and describing such usage, it still conducts its enquiries under the auspices of a concrete, positivistic conception of adequacy. Ethnomethodology conceives of such descriptions of usage as analytic "solutions" to their tasks, whereas our interest is in the production of the idea which makes any conception of relevant usage itself possible.³⁸

In our case, the topic or the idea under consideration is records. Although Garfinkel has described some "troubles" associated with the use of records and some "good organizational reasons" for these troubles,³⁹ he has not explicated the basic idea of records which makes these troubles with records possible. Garfinkel reports "troubles" for potential users of records, for example, missing information, ambiguous information, irrelevant information. However, like Gottschalk, Garfinkel leaves almost everything still to be explicated. Is it really so obvious how even a good record could "inform" us? What are people saying when they read a record and say that they "learned something?" Obviously, "learning something" or even "getting information" from a record is a different matter from "learning something" from a novel, but exactly what is the difference? Garfinkel mentions that good record-writers should "get the story right."⁴⁰ But what is it about record-writers and records that

38. Blum, Alan, and McHugh, Peter, "The Social Ascription of Motives" American Sociological Review, 36, February 1971, footnote, pages 98-99.

39. Garfinkel, op. cit., pages 186-207.

40. Ibid., page 195.

makes it even possible that they can be "right" or "wrong", unlike, for example, novelists who are evaluated by totally different standards? Furthermore, the easy answers to these questions are themselves questionable. If records can be "right" or "wrong" by corresponding to the world or not, how is that possible? How can one thing (a record) correspond to another thing (a world)?

Record-writing must depend on some kind of interesting segregating procedure by which two things, a record and the "world" are first, differentiated from each other and, then, related to each other so as to make the one, ideally, "about" the other. But how can one thing be about another? Again, we are back to the idea that records are a special kind of thing i.e., words, but surely the word-thing relationship exemplified in records needs to be formulated in more detail than just saying it is "troublesome". After all, even novels are "about things" in some sense, so again, what is the difference between a record and a novel? The obvious answer, that records are about the real world whereas novels are about other kinds of things, would not get us too far. If we did try this route toward an answer, surely we would have to provide an adequate formulation of this "real world" which records are differentiated from and then related to in such a way as to produce an "about" or "correspondence" relationship.

There is another problem with Garfinkel's formulation of record-keeping besides the fact that it leaves so many interesting issues unexplicated. Perhaps because he does not see anything worth talking about in the "obvious" features of records we are going to examine, in order to have news, Garfinkel is forced to exaggerate. In the

quotation which we reported earlier, Garfinkel stated that all investigators find records inadequate. Obviously, though, some persons do not have trouble with records. For Garfinkel these cases are so uninteresting that he chooses to ignore them. However, in terms of the questions we raised about records, those who succeed in using records are as interesting as anyone else. In succeeding they must have solved all the problems we have already raised. For example, they must have somehow been able to see one thing, (a record) as both different from and corresponding to another thing, (the world). More generally, they must have used some normative order to decide that a given record or all records are "good".

In a way, Garfinkel is like Gottschalk in that his description does not cover all the cases. The troublesome character of records is a possibility but not a necessity. Therefore, to describe records as troublesome, as Garfinkel does, is not to make much progress towards a formulation of the nature of the idea of records. Again, if Garfinkel would address and attempt to formulate the basic conception which allows records to be seen as fact, he might be able to provide both for those who find records troublesome and for those who do not. Both groups presumably have in common some implicit and unexplicated notion of what constitutes a good record. It is this underlying idea that we shall try to get at.

In the whole discussion so far, the fact that there is only a contingent relationship between record and event makes reference to the exigency that what a record records (i.e. the "original" material, the event) is, strictly speaking, unknowable, and so the adequacy of any record is problematic. Certainty is impossible, the only sure thing being that the record exists. We know definitely that there is a record but not whether it is adequate or not. What conception

orients us to this version of records and thus also provides for the rules of thumb and practical problems we have reviewed?

Although formulating in detail the underlying conception of a record is the major task ahead of us, we can offer some preliminary remarks now. The best record is one that is a photo-copy of the event. The record is not supposed to be an independent thing but merely a reflection (copy) of another thing. The record repeats the event but is not supposed to be, in any important sense, itself an event. To understand how a record could be a copy, we must understand how "fact" (rather than fantasy, humour, etc.) can be seen in the document - how the record can be a possible copy of that which is external to it. Seeing fact-in-a-document requires distinguishing between document and event as a matter of boundaries, limits, the outside (what the record reports) and the inside (the record, the word.) The record and its events stand in a relation of asymmetric externality and independence:

(1) The events are not seen as produced by the record, but the record is seen as produced by the events.

(2) The events can occur and remain unrecorded, but the record cannot occur without the events.

In social science an event which goes unrecorded is thought to be real but not to be communal property. The event needs to become socialized - it needs a name, and until it becomes socialized, it has no status as a fact. Having been socialized, it is made accessible as a possible topic. The relation of events to records is a relation of exterior, constraining things to words, which generates the possibility of attention by the social scientist according to his conception of socialized fact. This is why social fact is at the deepest level socialized fact.

By the same token, these relations establish matters of evidence as well as topic. If there is no event corresponding to a record, the record has no author(ity); it lacks status as a namer of anything. The rules of thumb on training and observing which we have reviewed address how we may see fact in a document as a matter of preserving this relation of asymmetric direction between event and word. Gottschalk's description of the recorder amounts to a description of the way the record should be made. That the recorder should be disinterested can now be seen to mean that he should be interested only in that it happened. That is, the record should be a product, not of his interest but of the event. Gottschalk's "serious" author intending to make a "mere" record must be an author who is willing to let the event make the record. That the record is merely a record means that the record (or recorder) has not produced the event. A "mere" record, then, is one that has been produced by nothing but the event it purports to record. The observer's presence in time when the event happens, his "closeness" to the event must be a device for insuring that the event will produce a record, i.e. that someone will be able to let his speech amount to nothing but a product of the event, thereby supplying science with a fact to which it can attend.

The way a record is prepared and organized provides for our conception of a photo-copy by detaching the thing (event) from the word (record) in such a way as to make the link of asymmetric direction transparent. The various problems with records (the potential absence of an event corresponding to the record, the failure of an observer to be present, the overinvolvement of a recorder in his record, etc.) stem from a version of fact as contingent upon the segregation of thing and word. Our problem will be to explicate the rationality of the idea which makes the record possible, the idea that the event but not the word should produce the record.

Chapter II

OBSERVATION AND RECORDS

In Chapter I we noted that words must be segregated from and then made dependent on events if the idea of a record is to be made intelligible. The notion of a record requires that the word can be thought of, not as an event, but as "about" events. Chapter II continues this examination of records by considering how it is possible and why it is rational to bring about the word-thing relationship exemplified in the record. We approach these topics through a consideration of the action necessary to produce a record. Medical records are produced by persons who are supposed to be engaged in the activity which might be called observation.¹ We might feel inclined to say, then, that the factual status of records is established by the fact that they are produced by observers. Although our records are produced by observers, merely to stipulate this point is to say nothing about the factual status of records because whatever it is that would comprise the action of an adequate observer remains to be specified. If one can produce a good record by being a good observer, then our topics must become what it is to be a good observer, and why, by being a good observer, one can produce records.

What is the link between records and observation? The record must be a particular kind of speech. It must not exist merely as itself (as speech). It must exist as a reflection of its topic, i.e. as a reflection of events. The question is: how can one go about producing this kind of speech? We shall note that one can produce such speech by being an observer. In the literature the question of what an observer is (and how, if at all, he can be said to be speaking) is, like the question of what a record is, not really answered.

1. "Observation" is being used in a broad sense which we specify at some length below.

Selltiz's description of observation can serve as an example:

We are all constantly observing - noticing what is going on around us. We look out the window in the morning to see whether the sun is shining or whether it is raining, and make our decision about carrying an umbrella accordingly. If we are driving, we look to see whether the traffic light is red or green ... There is no need to multiply examples; as long as we are awake, we are almost constantly engaged in observation. It is our basic method of getting information about the world around us.²

We agree with Selltiz that multiplying examples will not help, but have the examples which she does give really helped either? Is not her problem that all she can do is give examples? That this quotation does not permit us to understand what is distinctive to the activity of observation can be seen if we try to consider the proffered "definition". We are supposedly observing when we notice. Would Selltiz want to say, then, that everything we notice is an observation? If we notice that Selltiz has produced an inadequate definition, is that an observation? Perhaps it is, but then should we not wonder why Selltiz did not notice that herself? Do some of us, then, observe (notice?) better than others? If so, is it only the good observer who notices or are we to say instead that we all notice different things? If we take this tack, what are we to do with the Selltiz notion that what we notice is what is going on around us? Are different things going on around all of us and do their differences depend on us? Maybe Selltiz would want to distinguish what is going on from what we only think is going on. Would she say that thinking is not noticing? What is the difference between noticing and thinking you notice? Moving on to the window example, Selltiz seems to want to distinguish looking and seeing. What is this

2. Selltiz, Clair et al., Research Methods in Social Relations, London: Methuen and Co., 1965, page 200.

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distinction getting at? Sometimes, it seems, we can look without seeing. Does noticing involve both of these activities or only one? Are there other ways of seeing besides looking? If there are, should we classify these as observation? With regard to Selltitz's version of what we see when we look, "what is going on" and, later, "the world around us" are singularly uninformative phrases. Exactly what is going on around observers? One thing? Many things? What kinds of things?

We ask all of these questions, not to immediately answer them, but to suggest the need for a fresh investigation of what the action of adequate observation might amount to. Our suggestion is that it amounts to producing the kind of speech exemplified in the idea of a record. Does this mean that Selltitz is wrong to identify observing with noticing? Is observing a kind of speaking rather than a kind of noticing? Or is the noticing Selltitz refers to perhaps her (vague) way of referring to the kind of speech observers are supposed to make. Maybe observers say something by putting into words what they have noticed. On the other hand, one can presumably say something without having noticed anything. We are back to the idea that records are, and observers make, a particular kind of speech. Do they make such speech by noticing what is going on? If so, we shall have to try to describe what it is to notice and what it is that is "going on".

-1-

At the heart of all of these issues is the question of what an observer is. Let us begin with a discussion of what is meant by the activity of observing. To be an observer is to be present, to "be there". Being there can be conceived, albeit vaguely, as being in

the presence of whatever one is claiming to observe. If one is not present, if one is not "there" in the present, then whatever one is doing one is not observing. However, although the observer must be concretely present, he is not supposed to make a difference. The contact of observation must be direct and unidirectional in that the contact flows from event to observer, so that the record can be direct and unencumbered by the observer's opinions. The observer must be disciplined and watch over any impulse to participate and thus contaminate the unidirectional flow. The reader of any record can believe he is reading a record if he can also believe the record is a reproduction of such unidirectional contact.

Observing can be distinguished from activities as diverse as theorizing, reminiscing, and expecting. For one thing, the latter do not require one to be present with the object of one's theorizing, reminiscing, or expecting. For another, these activities may actually thwart observation:

Expectation or anticipation frequently leads a witness astray. Those who count on revolutionaries to be blood-thirsty and conservatives to be gentlemen ... usually find bloodthirsty revolutionaries and gentlemanly conservatives.³

It is perhaps obvious that Gottschalk fails to come to grips with his own version of observation here. Suppose, as Gottschalk recommends, one does not anticipate. Does one then not find bloodthirsty revolutionaries and how is this not itself a result of lack of anticipation? How is the negative of anticipation different in principle from anticipating and then finding what one has anticipated? Apparently what Gottschalk thinks is important is that the observer should not do something, in this case expect or anticipate. By not

3. Gottschalk, op. cit., page 42.

doing these things one is somehow able to avoid being led astray. The observer, although he must be present, is being asked to negate himself in some interesting but unspecified ways. He is not to expect or anticipate and somehow what he does not do is going to make him into an adequate witness. Is there a positive version of what the observer should do available to someone, if not to Gottschalk, or is Gottschalk's emphasis on what observers should not do perhaps his (vague) way of saying that the action of observation is essentially negative, the action of observation requires not having an effect. Observers must be there and yet they are not supposed to make their presence felt.

Methodologists concerned with the problem of observation generally presuppose the simple fact that observing requires presence, and ignore the idea that while the observer must be present, so must he be absent insofar as he is not to participate in that with which he is to be present. The issue surfaces in the literature on participant observation and the argument of whether it should be overt or covert. That it should be covert suggests that the observer gets in the way of the record by having joined as a co-speaker what would otherwise be a univocal event. That it may have to be overt suggests that observation nevertheless must be a certain kind of presence, namely a presence which organizes itself to be in a position when the event reveals itself. Finally, that he must at least be covertly present and not away at his home reaffirms that presence is essential. Dalton, for example, never questions this requirement but stresses possible effects:

(The observer's) presence may disturb the very situation he is seeking to freeze for study ...⁴

Weick:

Observers are perceptible as well as perceptive. They are usually present in any observational situation. Whether this presence alters the course of a natural event is the concern of every person who uses observational methodology.⁵

Note that we are given the same peculiar concern here. On the one hand, we are to be physically present; on the other, we are not to make a difference. We are to be present in the one sense, yet absent in the other.

The link between presence and the ability to observe can be seen in the plotting which novelists must go through in order to put their narrators at the scene of an incident. Hawthorne, for example, puts Roger Coverdale, the narrator of The Blithedale Romance, at a hotel window, in a treehouse, and behind a tombstone in order that he can be present at scenes about which Hawthorne wants his reader informed.⁶ In moving Coverdale into strange locations, Hawthorne is relying on the two ideas that narrators cannot observe unless they are present but also cannot be effective observers if their presence imposes itself on the events.

Such machinations in order to maintain a presence which will not make a difference are not limited to first person narrators. It is a commonplace that social scientists engage in similar procedures:

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4. Dalton, op.cit., page 74. See also Geer, Blanche, "First Days in the Field", in Hammond, op. cit., page 326.
 5. Weick, Carl, "Systematic Observational Methods", in Lindzey, Gardner and Aronson, Elliot, Editors, The Handbook of Social Psychology, Reading Mass: Addison-Wesley, volume 2, 1968, page 369.
 6. Hawthorne, Nathaniel, The Blithedale Romance, complete works, volume 5, London, Kegan-Paul, undated.

In attempts to disguise the fact that observation is taking place, observers have hidden under beds in college dormitories, eavesdropped on conversations in theatre lobbies and along streets and posed as radio interviewers.⁷

Most medical records depend for their adequacy on the implicit claim of the record-writer to have "been there". If we could imagine some reader challenging the following nurse's note by asking how the nurse knows these facts, the emphatic answer would be that she knows these facts because she observed them - because she was "there".

12:30 a.m. patient has no special rate, no respiration noted. Dr. Jones notified and responded immediately. Patient pronounced expired 12:45 a.m. Family visits. No consent for post mortem obtained.

Noting the exact time of events, a common technique in medical records, whatever other functions it may have, certainly serves to support the implicit claim that the nurse was "there". At the same time, the nurse's having been there is not to be seen as the point of the record. If we read this note as a record, it is not the fact of the nurse's speech, not the existence of the nurse, to which we are meant to attend. The speech and the nurse are mere vehicles for the transmission of the real object of interest: the things she speaks "about". The record is the event to the extent that we see the nurse's speech as not making any difference. The nurse qua speaker should cease to matter since her speech is supposed to amount to nothing but a representation of other things (the patient's death, the doctor's response, the post mortem, etc.) The thingness of her speech and the thereness of the nurse cease to matter if she succeeds in denying the fact of her speech by making her speech totally dependent on something other than itself, in this case, the events.

7. Weick, op.cit., page 373. See also the book by Campbell and Webb, op. cit.

In the following psychiatric record, both the use of quotations and the reference to the author's (nurse's) involvement in the events help to establish the writer's presence at the reported events:

... (The patient) approached Mr. Wagner and asked if he wanted to be "smacked on the behind. One shot will get you out. Why marry and ruin some girl's life, anyway?" Reluctant to talk when nurse (the record-writer) tried to engage him in conversation on his feelings.

Although the record-writer does, in a sense, enter this record, she enters it not through her speech but as another object which her speech can disclose. The writer becomes "the nurse", merely another thing to be spoken about rather than the participant who made the speech. Again speech has been subjugated by being made the servant of its subject, the subject in this case happening to include the record-writer.

This example helps to clarify how what sociologists refer to as participant observation does not necessarily threaten the basic idea of observation. The observer can participate as long as he is able to treat his participation as merely another thing to be spoken about. Like the nurse, then, the participant observer makes himself into one of his topics but also like the nurse he still succeeds in observing if he can treat his speech not as a fact in its own right but as dependent on what it is about, i.e. its subject, which in this case happens to include himself. More obviously, although both nurse and participant observer can participate in the sense that they can be part of the scene which they describe, neither is supposed to impose himself on the event. Usually their participation is limited to "drawing out" what is thought to be there already. Thus in the record just quoted we are to focus on the patient's reluctance. That is the "fact" the record brings to us rather than, e.g. the fact that the nurse

talked to the patient. Again we have the nurse's presence not as making a difference but merely as prod to help bring out what is really there, in this case the patient's reluctance.

Just as record-writers can claim to know the facts because they were present when they occurred, they can claim not to know the facts because they were physically absent. There are, of course, parts of the medical record which describe events which have occurred when the record-writer was not there. For example, all charts must include a "history" of the events leading up to the illness for which the patient has been hospitalized. Obviously, doctors who take histories have not been present at these events. When items of this sort are included in the record, record-writers will be careful to note that what is reported is mere hearsay. They cannot certify the accuracy of the information in the record precisely because they were not "present" when the events happened. A description of a patient's "complaint" reads, "Patient states that she took overdose of seconal", reminding the reader that only the patient's version of what happened is being reported. In this case, the writer is clearly denying that she can know what happened, because she was not there.⁸ More precisely, when recording "hearsay", record-writers are continuing to follow observers' principles. The difference between "hearsay" and other events is that in "hearsay" what the record-writer can know (as observer) is not what happened but what the patient says has happened.—The event

8. In the following anecdote told by Whyte, Doc can be seen as making the same point. He can know what happened because he was present while Whyte cannot know because he was absent: "(The) full awareness of the nature of my study stimulated Doc to look for and point out to me the sorts of observations that I was interested in. Often when I picked him up at the flat where he lived with his sister and brother-in-law he said to me 'Bill, you should have been around last night. You would have been interested in this.' And then he would go on to tell me what had happened." Whyte, William, F., Street Corner Society, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955, page 301.

with which the record-writer is present is the patient's speech. This speech is treated in the same way any other event is treated, that is, it is treated as a thing to be disclosed by treating one's own speech as mere vehicle for the disclosure of what the record is really "about", in this case the patient's speech. Although hearsay is usually formulated as information at second remove, really it is (as the word implies) information at first hand, but about what someone has said. Of course, given an interest in the "original" event, the problem represented by hearsay is that there have been twice as many chances for the observer's rule to be violated, twice as many chances for speakers to fail to control their speech so as to let the event speak through them.

Since records are written by observers and observing depends upon presence, record-writers leave gaps for the periods when they cannot be with patients:

Patient out on day-pass, due to return 11:00 p.m. Didn't.

4:00 p.m. has not returned. 7:00 p.m. still not back from pass.

Patient went to the operating room and returns back to the floor.

These writers are not being good reporters in that they are leaving out crucial (yet according to the observer, only opinionated and not knowledgeable) information such as what happened while the patients were away from the hospital or in the operating room. They are, however, being good observers by showing their ignorance about events from which they are absent.

The connection of observing to presence suggests a very simple, albeit partial, explanation for the abundance of records in complex organizations in modern society.⁹ It may not be sufficient to our

9. On the growth of record-keeping systems, see Wheeler, Stanton, "Problems and Issues in Record-Keeping", in Wheeler, editor, On Record, New York: Russel Sage Foundation, pages 10-11.

understanding of records to say that organizations require rational, efficient, and objective observations and therefore require employees to be present in order to make the observations.¹⁰ Perhaps organizations require employees to produce observations in order to motivate employees to be present at events they would otherwise avoid. Thus, there are two ways to account for the fact that all hospital nurses must write one record every day for every patient. The hospital needs daily records, but also the fact that they must write a daily record forces nurses to see patients they might otherwise miss.¹¹

We shall return here to the observer's dilemma with regard to his concurrent presence and absence if he is to be able to record. The observer is to be there but he is not to participate. He is to speak but not to make the fact of his speech the point of his speech. What are we to make of this peculiar and on the face of it contradictory set of actions and omissions? A record is made by one who is present in time (the observer). Somehow the observer's presence enables the record and, through the connection noted in Chapter I, the event as well, to last or become eternal. The event becomes known insofar as there is a record of it. How is the presence of a record made to equal the presence of knowledge? If the event appears to a present observer, it can become knowledge if the observer can deny that the record is an achievement of his participation in the event. That

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10. Weber has made the classic statement of this position. See Weber, Max, From Max Weber, editor, Gerth, H.H. and Mills, C.W., London: Routledge and Kegan-Paul, 1948, page 197. See also Blau, Peter, The Dynamics of Bureaucracy, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963, pages 36-55.
11. In other words, forcing nurses to be present is a "latent function" of records. See Merton, R.K. Social Theory and Social Structure, Glencoe, The Free Press, 1957, pages 60-64.

is, an observer needs to be present but is not supposed to have participated in the creation of the event if the record is to be treated as knowledge. Recorders, then, are observers of spectacle; they are present but do not participate. In this sense they are an absent presence. The achievement of the observer is the achievement of absence through presence. The responsible observer is one who can make what he observes responsible for what he records.

What is eternal about records, as in the notion of an archive, is achieved by the process of divorcing the record from its maker. If the record is devoid of any contamination arising from the observer's participation, then record users can know the event through the record because, since the record has not been affected by the observer, it becomes unnecessary to understand the observer in order to understand the record. The record speaks for itself. If an observer is present then he can know about a present event. That the observer is no longer present and that the event is a thing of the past can be irrelevant since, through the record, the observer has become irrelevant.

To observe, then, is to be a spectator. To be a spectator is to show the capacity to record. The spectator, if he can be said to participate at all, participates not as co-speaker with the event, but as passive observer of the thing which is the event, identical with the things which are the words of the report. Through the segregation of the observer from the record, the record is made to stand by itself. Analytically speaking, the observer might as well not be there, and we have formulated how he is not there. In this analytic regard there is no essential difference between the observer who presents himself as such and the one who observes in secret, since the achievement of the admitted observer is that he is not there at all, whatever the

actual circumstances in which he makes the record. Kaplan has remarked that "observation means that special care is being taken: the root meaning of the word is not just to 'see', but to watch over."¹² We are arguing that the observer must take special care to avoid intruding on and hence affecting the event. "Watching over", then, is not to watch over the event in the sense that one must control its production, but merely to watch it given the negation of participation by the self. What is "watched over" is the self, so that the self can be said to be indifferent to the watched event in order that appearances can show themselves as events. What "makes the record" is the event and not the observer. Making a record is at most noting the appearance. In this way the most important activity of the observer is not to make the record but to make ready so that the event can make the record - to be ready so that the event can present itself. The observer makes ready by segregating his speech (the record) from him-self (that he makes the record).

Presence, then, should be used by the observer as a method for permitting the indifferent recording of spectacle. The observer's indifference - the fact that he does not make a difference to the event - is what makes the event eternal, always present, and not subject to further transformation. The observer can adequately record the appearance of things by watching over any impulse to join them. What he watches over is the continued segregation of speech from speaker which simultaneously neutralizes the speech and socializes the event.

12. Kaplan, Abraham, The Conduct of Inquiry, San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Company, 1964, page 127.

The permanent presence of the event through its record is achieved by the obliteration of that which could make a difference to the event. What could make a difference is a co-speaker. The co-speaker is obliterated by having the event speak alone through the record. The absence of a participant factualizes the event as a record and thus makes the event eternal. The event is permanently present if, through the denial of the effects of his participation, the recorder has managed to make a record which amounts to nothing but the original event. The observer makes a record by making himself into nothing. As the observer becomes irrelevant, the event becomes permanently present.

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Thus far we have described observing as an activity which achieves absence through presence as its way of obtaining knowledge. Let us now attempt to establish the possibility of this accepted link between observing and knowledge. Our question is: how must knowledge be conceived in order that the idea of presence could be a means of obtaining that knowledge? We must attempt to formulate the conception of knowledge which makes the idea of an observer possible and necessary as a means to obtain that knowledge.

The observer can be described as solving the problem of knowledge by being there, by presence. The solution embodied in the observer is just one possible solution to the problem of knowledge, however. It is a solution which makes observing (presence) reasonable, but it is only a solution to a particular and differentiated version of the problem of knowledge.

Our question now is: for what version of the problem of knowledge could presence, could the observers kind of being there, be a solution?

To answer this question is to characterize the particular conception of the problem of knowledge which is presupposed in the idea of observing. When the problem of knowledge is constrained by a certain conception of time and place, then the idea of an observer, of presence, could be a solution to the problem of knowledge. Our task is to explicate the conception of time and place which makes an observer necessary.

TIME¹³

By thinking of himself historically (as a being in time) man makes the relationship between self and knowledge into a contingency. Man is not knowledge (since he is finite). Man is he who can do the knowing. The distinction between self and knowledge makes man's ability to know into only a possibility, thus laying the basis for a distinction between knowledge (what is known) and opinion (what man only thinks he knows). We shall be concerned only with one particular way of differentiating knowledge and opinion. The form of the distinction with which we are concerned is achieved by detaching the self from the world and treating the self's speech as only problematically connected to the world which that speech is "about". The contingency of knowledge resides here in various possible relations between speaker and world. The practical question of knowing becomes: how to assure the kind of relation that would produce knowledge rather than opinion? Given the problematic status of the relationship between speech and world, one answer to the problem is to treat speech as true speech only if speech and world are "together" i.e., only if the speech can be segregated from the man (the speaker) and given to the

13. We shall begin this section with a very brief review of ideas which have given rise to the version of time corresponding to the development of observation. It is certainly not our intention to do this exhaustively, nor to consider alternatives.

world. By transfer, as it were, the world is made to speak for itself, because it is made devoid of participation by the man who would raise anew the very problem of knowledge which this particular relation is meant to solve. In effect, the observer is generated by making him speechless, a witness to a world which testifies for itself.

What is known is thus what is witnessed as the world's speech. What is known is the witness's transcription of the world's speech. What is known is limited to the circumscribed and local coalescence of the event and observer. With regard to time, local coalescence is achieved through co-presence of world and witness. Time is itself conceived to both enable and inhibit a relation of local co-presence which determines that which can be known and that which cannot. The future cannot be known and the past cannot be known but the present can be, and thus the problem of knowledge is reasserted as the twin barriers of past and future. Given the problem of knowledge, an observer constituted by presence solves the problem in this domain by, again, localizing the relation between self and world (here, that part of the world that passes by). The fact of his presence shows that he recognizes his version of the problem of knowledge i.e., his presence suggests that he recognizes that neither the future nor the past can be known but the present can.

Riley states that:

The method (observation) is applicable to action taking place only in the present. It obviously cannot be used to refer to periods prior to the inception of the research.¹⁴

14. Riley, op.cit., page 187.

However, to state that observing is "inapplicable" to past and future fails to preserve the action of observers as they achieve their relation to the present. It is not that observing is "inapplicable" to the past and future but that the idea of observing (presence) expresses the basic conception that neither the past nor the future can be known and only the present can be. An observer's whole reason for existence depends upon the idea that only the present can be known.

If observing is grounded in the idea that only the present can be known, record-writers, insofar as they are acting as observers, should express ignorance about both the past and the future. Thus writers who refer to the future tend to be uncertain about it as if what they write is only an opinion and thus defeasible;

He is to be discharged in A.M. if all goes well.

If he remains relatively calm through the weekend he will go home free.

Waiting for results of lung scan. —

Even when the future is a medical certainty, record-writers qua observers will express doubt. Even when their "medical" opinion is that patients will certainly die, record-writers will write that:

Patient looks moribund and is bleeding uncontrollably from two puncture sites.

Prognosis extremely poor. —

Condition is very poor.

Insofar as they are acting as observers, medical record-writers will also be uncertain about the past:

Had possible seizure after which was found in bed with burning mattress. Question of smoking in bed. (My emphasis)

The nurse can be certain about the event she observes (the burning

mattress), but she can only guess about what may have occurred earlier (a seizure, smoking in bed).¹⁵

It must be stressed that we are grounding¹⁶ the role of observer and not making factual statements about the past, the present, the future. Obviously, it would be absurd to suggest that the past can never be known since historians, archeologists, geologists and others are gaining knowledge about the past all the time. Similarly, to argue that the future cannot be known would rule out both the scientific activity of predicting and the common sense activity of expecting. It is also absurd to state definitely that the present can be known, since, about many current events, we will be clearer tomorrow than we are today. We are not suggesting how past, present, and future must universally be seen; we are suggesting how observers must see the past, the present, and the future for their activity i.e., presence, to make sense. Ours is a formulation of a formulation necessary to make the activity of observation intelligible. Thus, we are not saying that the past cannot be known. We are saying that insofar as one believes that the past can be known one thereby eliminates the necessity for observing that past when it was present.

When a historian can write that:

The intellectual fascination which underlies the form of history is the desire to understand the meaning of what has happened in former times.¹⁷

he is defining himself as other than an observer precisely by treating

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15. There is an awkwardness in the formulation here due to the fact that the analysis is incomplete. As will be explained in Section 4 of this chapter, the observer can, in a sense, know the past. He can know the past if he was present when it was the present.
 16. To say that we are "grounding" the role of the observer is to say that we are using the method described in Chapter I: we are explicating the underlying ideas which make the observer possible.
 17. Huizinga, Johan, "A Definition of the Concept of History", in Klibansky, Raymond, and Paton, H.H., editors, Philosophy and History, Essays presented to Ernst Cassirer, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936, page 5.

the past as knowable without his having been there. Insofar as archeologists, geologists, or psychiatrists can treat the present as permitting inferences about the past, they can make it unnecessary that they be present in the past in order to know it i.e., they can make it unnecessary that they be observers of that past when it was present.

Similarly, insofar as one can claim to know the future, whether by prediction, prophecy, or expectation, one eliminates the need to observe that future when it becomes present; one is eliminating the need to "wait and see". Waiting and seeing i.e., observing, is only necessary when the future can be treated as unknowable.¹⁸

Finally, the notion that the present can be known is not a general principle; it is an observer's principle. If one treats the present as unknowable as, for example, skeptical philosophers do, one can thereby make it seem unreasonable to observe the present.¹⁹

Place

Just as observing is grounded in a particular conception of time, it is also grounded in a particular conception of place. The observer's rule for overcoming place as a barrier to knowledge is again to transfer responsibility for the speech to the world by making the relationship between the speech and the world into a local relation: only places at which one is present can be known.²⁰ One can know a place, as an observer, only by being there. Just as observers can know only the present, so can they know only places at which they have been present.

18. Hence record-writers in the hospital studied tend to write less about patients when their conditions are "stable". See Chapter III.

19. For the classic statement see Descartes, René, Discourse on Method, and Meditation, New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, especially pages 75-81. Descartes is an interesting example of a man who believes he can know without observing.

20. Observers can also know places to which they have been. See Section 4.

Again it should be stressed that to conceive of place as a barrier to knowledge which can be overcome by presence is not the only possible conception of place. Jaded travellers and other cynics think all places are basically the same and that, therefore, it is unnecessary to go to the place to know it. Physicists can formulate laws which are independent of place and social scientists can posit cultural universals. Common sense actors do not always assume that they do not know a place because they have not been there. Thus even "newcomers" can have expectations.

The point is not some factual assertion that only places to which one has gone can be known. The point is that insofar as one is committed to the activity of observing, one can only achieve an observation through the grammar of suspended judgment about places at which one has not been.²¹

In ordinary usage, we consider the two meanings of "present" with which we have been concerned to be distinct. We distinguish being here in time (the present) and being here in space (presence). However, the observer inhabits both spheres at once, being present in time and in space in order to extract the world's testimony through witness. The concept of presence is meant to capture the fact that observers stand in the same relation to time and to place as a way of achieving the local relation of coalescence which enables them to know. Presence is identical with the world-as-speaker, with knowledge. The observer's reason for being present in time is the same as his reason for being present in space, namely to subjugate his speech, which would only be opinion, to the discipline of participant self-denial. Whatever

21. Observers who believe in "sampling" can be seen as limiting their commitment to observation precisely by arguing that some other places can be understood without one's having been there.

is foreign about space and time - however they are barriers to knowledge - is concealed from himself by the observer in his refusal to speak of them.

-4-

In this chapter, our task is to address the grounds for seeing records as facts or truth. Although observing has been discussed more directly than recording, in an important sense the task of grounding records has already been at least partially accomplished.²² For we shall next show how an analysis of observing is also an analysis of recording, since the activity of observing entails the activity of recording. We shall discuss two questions: (1) Why an observer can make a record (2) Why records are necessary at all. Neither question is adequately discussed in the literature. Selltiz furnishes an example of how the record-observer link is usually formulated. Selltiz states that "in recording unstructured observation, two questions require consideration: When should the observer make notes? How should notes be kept."²³ To ask these questions is to treat our questions as already answered. That an observer should take notes presupposes, of course, that an observer can take notes. Observers can take notes only because they can do the kind of action we have explicated in this chapter. That is, essential to the activity of taking notes in Selltiz's sense is the activity of taking note in an observer's sense. Observers can take the kind of notes we presume Selltiz would want them to take only in so far as they can take note. Taking note is another

22. We say partially because some of the points made in the next chapter serve to further deepen the analysis.

23. Selltiz, et al., op. cit., page 210.

word for the action of observation: treating one's speech not as a fact in its own right, not as participation, but as a product of events. Notes, then, are nothing but a written down version of the action engaged in by the competent observer. Observation amounts to taking note not because concrete observers take notes but because being an observer amounts to making a particular kind of speech. In being an observer one is not, as we have said, participating through one's speech. The speech one makes through observing amounts to listening, to hearing from things what to say about them. Thus, the speech an observer makes amounts to taking note - not contributing to things but merely attending to what is already there. Our analysis of observation is also an analysis of recording in the sense that a record is nothing but an observer's version of speech - speech which does not make a difference but merely notes whatever is there to be seen.

In the following quotation, we can see how Selltiz conceals the analytic identity between observation and the kind of speech observers make (taking note):

The best time for recording is undoubtedly on the spot and during the event. This results in a minimum of selective bias and distortion through memory. There are many situations, however, in which note-taking on the spot is not feasible, because it would disturb the naturalness of the situation or arouse the suspicions of the persons observed ... Constant note-taking may interfere with the quality of observation. The observer may easily lose relevant aspects of the situation if he divides his attention between observing and writing.²⁴

To say that there are "many situations in which note-taking on the spot is not feasible" is to obscure the fact that to observe is

24. Selltiz, op. cit., page 210.

to take note. The observer may not write it down on the spot but that he does not is not to say that he has not taken note in the sense of listened to what the event has to say. Indeed, he can only "decide" between writing it down now and later because, having assimilated the event through observation, what he would say later can be the same as what he would say now since in both cases it is the permanent, unchanging event which his speech is supposed to reveal. Selltitz worries that the observer's memory may fail him but this worry covers over the more basic point that the observer has some thing to remember. He only has some thing to remember because he has succeeded in making ready so that a thing could reveal itself to him. That "constant note-taking may interfere with observation" and that the observer may "divide his attention between observing and writing" make it sound as if observing and writing are two different activities. Concretely they are, of course, but, analytically, what the observer writes is circumscribed by what he has observed. What he should write has been determined for him by what has happened. Basically, what he should write has already been said since it is the event which tells him what to say about it.

The next question we want to raise is why observers must speak at all - why a record is necessary. Given the analysis just completed, to observe is to make the recorder's kind of speech. Our question now is why observing takes the form of taking note. We shall argue that observing, to make sense, must always result in some kind of a record. Whether the record takes the form of writings, tape recording, pictures, or memories is irrelevant at the present level of abstraction. Whereas methodologists emphasize the differences between written records and memories, the former supposedly doing the job better than the latter, we have already suggested how they both

are different ways to do the same thing (take note) and we shall suggest how they both have the same justification. The observer seems to produce a kind of product, a set of notes or his "memories" and it is these that constitute the knowledge he has obtained. In most discussions about observation it is simply assumed that observing requires recording. Selltitz, as quoted above, by focusing on when and how to take notes, certainly does not ask why notes are necessary in the first place. Similarly, although Cicourel notes that "the group's activities may not permit recording of events until a considerable time between observation and recording has elapsed",²⁵ he does not investigate why observers record. We shall ask what there is about observing such that recording (or remembering) is necessary.

The usual answer to this question will not be acceptable to us. The usual answer is that observers must take notes or keep records because their memories are fallible. As Simon puts this position:

(Observing) ... requires immediate and detailed reporting whenever possible. Anthropologists try to record their field notes every day, to minimize the chance that their memories will play tricks on them. Police officers are also trained to take on-the-spot notes, to prevent bias and inaccuracy from creeping in ...²⁶

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25. Cicourel, op.cit., page 45. See also Powdermaker, Hortense, Hollywood The Dream Factory, London: Secker and Warburg, 1951, pages 5 and 6.
26. Simon, Julian, Basic Research Methods in Social Science, New York, Random House, 1969, page 88. See also Vidich, Arthur, J., "Participant Observation and the Collection and Interpretation of Data", American Journal of Sociology, volume LX, January 1955, page 360. For an argument in favour of non-human recorders, see Jaffe, Joseph and Feldstein, Stanley, Rhythms of Dialogue, New York: Academic Press, 1970, especially page 3.

The common-place view that records are necessary because observers, being human, tend to forget, begs our question. It is only noteworthy that observers tend to forget because observers are supposed to remember. It is the need for remembering which makes the observer's forgetfulness into a problem and also makes notes necessary as a way of overcoming the problem. Therefore, the burden of our analysis will be to show why observers must remember as a way of depicting why a record (or a memory) is necessary for one to claim he has adequately observed. Simon's attempt to explain the need for records is based on a physical fact.²⁷ He thinks he can explain the need for records by citing an obvious fact about memories, i.e. that they "play tricks." However, while the physical fact may tell us why memories fail, it does not tell us why memories are necessary in the first place. We shall suggest that it is not physical facts but the grounds of the activity of observing, as they have already been formulated, which make remembering necessary and, therefore, make necessary devices for remembering such as records and memories.

Why does observing always require some kind of a record? It has already been suggested that to observe is to be able to know the present but not the past or future. Now it must be noted that there is an obvious defect in the knowledge of the observer, as he has been defined to this point. The observer can know only the present. The defect in the knowledge of the observer so defined has to do with the obvious fact that the present becomes the past. Because the present becomes the past, the observer stands to lose every last bit of knowledge that he ever gained, since, when the present becomes the past, he should, qua observer, cease to know it.

27. For a good summary of physiological literature on memory, see John, Roy, E., Mechanisms of Memory, New York, Academic Press, 1967.

Given that observing requires presence, it is possible that the observer's knowledge will become ephemeral, that he will never be able to accumulate knowledge. It must be stressed that the fact that observers can lose all of their knowledge is not a physiological given but a consequence of the socially organized identity of observing itself. Forgetting becomes possible because of the various stipulations concerning the problem of knowledge and its solution, as mentioned above, which create the possibility of observation as an intelligible activity: first, time is passing (the present is becoming the past), and second, observers can know only the present. Thus, unless observing is to result in only the most transient kind of knowledge, some device is required for freezing the observed present before it becomes the foreign past. It is as a service to the longevity of the present that records fit into our analysis. The record overcomes the pastness of what was once present by converting the present into the permanent. Records are made necessary by the basic idea that only the present can be known.

Many writers have stated that records are characterized by permanence. For example, Wheeler writes: "... (records) have a permanence lacking in informal communication."²⁸ Weick writes:

If an observer obtains a record of a natural event ... he ... has a permanent picture of what occurred ...²⁹

We are noting more than the permanence of records however. We are now in a position to understand why observers want a "permanent picture": to record is to make the present into the permanent, to make the present remain, and making the present remain becomes necessary when

28. Wheeler, op. cit., page 5.

29. Weick, op. cit., page 411.

one believes, as observers do, that when the present becomes the past it can no longer be known.

The record thus makes the present permanent and eternalizes the event. The event speaks forever through the record, the record being identical with the event. Just as the problematic relation of knower to known is overcome by the witnessed but univocal speech of the event, so do we continue to subdue any co-participation, and therefore any doubt, by externalizing this self-same event in the transcription which is the record.³⁰ That we are not to co-participate with the event in making the record is of course a nearly perfect example of depersonalization. We can see, however, that the kind of depersonalization represented by the record, i.e. the idea that the observer should render himself speechless, is not bureaucratic miscarriage, but bureaucratic necessity according to this very bureaucratic version of knowledge. Analytically speaking, the recorded past is the present so depersonalization is necessary if the very claim to know anything but the present moment is to be possible.³¹

We have described an observer's kind of speech (taking note) and we have tried to show why he must make this kind of speech. However, it should be clear that the kind of speech an observer is supposed to make is very different from the opinions his whole activity is supposed to overcome. The observer's speech (record) does not make a difference to the event. It does not change it. Rather, it eternalizes it.

30. This is perhaps the deep ground of those who would characterize bureaucracy as depersonalized. Insofar as bureaucracy is a record-keeping organization, the record will have to be kept clear of contamination, given that bureaucracy is among the most pointed modern cases of organizations abiding by the distinction between knowledge and opinion.

31. The relationship between bureaucracy and record-keeping is discussed in more detail in Chapters IV and V.

The observer, through his speech, has not produced the event, he has preserved it. If his speech does finally make a difference to the event it is not so much what his speech does to the event. It is what his speech does for the event. Unlike the event, the speech lasts but what lasts as long as the speech lasts is not (in any important sense) the speech but the event the speech is serving.

A note on Memory

This idea of records provides a more complete formulation of the observer's relation to past and future.³² It is not enough to say that the observer cannot know the past. He cannot know it qua past, certainly, but he can know it in the form of the "formerly present" (and, for the future, the "will be present").³³

We are offering here a special formulation of the very mundane fact that observers can know the past if they were present when it was the present.³⁴ One can remember for the record. Just as it is not enough to say the observer cannot know the past, neither is it enough to say the record is only something material like a past sentence or photograph done simultaneously with the event. The event speaks through the observer, and so any speech, so long as it can be determined that the speech is the event's speech, can make a record. Given the grounds discussed above, those committed to observation would not ask whether a memory could be a record any more than they would ask whether observation could be knowledge. Rather, the

32. See footnote 15.

33. See Heidegger, Martin, An Introduction to Metaphysics, New York, Anchor Books, 1961, page 172.

34. And the future if they will be present when it becomes the present.

question of memory is technical and specific to particular instances: is this memory contaminated by participation extraneous to the event's own speech (forgetfulness, desire, the intrusion of exterior events, etc.)? Thus, record-writers can write about the past as long as they were present when it was the present, because we can continue to assume that it is the event which is speaking:

I first saw the patient in November, 1967, for heartburn and constipation.

Wife visited in a.m. Made comfortable.

Ambulated length of hall with assistance.

Refused a.m. care. Seen by Dr. Saver.

Although the writers of these notes know the past, they do not know it qua past. They can know the past because they knew it when it was the present and by observing and recording it they convert it into the permanent.

Chapter III

RECORDS AND EVENTS

In Chapter II it was emphasized that the observer-recorder's kind of presence becomes reasonable and even necessary only within a particular conception of time and place. When this viewpoint is developed, it has important practical implications: the simple fact that records must be produced by "being there" predetermines certain characteristics of records and, even, of the world. We cannot accept the view that records are merely a passive and mechanical reproduction of "what has happened". If it can be said that the observer is passive, then we have tried to indicate in Chapters I and II the very rigorous kind of work which is necessary to the achievement of this passivity. Nor can we accept the view that records are a biased representation of "what has happened". The bias of records - if it is anything - is surely not a description of what records are but a description of one thing that can happen to some (or all) of them, a happening which itself remains unexplicated and unprovided for until records are provided for. Both views are subject to the same criticism: they accept as given what records are "about" - the world, events, what has happened - and then try to formulate how records stand in relation to that given. By contrast we suggest that when records are seen in terms of the grounds which make them possible, it is no longer adequate to state that records reflect, whether accurately or inaccurately, the givens of the real world, because the real world itself comes to be shaped by the very idea of recording it.

When the grounds of recording are examined, the "real" world ceases to be a given. Rather, the grounds which make it seem reasonable to write records determine in advance both the characteristics of actual records and of the "real world" as it will appear to record-writers. It is not that records record things but that the very idea of recording determines in advance how things will have to appear.

A record is a way of giving evidence, and a way of giving evidence is to record what one witnesses. Consequently, insofar as the "real world" is constituted by and through its record, it is simultaneously constituted by and through the enforced conceptions of adequate evidence as witnessable evidence which create and limit the activity of observation.

This notion, that the grounds of the activity of recording determine the nature of records and the way record-writers will see things, is a difficult idea to grasp and to communicate.¹ In order to help the reader with the argument, we shall try first to distinguish our viewpoint from another to which it bears superficial similarity. Many authors have suggested that record-writers (and historians) must decide which facts are worth recording or interpreting. For example, Weick writes:

No recording system in current use provides an exact reproduction of an event, yet the fact that editing occurs is not always realized.²

Schutz writes, concerning the historian's task:

The science of history has the momentous task of deciding which events, actions, and communicative acts to select for the interpretation and reconstruction of "history" from the total social reality of the past.³

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1. A very simple version of this argument was presented in Section 4 of the last chapter when we tried to show how the "permanence" of records was a characteristic made necessary by the basic grounds of record-writers.
 2. Weick, op. cit., page 408.
 3. Schutz, Alfred, Collected Papers, II, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964, page 61.



Carr makes a similar point:

The historian is necessarily selective. The belief in a hard core of historical facts existing objectively and independently of the historian is a preposterous fallacy ...⁴

According to these writers, the key problem which historians and observers face is "selectivity". Observers must decide which facts to "select" from the myriad of "actual" facts.

Since selectivity is essentially a notion which depends upon treating the real world as a given, i.e. as that from which the observer must select, the problem with the idea is that it does not go far enough. It does not go far enough because that from which this or that is selected remains unexamined and thus the self-same world which provides for its extractability remains unexamined as well. For example, that selection is even possible requires among other things a version of the world as a witnessable world. The recorder, then, does not simply select. Rather, he relies on grounds. These grounds offer up the possibility of selection. Selection, then, can not be formulated as simply a problem observers face since the very fact that observers can select constitutes an affirmation that observers are confronting a world of potentially observable and recordable things. We shall show that it is not just that the observer must "select" certain facts and leave out others. Rather, the grounds of the record-writer will force him to see all facts, both those he selects and those he omits as having a certain form since his grounds presuppose a particular concept of factuality. In other words, we cannot accept the view that record-writers are in a situation of looking at "the" world and selecting parts of it. Rather, what their world consists of is determined by their grounds. It is these

4. Carr, Edward H. What is History?, London: MacMillan, 1961, page 6. For a view closer to my own, see Collingwood, op. cit. esp. pages 20-21 where he briefly makes the argument that history presupposes a particular version of the nature of things.

grounds which determine, for example, that the world permits a mining operation which does not contaminate the unextracted remainder left in the world. Mining or selecting does not make a difference; it leaves the world as it was. We note again the scaffold of observation as a support for non-participation, leaving the world observed yet unchanged by the fact that it has been observed and, furthermore, leaving the recorded event recorded yet unchanged by the fact that it has been recorded. In this sense the event is the record, the record the event. The observer is the recorder and the event is the record. The record is "pure", i.e. its shape is identical with the shape of the event. Unless the world can be thought of as sets of events which can be extracted and yet not affected by the extraction process, the record can not equal the event. Thus, the very idea of seeing the world as divisible into events, the very notion of "events", is made necessary by the grounds of the activity of recording.

Teggart, on the other hand, makes a clear distinction between records and events:

The historian concerns himself, on the one hand, with documents, and, on the other, with happenings or events which have taken place in the past ...⁵

Similarly, Cicourel distinguishes "natural occurrences" from information about them:

Our task is similar to that of constructing a computer that would reduce the information obtainable by means of the perspectives of differently situated video tapes, so that the information (or parts of it) could be retrieved while maintaining the fidelity of the original natural occurrence.⁶

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5. Teggart, Frederick J. Theory and Processes of History, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1960, page 11.
 6. Cicourel, The Social Organization of Juvenile Justice, New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1968, page 6.

Teggart, Cicourel, and others⁷ emphasize the distinction between records and events recorded as a technical matter and would seem to be attempting to reduce the technical disparity in such a way as to affirm the analytic equivalence between record and event. We shall investigate the connection between the idea of making a record and the idea of an event, a happening, an occurrence, the connection which produces their technical distinction. We shall attempt to show that the possibility that a record could represent the world or part of it and therefore the possibility that records could be grounded as we grounded them in Chapter II, depends on formulating the world as made up of witnessable events, of happenings, of occurrences to which observers can testify. From the viewpoint of the record-writer, it is not just that he must report accurately or even select from events in the world. Rather, the possibility and necessity of his writing a record at all depends on his seeing the world as a set of witnessable and extractable events.

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7. See, for example, Nagel, Ernest, "The Logic of Historical Analysis", in Meyerhoff, Hans, ed. The Philosophy of History in Our Time, New York: Anchor Books, 1959, page 207. Two interesting linguistic analyses of narratives also rest on a distinction between the report of the event and the event. See Sacks, Harvey, "On the Analyzability of Stories by Children", in Gumperz, John and Hymes, Dell, eds., Directions in Sociolinguistics, New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1972, esp. page 330. Labov, William and Waletzky, Joshua, "Narrative Analysis; Oral Versions of Personal Experience", in Essays on the Verbal and Visual Arts, Proceedings of the 1966 Spring Meeting, American Ethnological Society, Seattle: University of Washington Press. Our approach to the record-event relationship is differentiated from Labov's below.

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We have said records can be conceived as solutions to the problem of knowledge when the problem takes the form: only the present can be known. Now we take the analysis a step further by grounding this view. How must the world be constituted in order that one could know the present but not the past or future, this place but not other places?

Firstly, the observer's conceptions of time and place imply a conception of things as transient: if what is now need not remain, then the present would be more accessible to an observer than the past or future. Similarly, when what is here need not be there one might be able to have knowledge of this place but not other places. Although these formulations of the observer's version of things are not nearly complete they already begin to show that the observer's versions of time and place rest on or are implicitly views about the nature of things. In other words, the observer's idea of time and place becomes possible when things can be pictured as coming to be and ceasing to be,⁸ and passing between here and there. The notion that only the present can be known rests on the basic formulation that what is here need not be there and what is now need not remain.

This is said not to confirm the cliché that "... the world and everything in it is historical ...",⁹ but to launch an examination of how that statement fits with the activity of observation. We have no intention of affirming a factual statement about "the" world.

8. Collingwood, op. cit., page 20.

9. Alexander, S., "The Historicity of Things", in Klibansky and Paton, op. cit., page 11.

The view of the world which is characteristic of the observer, i.e. the view that only the present can be known, becomes possible when witnessably extractable things are pictured as being transient and having spatial limitations. By obviating the possibility of omniscience (through his notion that only the present can be known), the observer creates a problem as to what he can know, since he cannot, according to his auspices, know all. The observer's work is thus to organize what is extractable and then to bear witness. Omniscience is renounced when the knower is localized in the historicized person and knowledge is localized in historicized time and space. This local character of knowledge as knower and known creates the possibility of mere opinion (as that which reflects the historicized person rather than the nature of things), and so establishes also the possibility of observation as a means of coming to terms with the local by extracting through witness. The historicization of knowing grounds the observer as a potential failure (to know). The achievement of adequate observation, hence knowledge, is accomplished by identifying that which is not local (other times, other places) and then extracting from the world that which is local (the present, here).

It has been suggested that the observer's conception that only the present is knowable becomes possible when (1) knowledge is segregated from opinion, and concurrently (2) knowledge is localized. Together they formulate the standard that what is here need not be there and what is now need not remain. However, the historicization of things is not enough to provide for knowledge of the present since while it may suggest why the observer cannot know absent things, it does not indicate why he can know present things. In addition we have been relying on a common sense, unexplicated version of the

present as what an observer can know without defining what an observer's notion of the present is. A deeper formulation is now available: it is not just because what is here need not be there and what is now need not remain that observers can know only the present. More profoundly, the observer's conception of the present is determined by his conception of "what is", by his conception of events as "things" with an incorrigibly independent life. Observation, then, presupposes a particular version of things, namely that things have the quality of appearing or showing themselves to those who are present and bear witness when the things appear. It is this quality of things which makes it possible for observers to see them and, in turn, makes possible the observer's version of knowledge: that only the present can be known and that he can know it only by being there. We can now improve on the formulation offered in Chapter II by noting how it is elliptical to state that observers can know only the present. Observation presupposes a particular way of defining the present, namely not as a moment in time but as a kind of thing - a thing which is presenting itself (to an observer).

If we really do have a deeper version of the observer's version of the present now, we should expect that it will describe what observers do better than the version that observers can know the present in the sense of the present moment.

When record-writers, in the role of observers, can claim to know "the present", they are not referring to a particular point on some abstract continuum of time:

Hiccups stop - no evidence of continued significant gastrointestinal bleeding. Will be available if needed. Condition stable at present.

Mrs. Sacks is feeling well, she has multiple neurotic complaints, none of which have any bearing on her condition at the present time.

Patient was sitting in a chair at this time.

Patient continues sleeping unless disturbed.
Less restless now than previously.

In these notes, what can be known is determined by what is showing itself, not by what is current at the moment. In the first note, for example, a claim to know that the hiccoughs have stopped and that there is no bleeding would depend on the claim that these things are not showing themselves. What is appearing is no bleeding and so he who would let things tell him what to say about them, i.e. the observer, can claim there is no "evidence" of bleeding. That is, what constitutes evidence, what is evident to observer, is what discloses itself to him without the need for him to participate except through his presence. The present, in the sense that it is evident to the observer, is not the moment, but the appearing, self-revealing thing. Although these notes do, of course, make use of chronological expressions ("at present", "at the present time", "at this time", "now") observers have surely not decided that it is "the present instant" or "now" by looking at a clock and determining that time is passing. Rather, divisions between now and later, past and future, in so far as these divisions differentiate what an observer can know from what he cannot, must be determined by determining what is happening to things. It does not become "later" for an observer just because a moment passes. As proof of this point, it is not the case that another note becomes necessary when a moment passes. In note four, for example, "previously" presumably refers not to the previous moment in a clock sense but to a time when some other thing (a restless condition) was presenting itself. For

an observer, the present in the sense in which he can claim to know it is that time in which some thing is continuing to disclose itself. It becomes possible for record-writers to know the present, to have a version of "now", because some thing (the stable condition, the act of sitting, the ability to sleep) is available to be seen by those who would only present themselves.

If the observer conceives of the present not as an instant on the clock, but as the time in which some thing is remaining, it becomes clear why observers can know only the present. They can know only the present because, to them, the present means that which is presenting itself to them. That is, an observer's commitment to the present does not imply a scepticism about "the next instant". Rather it implies a commitment to the "appearance" of things as events which present themselves for observation.

Unlike clock time, there can be no uniformity in the observer's conception of time. If observers define "the present" by determining whether the thing is remaining, then, depending on how long things are remaining, the present expands and contracts. Thus, in the following note in which many things are "happening" there are, as it were, many "nows":

Self A.M. care. Out of bed and walking around unit most of day. Disagreeable to all procedures which had to be done. Good appetite at breakfast. At eleven o'clock complains of chills and shaking - did not appear to be severe - would not stay in bed or keep blankets on. Medication given. Refused lunch.

12:30 a.m. patient moaning very loudly and bringing up vomitus.

1:00 a.m. patient continues to vomit.

1:15 a.m. Doctor rushed to see patient ...

1:30 a.m. Patient catheterized 30 cc. for concentrated urine.

Just as the present time is, for an observer, the time during which some thing remains, the present place is the place in which

some thing is remaining. Places "belong to the thing itself".¹⁰
 For the observer, place is not a continuum on which are found all conceivable locations. In other words, place is not space. Rather, the observer experiences a different place wherever he experiences a different thing.

The observer's idea of place has been described by Heidegger. What he refers to as the Greek idea of place seems to us to be the observer's concept of place:

That wherein some thing becomes, refers to what we (moderns) call "space." The Greeks had no word for "space." This is no accident; for they experienced the spatial on the basis not of extension but of place; they experienced it as chora which signifies ... that which is occupied by what stands there. The place belongs to the thing itself. Each of all the various things has its place.¹¹

For an observer to move from one place to another is not merely a matter of his changing spatial co-ordinates, any more than moving from one time to another is a change of chronology. It involves moving from the presence of one thing to the presence of another since, given his conception of place, only things can have places.

Now we can understand more clearly how an observer's kind of presence is possible. Being present is possible because "the present", in both time and place is not an abstractly defined set of co-ordinates. Rather, the present is an appearing thing. As such, the concrete kind of presence with it required of observers becomes intelligible. Furthermore, we can now provide for Gottschalk's

10. Heidegger, op. cit., page 54.

11. Ibid. page 54. The idea that, for observers, places belong to things, is not unfamiliar to sociologists. The notion that observation occurs in a "setting" is the same idea. See Weick, op. cit., pages 366-369.

idea of "closeness" in time, which puzzled us in Chapter I. One can be close to a time when a time takes the form of an event which is appearing. The record testifies to the witnessing of this appearing and extractable thing.

We can also be clearer now about how the observer's kind of passivity is possible. The observer need not participate or speak since the event is, as it were, doing all the work for him. Since the event is thought to show itself, the observer's job becomes to do, in effect, nothing, so as to let the event show itself. The observer need not speak and so need not expose himself to the contingency of opinion because there is nothing that needs to be disclosed through speech. There is nothing to be disclosed because the relevant thing (events) is disclosing itself. The minimal role left for speech is to remember what has been disclosed after it disappears. Again, speech in the form of records serves not to sustain participation but to sustain non-participation by allowing us to remain silent even in the face of the absent by converting the absent into the permanently present (records). The speech may be different from the event in that it remains but, analytically, what remains as long as the speech remains is the event. So although speech may be different, what makes the difference is not the speech but the event which makes the speech (record) possible.

We must, of course, redraw the boundaries of an observer's knowledge in terms of this version of the present as that which is presenting itself. First there is the possibility of clarifying how an observer stands in relation to knowledge of the present. His claim that he can know the present must now be taken to mean that he knows about the current. Knowing things by observation is

not a matter of whether the things are current or not. It is a matter of whether the things are presenting themselves or not. In the following notes record-writers can express ignorance about the chronological present for the simple reason that the chronological present is not showing what it is:

The clinical picture is far from clear.
Pleurisy? Pericostitis? Myocardial
infarction?

Chest clear-epigastic tenderness?

The RAI uptake has been done. Results?

Prosthesis: Unable to obtain info. Patient in coma.

Some aspects of the chronological present remain unclear to these observers: the clinical picture, whether there is epigastic tenderness, what the test results are, and whether the patient has prosthesis. However to argue from these examples to the conclusion that observers cannot know the present is to misunderstand the observer's version of the present. Even in these notes what can be known remains that which is presenting or disclosing itself. In the first note, the observer lets himself be governed by the clinical picture. Since the picture that presents itself is unclear, so is the observer. He will not venture beyond what is presenting itself and so his ignorance affirms rather than denies the observer's rule that only what is present can be known. In all of these notes, the writers continue to follow the observer's rule by letting their speech (record) be guided by the transparent, appearing thing. The observer will speak about that which appears and refuse to speak about that which does not appear. As expressions of knowledge are licensed by the appearance of things so expressions of ignorance (questions, doubt) are licensed by the absence of such an appearance.

It has just been suggested that aspects of the chronological present cannot be known by observers if they do not show themselves. Correlatively, the chronological past and the chronological future are potentially knowable by observation if they present themselves. Signs, remnants and, we might add, records, are things which, although they may be from the chronological past or future, are within an observer's grasp if they show themselves. It is of course perfectly true that a sign or a remnant may lead an observer to incorrectly interpret the future or the past but it is also true that appearances can be deceiving in the chronological present so the possibility of being wrong does not seem to furnish us with a principle which would allow us to limit observers to the chronological present. What seems to be true in all time periods is that observers are supposed to limit themselves to what is showing itself rather than to make of the thing "more" than is there. In the light of this point that observers are not restricted to the chronological present, we can add an additional criticism to the one made earlier concerning Riley's statement that observing is inapplicable to action taking place in the past. It is not just that "inapplicable" is too weak a word. Now we can see that her view is possibly wrong unless she specifies clearly that by the past she means that which is no longer appearing.

Having shown how the idea that what an observer can know is that which presents itself serves to deepen the idea that observers can know the present, we want next to depict the "news" contained in the idea that observers can know about things which present themselves by contrasting it with more familiar views. Our point is that most accounts of what an observer can know fail to formulate the "what" at all. We have already quoted Selltitz's vague idea that observers notice "what is going on around them". Richardson is equally

vague when he writes: "... observers watch, count, listen to and even smell objects or phenomena as they take place."¹² He has no version of what the "objects" or "phenomena" are. It is not just that observers watch phenomena but that the very idea of watching presupposes a particular version of exactly what a phenomenon is: A phenomenon is a thing which reveals itself to he who would only make ready. If all that is required of the observer is making ready so as to let the thing disclose itself, Richardson's grounds for linking watching, listening, counting, and even smelling become clear. If a phenomenon discloses itself, then "seeing" it amounts to merely being able to receive what it gives off. If the purpose is to be such a receptacle, watching, listening, and even smelling would seem to be different ways to do the same job. What all these human faculties have in common is that they are ways of being there without treating one's own being there as anything but a way of taking what is already there. Finally although counting could be formulated as a kind of speaking, it is not so much a contribution to events as a way of disclosing properties already there. In counting, what does not count (what is no-thing) is he who makes the count. Hence Richardson is right to connect counting with observing. In counting, as in observing, the fact of one's own speech is not supposed to count.

As a second example of sociological vagueness about the observer's phenomena, let us consider Goode's characterization of what an observer can know as what is "out there".¹³ He gives no

12. Richardson, Stephen et al., Interviewing London: Basic Books, 1965, page 9.

13. Goode, William, Explorations in Social Theory, New York: Oxford University Press, 1973, page 10.

formulation of the "what" that is "out there" nor of why this "what" is located "out there". What discloses itself is "out there" in the sense that the observer knows, not by participating with the world (i.e. by being a part of it), but by differentiating self and world in order to treat world as that which can be known and self as that which can do the knowing. The observer accomplishes this differentiation by treating his own speech not as part of the world (out there) but as that which will reflect, as mere product, his contact with the world. For such unidirectional contact between speech and world to be possible, the world must be formulated as that which presents itself and the speech as that which merely captures (records) the presentation. To say the world is "out there", then, amounts to an implicit characterization of the action of observation. The world is out there to an observer because the observer constitutes himself by refusing to participate, by refusing to treat his own speech as part of the world. The refusal is possible by formulating the world, not as including one's participation through speech, but as that which will be disclosed through speech.

Both Goode and Richardson fail to describe what an observer can know because terms like "out there", and "phenomenon" are devoid of content until what observers might mean by these terms is explicated. Instead of saying that an observer can see only what is "there", we say that what an observer conceives of as "there" is determined by his grounds. What is there is what discloses itself without any participation on his part. Unless what an observer can see is explicated and formulated then saying that an observer is limited to what is there or to phenomena amounts to saying that an observer can see what he can see. Of course he can, but the intellectual task is to describe what it is that

observers can see and not just to repeat tautologically that they can see what they can see. Our point is most emphatically not, then, the banal one that observers can see what is visible. We are not just asserting that observers are limited to the visible. Rather we are trying to characterize exactly what is visible to an observer. What can an observer see? It is not just that he can see what is visible but that what is visible to him is anything which is thought to reveal itself.

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The vital connection between the idea of an observer and the idea that things will disclose what must be said about them, can be illustrated more forcefully by looking at the connection in terms of the records which are an observer's products. The common conception is that records correspond to the world or that records make selections from the world. Our conception, on the other hand, is that it becomes possible for a record to correspond to the world only when "the world" is formulated as itself revealing the things which must be said about it. This is not to say that the world does disclose itself. Rather: insofar as one can formulate the world as made up of things which present or fail to present themselves, it thereby becomes possible for a record to "represent" the world. It is neither correct or incorrect, then, to treat records as corresponding to the world. The proper statement of the relationship of records to the world is that, in so far as one wants to see records as corresponding to the world, one must treat the world as revealing or presenting what must be said about it.

The first point is the most basic: the rule for deciding what can be said in the record is that what can be said must be limited

to what is thought to disclose itself. The way the observer denies the contribution of his own speech is by treating his speech as made necessary by "what has happened", by what is "revealed to him". Interestingly, this is not to say that what is revealed to an observer is necessarily the "physical" aspect of things. The "physical", exactly like the "mental" may or may not present itself and it is whether some thing presents itself rather than whether some thing is "physical" which determines whether an observer can see it. We are definitely not saying that observers can see only a particular kind of things, e.g. "physical" things. Rather, the point is that observers are restricted to seeing all things in terms of what those things reveal themselves to be. That is, if the "mental" is thought to disclose itself, then it is just as suitable a topic, then it is just as much within an observer's province as the "physical". Observers do not restrict themselves to the "physical". They restrict themselves to the look or appearance of anything (physical, mental, etc.) which is to say they restrict themselves to saying about anything only what that thing makes it necessary for them to say.

Those who think observers are limited to "physical" things¹⁴ might think that these records are observation:

Patient looks more alert and speaks in sentences like "put it on the table."

Patient looks well - still has copious purulent drainage from drain site.

Ankles appeared swollen.

14. The view that observers are limited to physical things is expressed as follows by Sjoberg and Nett:

... just what do social scientists observe? They observe physical behaviour, such as walking, waving of arms, facial expressions, and patterned sounds, and the results of physical behavior, such as writing or tools.

Sjoberg and Nett., op. cit., page 33. See also pages 160-161.

whereas these may seem like "inference":

Patient concerned about forthcoming surgery;
about need for private duty nurses.

Comfortable.

Seemed in good spirits.

She tries to be helpful to nurses.

More goal directed than yesterday.

Patient very upset about being in hospital during holiday.

Those who support the formulation that observers are limited to "physical" things could, of course, produce a description of these data which would be consistent with their viewpoint. Presumably they would argue that the second set of examples show that actual record-writers are not "just" observers. That is, in these records actual record-writers are engaging in two processes: making inferences as well as observations. Note, though, that the data provide no particular support for this view. There is no evidence that the record-writers are more uncertain in the second set of examples than they are in the first. If it is considered noteworthy that the patient only "seems" to be in good spirits, why is it not equally noteworthy that the ankles only "appear" to be swollen? Why say that record-writers are inferring in the second set of cases but observing in the first? We say that all of these records are identical in that the observers are letting themselves be guided by what they take to be revealing itself. In all cases, the record-writer's own speech is supposedly produced by what his subject is telling him to say. Of course it is correct that in the first set of cases the topic is physical things, whereas in the second set the topic is mental things. However in both cases the observer writes about a topic by letting his speech be guided by what the thing (ankles on the one hand, spirits on the other) shows itself to be. Observers

are not restricted to any one kind of thing. They are restricted to the treatment of all kinds of things as nothing but what those things reveal themselves to be.

Besides the basic issue of what can legitimately be said in a record, other aspects of records are illuminated by the idea that a record reports what discloses itself.

(1) The world must be formulated as telling one what must be said about it for short notes to be able to "represent" long periods of time:

11:00 - 7:00 Slept well.

11-7:30 medication given for sleep. Appears to have slept.

7:00-3:30 Had shower. Out of bed walking.

3:00-11:30 continues to improve.

The concept of events makes it possible to treat these records, short as they are, as complete. A phrase like "slept well" or "had shower" could represent an entire day if to represent a day means, not to report every second of the day, but to record what happened. Even a short record can be complete if completeness is defined as depending not on the definitiveness of the record but as depending on the simple contingency of whether anything has happened. Thus, by seeing the world as events and making speech depend on events one has made it possible to say enough without, for example, saying enough to satisfy an audience or solve a problem. Satisfying an audience or solving a problem is incidental in the kind of speech that records exemplify since one's only standard for what one has to say is what events permit one to say.

(2) Because it is the events which speak, it is even possible for a record to say nothing and yet be adequate. A record-writer

can have nothing to say and yet produce an adequate record because it is not he who is thought to be responsible for what is said. What is said is the responsibility of the events and so if nothing happens, then that very absence of anything can be a topic of the record:

3:00-11:30 no complaints offered.

11:00-7:00 nothing unusual.

7:00-3:30 Mrs. S. has been quiet all day. Did not verbalize any concerns.

If the world is that which happens and fails to happen and if the observer himself is not thought to be something, it becomes possible to see nothing. Nothing is possible when something is some thing which presents or discloses itself. While it might be said that there is always something in the record, namely the record itself, to make such a point is to forget that from an observer's viewpoint his own speech (record) is supposed to amount to nothing since it is supposed to merely reflect things (or the absence of things) external to itself. Here we have a partial formulation of how it is possible for the social scientists mentioned in Chapter I to find records troublesome. Records can be troublesome because they can give no information and, in turn, they can give no information partly because they are themselves formulated not as information in their own right but as about other things. One version of why our study does not find records troublesome is that instead of treating them as information about other and potentially absent things like events, we treat them as themselves the thing to be studied.

(3) Finally, we shall differentiate our account of the record-event link from that given by Labov and Waletzky in their analysis of narratives. They define a narrative as a "method of recapitulating past experiences by matching of the verbal sequence of clauses to the

sequence of events which actually occurred."¹⁵ They might say that the following note is a narrative because it "recapitulates experience in the same order as the original events:"¹⁶

Patient had cardiac arrest. Immediate cardio-pulmonary resuscitative measures instituted but failed to revive the patient. Patient pronounced dead at 10:56 P.M. on 9/28/69.

By making the important issue whether the clauses of the account have the same time order as the original events, they presuppose too much. How can a set of sentences have a time order, for example? Perhaps they would say this is possible because the sentences refer back to the events, but exactly what does that mean? They must describe how one thing (a sentence) can refer back to (recapitulate) another thing (events). This is the issue we focus on. A narrative is possible in so far as things (events) are thought to disclose themselves. Therefore, speech can be thought of not as adding something but as repeating what is there. Speech can repeat a thing if a speech need not be thought of as itself a thing but can be "about" other things. This view of speech is accomplished by ridding speech of any contribution except the contribution of making a record. The sameness of narrative and event is not adequately described as a matching of order of sentences in the report to order of events. The narrative is the same as the event in the more fundamental sense that it is the event, since the narrative is supposed to be nothing but a disclosure of what has already happened. Events are "original" not just in Labov and Waletzky's narrow sense that they happened first but in the sense that events are thought to originate, that is, produce, the speech about them, thus making the happening that is speech not itself original but a repeat.

15. Labov and Waletzky, op. cit., page 20.

16. Ibid. page 21.

In the final section of this chapter, we shall note an implication of the connection between events and observation. The grounds of observing and recording, as we have formulated them, make it necessary that observers see only one thing at a time. Using the grounds of the activity of recording, we shall attempt to account for the "one at a time" character of observation. Of course, the notion that observers cannot see two things at once has been available for some time in psychologically oriented discussions of "attention". Boring writes:

... There really is a fundamental fact of attention. The fact of attention is that consciousness is limited. Attention to one "thing" requires inattention to others. If you are paying attention to the old lady in the pew in front of you, presumably you are not paying attention to the sermon.¹⁷

Vernon writes:

It seems possible that we cannot attend to two events happening at one and the same moment, and perceive both of them clearly. Thus it was found that it was impossible to take in two pieces of information presented simultaneously, one visually and the other aurally ... unless the two events can be combined in some way, one must be overlooked.¹⁸

Usually, to explain why observers can see only one thing at a time, the psychologists resort to physiological facts. Thus, Boring believes that:

At a given moment a person can think of so much and no more because he has just so much brain with which to do the thinking ...¹⁹

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17. Boring, Edwin, The Physical Dimensions of Consciousness, New York: The Century Company, 1933, page 194.
 18. Vernon, Magdalen, "Perception, Attention, and Consciousness", in Bahan, Paul, ed., Attention, Princeton: Van Nostrand, 1966, pages 38-39.
 19. Boring, op. cit., page 198.

As Sanders describes it, the single-channel theory states:

... that while processing one signal, one is blocked for others.²⁰

Unlike the psychologists, we will not rest our argument that the observer can see only one thing at a time on physiological grounds. Rather, the key question for us to examine is how the observer's knowledge organizes his attention: 1) what is an observer's conception of a thing? 2) What is an observer's conception of "at a time"?

Answers to these questions were implicit in our previous discussion. An observer conceives of a thing as an event. Psychologists who try to account for "one at a time" while using the furniture of material objects as their "things", are missing the essential point that, for an observer, these objects are not things.²¹ Rather, events are things. If an event and not just an ordinary object is, for an observer, a thing, then the question of the possibility of "one at a time" becomes transformed. It is no longer a question of the observer's physiological ability to hold two objects in focus at once. It is a question of whether, given the socially organized nature of events and observers, this nature would enable one observer to see two events at once.

To decide this issue, we must move to a second question: what is an observer's conception of "at once"? As was suggested in Section 1, an observer's idea of "at once" is not determined by looking at a clock or map. An observer decides that it is "now" rather than later

20.. Sanders, A.F., Attention and Performance, Amsterdam North-Holland Publishing Company, 1967, page 3.

21. See Boring, op. cit., page 195.

because some thing is continuing to "happen". He decides that it is "later" when some other thing begins to happen.²² In other words, an observer's idea of what time it is, is dependent on his idea of what is happening. He will see the time as the present, as now, as long as he continues to see one thing happen. When he sees another thing happen, he will see the time as "later". Thus it is inconceivable that an observer can see two things at once not because of physiological limitation but because the observer's idea of "at once" requires that he see only one thing. Whenever he sees two things, he will also see two times since, for him, the idea of two times requires the fact of two things. For an observer, the idea of two things at one time is analytically inconceivable.

It should be noted that we are not saying, as do Gestalt and other psychologists, that observers tend to unify their diverse perceptions.²³ It is not a matter of perception at all. We are saying that whatever observers see as one thing they will also see as one time. One at a time is not necessary for observation as a consequence of the simultaneous perception of wholes in parts;—the necessity of one at a time resides instead in the identity of one thing with one time.

Exactly the same point can be made with regard to place. The observer cannot see two things in one place because the idea that he seeing one thing means also that he is also in one place. His idea that he is seeing two things would force him to conceive of himself as in two places.

22. See Mach, Ernest, The Analysis of Sensations, NY: Dover Publications, 1959, pages 249-250.

23. See for example, Kohler, Wolfgang, Gestalt Psychology, New York: Leveright Publishing, 1947, page 103.

PART II

IMPLICATIONS OF THE GROUNDS OF RECORDS
FOR THE USES OF RECORDS

CHAPTER IV

RELIABILITY

In earlier chapters we have been concerned with the grounds of the activity of recording. Now we shift our focus to the uses of records. However, the grounds of records and the uses of records are not the different issues they may appear to be since what makes records possible (grounds) provide for and delimit the uses to which records may be put. Furthermore, even the fact that records are the kind of thing which it is appropriate and possible to use will be shown to be a consequence of the grounds of records. We shall find, then, that the various concerns connected with the use of records can be understood as another manifestation of the grounds of the activity of recording. The analysis to be done now will serve to justify further our point that it is necessary to provide the basic grounds of records since it will be shown that a successful analysis of the uses of records requires reference to the grounds of the activity of recording. We begin our discussion of how records are used with a characterization of those who are important users of medical records - bureaucrats.

-1-

The distinction between opinion and knowledge and the consequent desire to control speech, which ground the observer's interest in presence,¹ find derivative expression in the bureaucratic concern with appearance (the recorded record) and reality (the truth of the recorded record). In each case, the recognition of the contingent or conventional character of speech - its problematic adequacy with regard to whether it is faithful to the event which it is about -

1. For the argument that a distinction between knowledge and opinion grounds observation, see Chapter II section 3 and Chapter III, section 1. We shall be suggesting in this chapter that, just as the observer uses the event to control his speech, the bureaucrat uses the record to control his.

gives rise to the attempt to void this contingency by voiding any participation through speech in the recording of the event.

The difficulty with presence as a solution to the problem of knowledge is that records are used by persons who are not present. Consequently, the user is faced with the question of how to re-achieve in his use the purity of the original record in the face of (1) his absence at the point when the event has presented itself and (2) his own capacity to contaminate the record by participating through speech. The user's problem of imperfect or incomplete speech is the same as the observer's (they are members of the same knowledge-opinion community). Potentially the user shares the observer's remedy of eliminating the problem by eliminating the speech which equivocates the nature of the event. However, the user is confronted with a special difficulty as a result of the observer's way of solving the problem: how is the user supposed to achieve the silence necessary for him to be able to listen to the record? How might he resolve the problem of participant speech, when the opportunity to accomplish this through presence is by definition closed to him? In a way, all bureaucracy can be seen as an attempt to create a method for the reduction of contingency, imperfection, and error, an attempt which is re-presented in the bureaucrat-as-user's effort to reduce his participation in the reading of the record.

It should be noted that we are not discussing isolated instances in which records are patently erroneous or flawed, or where administrators explicitly address standards of record-keeping. The point is that the very possibility of a record emanates from a conception of speech as conventional, dangerous, and opinionated, and the concomitant attempt to forestall this human danger by the creation of a circumstance

in which knowledge can be received as a gift from the events which are thought to be the source and substance of knowledge. This is to say, then, that every record displays the abiding observational-bureaucratic concern regarding the contamination of the record through participant speech. Given that records are speech, of course, and therefore only contingently adequate, it is the bureaucrat's job as a user of records to continuously and assiduously repair each and every instance of the contingency which records inevitably are. It is of course true that administrators (like sociologists) find some records more adequate than others. However our point is that every such finding, (whether of adequacy or inadequacy) presupposes a solution to the basic problem of achieving a relationship to records, a solution which does not involve speaking to and hence contaminating the record in spite of the fact that being absent at the original event, administrators are seemingly unable to decide whether records are adequate or not.

Generally, then, the bureaucrat sees the record's speech (since it is speech) as potentially unreal, as no more than an appearance. In a variety of ways which we shall specify in detail, bureaucratic work consists of remedying the contingency of the record by regenerating bureaucratic speech as a technical matter in the service of the events which are real. For example, as we shall show, bureaucrats try to conceive of their speech as generated by records in the same way that observers treat their speech as generated by events. In addition, as we shall show, bureaucrats try to subject their speech to events by formulating themselves as subject to observers. By making speech secondary, artificial, and only technically necessary, the bureaucrat makes his speech subservient to that which it is about. If the user asks himself how to preserve

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the record from contamination, he can produce an answer by re-organizing the idea of speech from that which originates to that which follows, in this case that which follows from records.

The bureaucrat prevents himself from speaking by making his speech into a thing at the disposal of its subject. We might express this point by saying that the bureaucrat's problem is to be able to use the record. It sounds banal, perhaps, but now we are in a position to understand better what the idea of using means. It means to be able to establish the kind of relationship in which ego (bureaucrat) can conceive of alter (record) as an object which, like a ripe apple, is there for the picking. To use some thing is to treat it as self-sufficient, finished, and so available for the relationship we call use rather than the relationship we call participation. To treat something as use-able is to be able to stop thinking (speaking) about it. The bureaucrat's problem is that he must somehow achieve this using relationship with records even though, through his absence, the record has seemingly become a questionable thing. The bureaucrat must somehow move from questioning (speaking to, participating with) records to listening to records. The bureaucrat must listen to the record so that the only speech which ensues becomes the exclusive domain of the record. One can understand the exasperation of administrators as listeners, listeners who are devoted to certain standards (of reality in our case) but who cannot control the performances (records) which are measured in terms of these standards. What appears (the record) may not be real (the event), and the bureaucrat is without the resource (presence) to decide.

In this chapter and the next we shall try to describe in detail some of the ways in which bureaucrats subjugate their speech to the record. We shall begin with the rather routine observation that bureaucratic control requires supervision. However, even this observation will seem problematic to us when it is applied to the activity of record-keeping since it raises the question of how supervision of record-making can be conducted in such a way that it is consistent with the ideal of speechlessness. How can the bureaucrat supervise without deciding, participating, and speaking and how can he speak when, being absent at the original event, his speech would not be controlled?

Many writers have, of course, identified supervision as a major feature of bureaucracy. As Weber writes:

The principles of office hierarchy and of levels of graded authority mean a firmly ordered system of super- and subordination in which there is a supervision of the lower offices by the higher ones.²

Etzioni, too, emphasizes the fact that bureaucratic structures require supervision:

Most organizations most of the time cannot rely on most of their participants to carry out their assignments voluntarily ... The participants need to be supervised, the supervisors themselves need supervision, and so on, all the way to the top of the organization. In this sense, the organizational structure is one of control, and the hierarchy of control is the most central element of the organizational structure.³

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2. Weber, *op. cit.*, page 197.
 3. Etzioni, Amitai, "Organizational Control Structure", in March, James, ed., Handbook of Organizations, Chicago: Rand McNally, 1965, page 650.

Like supervision, record-keeping is an important element of bureaucratic organization. Weber writes:

The management of the modern office is based upon written documents ('the files') which are preserved in their original or draught form.⁴

Furthermore, researchers have often looked at the relationship between these two facets of bureaucracy. In a famous analysis, Blau has shown how records play an important role in the supervisory process.⁵ Erikson and Gilbertson suggest that medical records can be used by supervisors and others in order to evaluate personnel:

The dossier is not only a record of a particular patient; it is a record of the personnel who have contributed materials to it and a record of the institution. Among the most interested consumers of dossiers, then, are administrators trying to monitor operations of the plant, teachers trying to measure the progress of students, attorneys trying to keep informed about legal difficulties, supervisors trying to evaluate the performance of the staff, researchers engaged in a variety of investigations and so on.⁶

What is being said here? How can a record be a record of its maker rather than its subject, and why would this kind of record interest an administrator? Originally, we had the event and only the event speaking to us. Now we come upon the possibility that the recorder is also making an appearance as the maker of the record, which raises a question about the relation of this to our first formulation (presented in chapters I, II, and III) that the event is the sole participant (analytically) and so the record is not a record of the recorder. It remains to work through the Erikson and Gilbertson

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4. Weber, op. cit. p. 197. See also Wheeler, op. cit. passim. Merton, op. cit., pages 342-343.
 5. Blau, op. cit., pages 36-55.
 6. Erikson, Kai and Gilbertson, Daniel, "Case Records in the Mental Hospital", in Wheeler, op. cit., page 399.

phrase "record of the institution" to show how it is another instance of the knowledge-opinion distinction, and so is compatible with our earlier formulation. To anticipate, treating a record as a record of the institution will turn out to be an administrator's way of using the record given (1) his absence at the original event and (2) his commitment to non-participation. That is, the administrator converts the record into the maker's record in order to make it subject to a kind of supervision which will not require participation.

It is undoubtedly true, as Blau and Erikson and Gilbertson note, that supervisors can use records to evaluate personnel. However, a prior aspect of the relationship between supervision and record-keeping is that, for the bureaucrat who was not present, record-keeping surfaces as a phenomenon which poses for him the bureaucrat-as-user's problem: how to assert and then solve the appearance-reality, knowledge-opinion distinction. The bureaucrat looks to some method for achieving the distinction in order that his (institutional) use of the record can be controlled by that method. Perhaps his use can be controlled by his controlling the recorder - in effect by his becoming the observer. As we shall explicate below, supervising the recorder may be a method for bringing the bureaucrat to the event by achieving analytic identity with the recorder. We shall examine this possibility as a more rigorous formulation of the conventional sociological statement that in bureaucracies the functions of supervision and record-keeping are paramount.

We launch our investigation of the supervision-record user link by considering an obvious requirement of supervision. Merton has pointed out that "visibility of both norms and of role-performance is required if the structure of authority is to operate effectively."⁷

7. Merton, op. cit., page 340.

Moreover:

... effective and stable authority involves the functional requirement of fairly full information about the actual (not the assumed) norms of the group and the actual (not the assumed) role-performance of its members.⁸

Merton is writing about the behaviour of persons, including persons who make and keep records. To achieve the appearance - reality distinction the bureaucrat has to organize it with regard to the production of records, which is to say that for the bureaucrat to "know" rather than "opine" he needs to generate a collection of actions which will re-produce the knowledge that is potential in the record. In common parlance: what would an administrator have to know to evaluate a record? Given the obvious purpose of records, i.e. to represent events, in order to decide whether a record was adequate, an administrator would presumably have to decide whether it was true. Administrators must determine whether what the record reported has, in fact, happened.

As has been emphasized, however, the idea of recording requires that only those who are present can know what happened. Thus, in so far as they are committed to the grounds which make it reasonable to record, supervisors can never know whether a given record is true. Those who were not present cannot know what happened and cannot evaluate records in terms of their accuracy without (1) ignoring the very basis of their whole enterprise or (2) transforming the idea of presence so as to warrant a different but faithful sense of knowledge. While it would be simple for us to opt for the first option and so write off bureaucracy as just another case of self-contradictory group behaviour, a careful examination reveals that bureaucracy generates a coherent and complementary display of ground and action.

8. Ibid., page 341.

Recalling Merton's statement that to be in a stable position of authority requires "fairly full information" about the object of control, we can see the problem which administrators face. Administrators and clerks who would supervise records do not have the same option that, for example, referees supervising football matches do. Being present, the referee can simply decide (see) that play goes against the rules. However, for a supervisor to decide that a record is imperfect, i.e. untrue, would seem to violate the basic idea that knowing what happened requires presence.

Non-observers, such as administrators and record room clerks, would therefore seem to be in a position of having to assess records (because as bureaucrats they must assess their bureaucracy's products) without being able to do so. Although there is an obvious standard in terms of which the assessment of records could be made, i.e. the truth, administrators and clerks, qua non-observers, cannot apply the standard. Administrators' and clerks' ignorance of the truth of records is a feature of the structure of the record-keeping system rather than a property of particular individuals. Their ignorance is given by the fact that, although they are involved in the record-keeping system, they are not observers.

Because the administrators' ignorance is structurally determined, it would seem to be an irremediable aspect of the record-keeping system. Although Blau and Scott state that administrators "seek to widen the sphere of (their) influence over employees beyond the controlling power that rests on the legal contract or formal sanctions",⁹

9. Blau, Peter and Scott, W. Richard, Formal Organizations, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963, pages 140-141.

administrators could not extend their range of control to include the assessment of the truth of records without violating the basic principle that only presence leads to knowledge. Thus, the administrator's dilemma is that he must account for the record as bureaucracy's product while at the same time his absence during recording makes it impossible, according to the version of knowledge which gives rise to recording in the first place, that he can responsibly provide such an account. This is not to disagree with Blau and Scott, of course, but it is to suggest that their statement is too sanguine. Granted the administrator's desire to widen his sphere, we want to know how it is possible for him to include within his sphere even such a bureaucratically ordinary object as a record since his absence would seem to make any influence or control on his part unwarranted. In addition, if it is true that bureaucrats seek to "influence" record-keeping, the nature of such influence remains to be specified since the very idea of influence seems to go against the concept of a record as independently produced by events.

-3-

Having described the administrator's dilemma, we are now in a position to look at his solutions. Two solutions will be described in detail. (1) Administrators can assess records indirectly by concerning themselves with the "reliability" of record-writers. (2) When administrators do assess records directly, they assess them in terms of completeness rather than truth.¹⁰

The first solution sustains the fundamental tenet that non-observers cannot know what happened and observers can, while

10. The second solution is discussed in the next chapter.

simultaneously rejecting the possible consequence that non-observers are ignorant concerning what happened. Instead of assuming the posture of ignorance, non-observers can see themselves as depending upon or relying on observers. Relying on observers is a device which makes it possible that non-observers can know what has happened, without at the same time violating the idea that, qua non-observers, they should be incapable of such knowledge. By being able to "rely", non-observers make it unnecessary that they remain ignorant even though they were not present. At the same time, they are not violating the idea that only presence can lead to knowledge. The fact that they must rely on observers rather than know "on their own" is an acknowledgement of the principle that only presence can lead to knowledge.

We can make a more general point. It is no accident that non-observers must rely on observers. Non-observers are put in the position of having to rely on observers because of the grounds of the activity of observing. Given that only those who are present can know what happened, unless non-observers can rely on observers, only events which had been personally observed could be known. Thus, unless knowledge is to take a very private form, the basic idea that observing depends on presence requires the complementary idea that non-observers can rely on observers.

Reliability effectively achieves bureaucratic presence by negating the difference between the one who records and the one who uses the record. The inter-action which is reliability reaffirms a commitment to distinguishing between presence and absence and hence between knowledge and opinion, but it achieves this reaffirmation by re-presenting the observer and bureaucrat as analytically identical, such that the real can make its appearance equally to observer and bureaucrat. The action they are to do is different: the observer

observes, the bureaucrat uses; the observer records, the bureaucrat supervises; the observer works to get into position, the bureaucrat to control. But these differences in action are generated by the shared commitment to the difference between knowledge and opinion and the shared commitment to attaining knowledge by refusing to speak so as to let the event disclose itself. The reliability of the observer, in which he becomes an extension of the bureaucrat's outer reach, thus brings the bureaucrat to the event and dissolves the problem of presence-absence while maintaining the distinction which had originally made it a problem. Such a formulation enlivens and deepens the notions of interdependence and division of labour, terms which are so common but unexamined in the literature on organizations. If bureaucrat and observer form a division of labour, we can note that what is decisive about the division is not that they have two different jobs but that they go about doing the same basic job (not participating) in different ways, the one by relying, the other by being reliable. Focus on their differences would thus be deceptive since it would hide the fact that their differences are produced by a shared commitment. As for "interdependence" it is doubtful that that is an adequate term to characterize the observer-administrator relationship made possible by the idea of reliability. First of all, interdependence probably suggests some sort of symmetry whereas in this case, instead of both depending, the one depends while the other must be dependable. Second, rather than interdependence, their relationship is better characterized as one of identity since it is analytic identity which they produce through relying and being rely-able. The administrator does not just depend on the observer, he becomes the observer by being able to rely on him.

It has been suggested that the possibility of relying on observers allows non-observers to know about events they have not witnessed without violating the principle that knowledge can be obtained only by those who are present. Bureaucrats bring the possibility into being by the method of controlling observers through the grammar of evaluation. Non-observers can and do convert the fact that they are relying on observers into a method of evaluation. Instead of deciding whether records are true, non-observers can decide (discuss) whether record-writers are 'rely-able'. The bureaucrat changes the topic from record to record-keeper, a move which is perfectly consistent with his notion that he can know through relying. By making the observer into the topic, he gives himself licence to speak. He can speak because his topic is not what happened. His topic is his attempt to control those who let him know what happened. With this new topic, everything he says, every attempt to exercise control over observers, is not an expression of his independence and therefore a contaminating influence on the event. Rather, the administrator's speech expresses his dependence on the observer and therefore the event. Speech about reliability, which we shall show to be so characteristic of administrators, emerges as a clear-cut example of the point made earlier that the administrator, like the observer, attempts to subject his speech to the event. The bureaucrat wants a method for controlling speech, i.e. he wants a method which is not speech. How can he achieve this speechlessness? Although concretely the administrator is talking, by talking about observer reliability, his message is that he is submitting his speech to the sovereignty of he who can know, and he is identifying the knower as he who can afford to be silent because the event tells him what to say. The administrator is saying that he can only know

through relying and therefore that the source of his knowledge is not his own speech but the observer's speech and, ultimately, the event which permits the observer to speak.

What is being offered here is a new formulation of a well known fact: whenever observation is used as a means of obtaining knowledge, the reliability of observations becomes an issue. Almost all discussions about observation or recording mention the problem of reliability. For example, Selltiz writes that "A good measurement procedure must be ... reliable."¹¹ Cannel and Kahn write:

Scarcely less important than validity is reliability, which has to do with the stability and equivalence of a measure.¹²

Weick:

Observational methods are more vulnerable to the fallibilities of human perceivers than almost any other method.¹³

And Nagel:

... the undeniable difficulties that stand in the way of obtaining reliable knowledge of human affairs because of the fact that social scientists differ in their value orientations are practical difficulties.¹⁴

Taking Nagel's assertion seriously, we might wonder why, if the difficulties are practical, they are also "undeniable". If the difficulties can be remedied practically why do they so persistently appear? Why don't they just go away? When Nagel says that reliability is a practical difficulty, we would formulate the practicality as the fact that the difficulty is remedied through practices, namely the practice which, from the perspective of users

11. Selltiz et al., op. cit., page 148.

12. Cannel, Charles and Kahn, Robert, "Interviewing", in Lindzey and Aronson, op. cit., page 359.

13. Weick, op. cit., page 428.

14. Nagel, Ernest, The Structure of Science, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961, page 489.

involves relying and from the perspective of observers involves being reliable. Strictly speaking, then, it is not the difficulty which is practical (and so can be expected to go away). What is practical, i.e. something to be done, is the solution represented in the idea of relying but the difficulty is not practical; the difficulty is what makes the practice necessary. Furthermore, the difficulty is not adequately formulated as some thing standing in the way of reliable knowledge since the basic difficulty (the fact that non-observers, being absent, cannot know) has been solved, albeit practically, with the acknowledgement implicit in Nagel that relying can be a method of knowing. By not focusing on his own implicit acknowledgement, Nagel obscures the fact that the difficulty has been solved, not by the practices, but by the decision to let relying be a way of knowing, i.e. by the decision which makes the practices necessary.

What is lacking in most¹⁵ discussions of the issue of reliability is an understanding of why reliability becomes an issue whenever observation and recording are used as means of obtaining knowledge. What is there about the activity of recording such that it leads to a concern with observer reliability? The concern with reliability arises because of the fundamental fact that opinionated non-observers are relying on knowledgeable observers to convert themselves into

15. See, for example, Galtung, Johan, Theory and Methods of Social Research, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1967, esp. page 121. Siegel, Paul and Hodge, Robert, "A Causal Approach to the Study of Measurement Error", in Blalock, Hubert and Ann, eds., Methodology in Social Research, New York: McGraw Hill, 1971. Cronback, Lee J., Essentials of Psychological Testing, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949.

knowledgeable users. When Cannel and Kahn write of reliability as the "equivalence of a measure", we would reformulate it as the equivalence of observer and user. This is to say that the measure, as reliability, is the degree of analytic identity between recorder and bureaucrat, an identity which universalizes the event without at the same time contaminating it by opinionated bureaucratic participation. The bureaucrat does not have to fuss with the record itself as long as he controls the observer and thereby has contact with the observation. Only because non-observers are in the position of relying on observers does observers' reliability become a possible question. Given the fact that observers are being relied on, obviously it will become relevant to decide whether they are, in fact, "rely-able". The concern with reliability is, then, nothing but a user's way of expressing the essential suspicion of participation in the event.

Our account of reliability must be carefully distinguished from others' accounts. We are not saying that a concern with reliability arises because "humans are fallible",¹⁶ "social scientists differ in their value orientations",¹⁷ or "our sense organs operate in a highly variable, erratic, and selective manner".¹⁸ Even if we were inclined to accept all these assertions, they would not tell us why reliability becomes an issue in the first place. That humans are fallible does not explain why human failures matter to record users. That social scientists differ does not explain why such differences

16. Weick, op. cit., page 428

17. Nagel, op. cit., page 489.

18. Madge, op. cit., page 120.

constitute a problem. Finally, the supposed properties of our sense organs do not explain why we should be concerned about such properties. To explain why reliability becomes an issue is not to cite the "defects" which make for unreliability since these defects are formulated as defects only because there has been a decision to make reliability matter. Therefore, the complete explanation must explain not why some of us or all of us are unreliable but why the question of our reliability even arises. We are saying that a concern with reliability is produced by the self-same commitment to the activity of observing which reliability resolves. The concern with reliability is a practical expression of the basic fact that the absent non-observer's structural position is always and irremediably one of dependence in a world where the truth resides in the local nature of immediate events.

In our terms, most other attempts to explain why troubles arise over reliability are too superficial. Roth's description of information flow in a hospital can serve as an example:

The (medical) staff often has difficulty obtaining reliable information about the patient, partly because some kinds of information by their very nature resist definition and measurement, and partly because of the manipulation of information by patients and various staff groups.¹⁹

It is undoubtedly true that patients and staff groups manipulate information and that some information is resistant to measurement. However, these facts alone cannot explain why the staff has difficulty obtaining reliable information since to merely cite these facts is

19. Roth, Julius, "Information and Control in Tuberculosis Hospitals", in Freidson, Elliot, ed., The Hospital in Modern Society, Glencoe: The Free Press, 1963, page 294.

to presuppose without explicating why they might be relevant. A full explanation of the staff difficulties would require that Roth note that reliability becomes a difficulty only because the staff must simultaneously generate and overcome the difference between themselves, on the one hand, and patients and staff, on the other hand, as users and observers. They generate the differences by committing themselves to observation without being present. They overcome the differences by relying. The staff must rely on patients and staff groups for its information, i.e. work to achieve analytic identity with them, because of the very nature of the activity of observing. Roth's account gives the impression that the difficulties over reliability come from contingent features of this particular organization. However, these particular features are noteworthy to organization members and to Roth only because of the matter which he leaves unexplicated: the essential character of the activities of observing and using.

-4-

The concept of reliability offers a solution to the administrator's dilemma of having to evaluate records when there is no method of determining their truth. Instead of evaluating records, administrators can concentrate their efforts on attempting to ensure the reliability of record-keepers. Administrators can use the following logic: although the truth of records cannot be directly determined, records are true to the extent that record-keepers are reliable. Therefore, by attempting to make record-keepers reliable, they are indirectly attempting to make records truthful. They can assert their supervisory prerogative, not by watching over records but by watching over observers. In the rest of this chapter, we shall present evidence to

suggest that although administrators and clerks do not directly assess the truth of records (since that is impossible), they devote considerable administrative energy to ensuring the reliability of record-keepers.

Several ways in which the administration tries to supervise record-keeping by fostering the reliability of record-keepers will be discussed: (1) Restricting the "privilege" of record-writing to professionals and semi-professionals. (2) Imposing legal and other kinds of sanctions on record-writers. (3) Instituting review procedures, and (4) making bureaucratic tasks concurrent with medical tasks.

(1) Professional reliability. Most students of the professions stress that doctors acquire freedom from control in return for high commitment to the norm of responsibility:

... the very great prestige of the professions is a response of the society to their apparent self denial, i.e. they can, but typically do not, exploit.²⁰

Goss writes:

... Physicians place high value on assuming personal responsibility and exercising individual authority in making professional decisions. Accordingly, their role expectations emphasize independence in the realm of professional work.²¹

Whatever other purposes it serves, the fact that only professionals and "semi-professionals" (nurses, social workers, etc.) may write in the record can be seen as an administrative tactic to encourage

20. Goode, William J., "Community within a Community: The Professions", American Sociological Review, 1957, 22, page 196.

21. Goss, Mary, "Patterns of Bureaucracy among Hospital Staff Physicians", in Freidson, op. cit., page 176.

dependable record-keeping.²² Only those who could be expected to be reliable, because of their professional commitments, are permitted to make entries in the medical record.

Some semi-professionals are very proud of the fact that they may write in the record. When asked to differentiate herself from recreation workers, an occupational therapist noted that recreation workers had no access to the medical record. Writers proud of the privilege of writing records should be less likely to abuse the privilege. We are not, of course, insisting on the empirical point that professionals and semi-professionals will produce more reliable records than untrained clerks. We are saying that the idea of restricting the record to doctors and other "trustworthy" types, whether it works or not, shows bureaucratic recognition that record users must trust record writers in order to achieve analytic identity with them. Here is a very concrete demonstration of Goode's point about professional self denial. It is not just that professionals work for low wages but that in an actual situation when self denial, i.e. control over desire so that the event may be permitted to speak, is called for, professionals are being asked to do the job.

(2) Sanctions. The administration also uses more direct methods than restricting record-writing to dependable groups in order to foster reliability. Most entries in the medical record must be signed, thus making the record-writer responsible for his record.

22. Most discussions of professionals in bureaucracy emphasize the conflict between bureaucratic and professional ideals. It is being suggested here that dependability is a quality which both bureaucracies and professions require. For other areas in which professional ideals do not conflict with bureaucratic ideals, see Goss, op. cit. and Goode, op. cit., pages 197-198.

Requiring a signature would seem to involve an implicit recognition on the part of the administrator that records are only contingently knowledge. If the observer's speech fails to mirror the event, then the record is not knowledge but opinion. As opinion it will belong to someone and it becomes relevant to know to whom it belongs. Hence the need for the signature. Note that with a signature the bureaucrat has a new option at his disposal. If he decides to rely on the observer, he can know about the event. If he does not rely on the observer, then he can at least know whom he finds unreliable. In a sense, he has a record either way - either a record of the event or a record of who made the opinionated speech. Thus there are at least two senses in which Erikson and Gilbertson's point that a record is "a record of the personnel who contributed to it" may be taken: (1) Obviously, personnel may figure in the events reported in adequate records but also (2) by requiring signatures, administrators have the option of treating any record, not as a report about an event, but as a record of who failed to let an event speak. If administrators choose this option then, although they cannot know the event, they can know who they blame for their lack of knowledge, they can know who it is that is unreliable. Given the possibility of this option, we can say that signing a record might serve to encourage observers to be reliable by reminding opinionated record-writers who are tempted to contaminate the record that they may not succeed in getting others to accept their version of the event. Since they are known (by signing), if it is decided that they are unreliable, then what may become "known" is not their version of the event but the fact that they are unreliable.²³

23. More than encouraging reliability, the signature seems to amount to a claim by the record-writer that he is reliable. Here the important point to notice is that, implicit in such a claim is a recognition that observer reliability matters. However, another issue is why the administration wants the observer to make a claim. We shall consider the signature again, from the viewpoint of its status as a claim, in the next chapter.

Obviously, the writer becomes legally responsible for what he has written by signing his name.²⁴ However, the signer is also accountable in more subtle ways. His colleagues will often look at an entry which he has signed and then ask him: "Why did you write that?" Similarly, at staff meetings which use medical records, authors of an entry will often be asked to explain what they have written. The fact that record-writers will sometimes refuse to sign documents or think twice before signing offers some evidence of signatures acting as sanctions controlling record-writers' behaviour.²⁵

Another aspect of the responsibility of doctors for their entries in the record is the fact that some important entries must be "authenticated" by superiors. An official Mont Royal Hospital memorandum states that "all histories, physical exams, and summaries entered in the Record by interns and first and second year residents must be authenticated." Although, in practice, the "authentication" procedure consists of a careless signature by a busy man, the fact that the initial writer knows that others may be held responsible for what he writes fosters reliability.²⁶

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24. The staff are very much aware of the legal responsibility that goes with signing (or not signing) a record. They often advise each other about whether or not to sign certain entries. For example, an emergency room nurse said to an intern concerning a patient who could not be admitted for administrative reasons: "You ought to put your name on the chart just to protect yourself, you saw him."
 25. A resident in the emergency room, for example, was asked to countersign an intern's write up. After reading what the intern had written, he said, "I won't sign that." Instead, he and the intern discussed the case more.
 26. Thus, instead of letting residents "authenticate" their records, interns will often ask the resident for advice before even writing their note.

Clearly a signature will not rule out unreliability. Indeed, the fact that records must be signed makes some record-writers even less inclined to be accurate if, for example, the truth would incriminate them. However, whether or not the tactic works, the point of requiring a signature is to attempt to supervise records by supervising record-keepers.

(3) Replications. Administrators use the same tactic to foster reliability that social scientists use. They attempt to have two or more observers, working independently, write up the same events. A patient's history is supposed to be taken by three doctors. Two doctors are supposed to give him physicals. Daily "progress" reports are supposed to be written by both attending and resident physicians.

It is true of course that doctors have ways of skirting rules about replications. It is never certain that two entries about the same event, when they appear in the record, constitute an authentic replication. Since doctors writing later entries have access to earlier entries, often the second note will merely reproduce the first.²⁷ However, just the fact that replications are required shows that the administration is attempting to exercise control over record-writers.

In the activity of replication, having two or more observers is not, of course, a device for increasing individuality, variety, or opinionated speech but for decreasing these extraneous influences. In the peculiar logic of non-participation and self-denial which characterizes observers and record-users, it is hoped that the many will do, so to speak, less than the one. Adding amounts to subtracting since it is intended that the many will have less effect on the event than the one would. How does this logic work? Any actual observer

27. As evidence of this point, often careless errors get repeated over and over in supposedly independent entries.

could be opinionated and hence unreliable. If he is opinionated, there is the danger that the speech which belongs to him could be mistaken for the speech which belongs to the event. The idea of replication serves to manage this danger by increasing the number of observers and being interested only in what they have in common. Since the more people, the less they will have in common it is hoped that with enough people what they will continue to have in common is what would be there if they had nothing in common, the impact of that which affects them in spite of rather than because of themselves, i.e. the pristine event which is supposed to speak through them rather than because of them.

Although Galtung writes that we replicate to eliminate "... observations that belong to one particular person ... and cannot be shared by others",²⁸ more rigorously it is not what observers share that replication is after. Increasing the number of observers is intended to bring observers to the point where they will share nothing and hence the event will be available as what they still have in common in spite of their complete differentness. What they will have in common under these circumstances is not really shared by them since it is not their joint possession. Rather, since ideally they share nothing, if their speech continues to show something common to them, it must not be their speech (opinion) which is being expressed; it must be the world's speech.

(4) Linking bureaucratic and professional tasks. A key administrative strategy for producing dependable observers is to make the record writer's medical and bureaucratic tasks coincide so that

28. Galtung, op. cit., page 28.

the same record is meant to serve both bureaucratic and professional users. An example will clarify this point. A pathologist does not perform two separate activities in reporting his findings to the attending physician and producing a record for the files. Using carbon paper he engages in both activities at once. A pathologist who wanted to hide the fact that a patient's tumor was benign from the medical record will also have to hide this fact from the surgeon waiting to cut. Similarly, if the pathologist wanted to present his colleagues with only an elliptical version of the event, he would have to present that to bureaucratic users too.

Having two or more records produced at once is a nice device for minimising observer participation. If the two records were produced by two separate acts, the observer would, of course, have twice as many chances to intervene by imposing his own desire on the event. In addition, the fact that the same record is used by both doctors and bureaucrats has some additional significance which makes it compatible with what has just been said about replication. Instead of the number of observers, now the size of the audience is being increased. Those concerned with reliability may be hoping that with more than one audience (bureaucrats as well as doctors) the observer will not have available the interactionally useful device of tailoring the message to the audience. More than one audience is going to hear the same message. If the audiences have nothing in common (nothing they all want to hear) the observer may have nothing he wants to tell them all. If he has nothing he wants to say, perhaps he will allow the event to speak more clearly through him.

The point here is different from Scott's suggestion²⁹ that the professional's conditional loyalty to the bureaucracy in which he is working is among the basic sources of professional-bureaucratic conflict. We agree with Scott, of course, that the professional, in this case the doctor, may have only conditional loyalty to the bureaucracy. There still remains the question, though, of specifying the conditions under which that conditional loyalty will result in loyal actions. What we are suggesting is that the bureaucrat can seek to reduce the likelihood of the professional not conforming to its rules (in this case not being a dependable record-writer) by making its tasks concurrent with professional tasks.

In discussing four administrative tactics for fostering dependability, our point has not been to argue that these tactics will or will not work. Our interest has been in demonstrating the existence of these tactics. The very existence of these tactics indicates how the administration can supervise record-keeping without directly assessing the truth of records. Namely, it supervises the production of records indirectly by attempting to make record-writers reliable.

29. Scott, Richard, "Professionals in Bureaucracies - Areas of Conflict", in Vollmer, Richard and Mills, Donald, eds., Professionalization, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1966, pages 265-275.

CHAPTER V

COMPLETENESS

In the last chapter, we treated administrative tactics fostering reliability as a methodic response to the bureaucrat's dilemma that, although the truth of records cannot be directly determined because the bureaucrat is not present at the event, the bureaucrat as user must nevertheless satisfy himself that speech does not participate in his use of the record. Another methodic solution to the same dilemma is to reorganize the idea of presence to the local event by extending what is meant by the event to include the record. Administrators can gain presence and hence make possible their non-participation by reconceiving of the record as itself the event. If the record itself can be conceived of as the event, then the administrator, who obviously can be present with the record, is no longer necessarily in a state of ignorance. The problem generated by the administrator's absence at the original event can be overcome, then, not just by surrogate presence as was the case with reliability, but also by making the record itself into a thing which, like the observer's original events, shows itself as what it is and so can be assessed, read, and used, without reference to the original event. If the event can, as it were, be extended to the administrator, then the administrator, like the observer, need not express his opinions or otherwise intrude and the event (now the record) can be protected.

It remains true, of course, that whether a record mirrors an event cannot be determined by those who are absent when the event occurs. However, records can be assessed in terms of standards other than their effectiveness in mirroring events. For example, records can be evaluated according to whether they possess various bureaucratically necessary forms and whether the forms have been "completed", i.e. whether all questions on the form have been answered and whether

all the forms have been signed. Such evaluation amounts to redefining the record as a visible event at which the bureaucrat, being present, can sustain a selfless and neutral stance that does not corrupt the pristine certainty of the event (now the record). Thus bureaucratic standards are themselves a method for controlling the (one who makes the) construction of the record so that the self-same principle of non-participation which record-writers were asked to follow can also be followed by record-users. One may indeed marvel that the idea by which a record is made synonymous with the event it originally recorded - the idea that the event shall show itself as what it is - is now turned around and made into the criterion of adequate records. An adequate record becomes not one which actually mirrors the event (since knowledge of the accuracy of the record is not available to those who are absent) but one which shows itself to be adequate by appearing to be adequate to any bureaucrat who looks at it.

Thus, while it may be that standards like bureaucratically defined completeness seem ad hoc in that they are far removed from the obvious original purpose of making a record, they remain in accord with the grounds of the activity of recording. This is to say that for bureaucracy, so-called ad hoc standards can sustain an interest in the truth of records whereas at first blush it would seem that the bureaucrat's absence at the appearance of the original event precludes any such assessment. It is the conspicuous task of the bureaucrat to re-achieve the original aim of the activity of recording, which is to obtain knowledge rather than to create opinion, by letting events speak, even in the face of his absence at the original event. It is the bureaucrat's task to remember that adequate knowledge is

obtainable only by refusing to speak so as to let events speak to him. He fulfils his task by treating records as things which show themselves to be what they are, thereby rendering further speech unnecessary. The familiar general notion that bureaucratic organization leads to the displacement of sentiments from goals (in this case obtaining truthful records) to means (in this case evaluating records)¹ does not really capture this phenomenon, since the displacement (if such it be) remains in accord with the original grounds of the activity of observation.

The hospital administration's overriding interest is in the completeness of records. We shall show how the concern with completeness and even the way in which completeness is defined, while seemingly contradicting the goals of record-keeping, in fact manage to re-achieve, within the bureaucratic context, the same basic record keeper's principles which we have been analysing throughout. A major theme of the discussion, then, is that evaluation of records in terms of completeness is compatible with the basic principle that records are supposed to report the truth, the truth being defined as an observer defines it, namely as that which presents itself by itself without any need for co-participation with it by speakers. Just as those who are present at the event become observers by letting the event present itself to them, those who wish to evaluate become readers (and readers for whom reading amounts, analytically, to observation), by letting the record's completeness present itself to them. The reader is able to achieve exactly the same kind of passivity which the observer was able to achieve by treating the record

1. See Merton, op. cit., pages 199-200.

the way the observer treated the event - as a thing which is showing him what it is.

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It is easily noticeable that completeness is the major standard in terms of which records are actually assessed by bureaucrats. Inaccuracy is never directly mentioned in the administration's memoranda about records but incompleteness often is. One memorandum deals exclusively with penalties for incomplete records. The memorandum states that "failure to fulfil this requirement (completing the record) will automatically authorize the director's office to suspend admitting privileges and/or to suspend operating privileges."²

Whenever a new kind of information is required for the medical record, the memorandum which announces the new requirement includes statements like:

The completion of ... (the new form) will be a requisite for a completed chart. If Medical Record, in reviewing charts of discharged patients, finds that this form has not been completed, it will indicate that the chart is an incomplete one and the appropriate disciplinary action will be taken with reference to incomplete records.²

Another memorandum notes that "an unsigned form renders the chart incomplete and will not be accepted by the Medical Record Department."²

A manual for hospital administrators also emphasizes, not that records should be truthful, but that they should be complete:

In all cases the record should be complete to the extent that it presents a comprehensive picture of the patient's illness, together with the physical findings and special reports, such as x-ray and laboratory. Such a record substantiates the diagnosis, warrants the treatment and justifies the end result.³

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2. From an official memorandum of Mont Royal hospital.
 3. McGibony, John, Principles of Hospital Administration, New York, G.P. Putnams Sons, 1952, page 468.

It is not just memoranda and manuals which indicate the administration's overriding interest in the completeness of records. It is also the administration's actions. Three clerks in the Medical Record Room of Mont Royal Hospital constantly attempt to force doctors to finish their records. Indeed, the major reason for which doctors come to the record room is not to study old charts but to finish records. The record room receptionist assumes that a doctor has come to complete records whenever he enters the record room. Thus, she always greets doctors with: "You are doctor ..." or, if she know them, "Hello, Dr. Hitchcock". Then, without any indication from the doctor as to the purpose of his visit, she will send a file clerk to find the doctor's incomplete charts.

An entire wall of shelves is used to store incomplete charts. The fact that there are regular procedures for processing incomplete charts and even regular places to store them suggests, of course, that, to the administration, incompleteness is both noticeable and worth correcting. The obvious question is why completeness rather than accuracy is the major standard in terms of which the records are assessed. Our answer, already suggested, is that the question proposes a distinction which bureaucrats, being absent at the original event, need not respect. If we understand that bureaucrats remain interested in truth but recognize their status as non-observers of the original event, we can understand completeness as their way of achieving presence, as their way to deny participation, as their way to the real. A clerk or an administrator, sitting in the record room, can decide (using observers' principles) whether a record is bureaucratically complete but not whether it is accurate. Incompleteness (a missing signature, a missing discharge summary) can be easily spotted

even by medically naive clerks. These are things which can be seen because they appear just like the observer's original events. The clerks are doing the same basic activity that observers are doing. They are letting what is present speak to them and so guide their speech for them. Thus a concern with completeness does not contradict a concern with truth if by truth is meant commitment to observational principles. The complete record is the observer-bureaucrat's version of the true record in that, as far as he can determine by looking, it shows itself to be true.

Indeed, if bureaucrats did concern themselves with the truth of the record as a mirror of the original event, then they would be contradicting observers' principles. They would be trying to gain knowledge without being present. They would be participating. They would be speaking their own minds rather than minding the event. That a record correspond to an event is the business of those who are there. This the bureaucrat believes, and, far from contradicting this belief, he reasserts it by restricting himself to assessing records as events, rather than the events the records purport to record. Focusing on the completeness of the record transforms the record into the bureaucrat's event and transforms the bureaucrat into an observer who need not participate. We find in Chapter V as we found in Chapter IV that whereas the bureaucrat and the record-writer may do different things (the record-writer looks at events, the bureaucrat looks at records), what they do is different only in the most superficial sense. The different things they are doing amount to the same thing in the sense that they are different expressions (because of differing structural locations) of the same commitment to treating the real as that which will appear to those who would only look for it.

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We are not suggesting, of course, that the interests of administrators and record-writers never clash. What we are suggesting is that, at least with regard to the phenomenon we are studying, the clash, when it occurs, cannot be understood as a conflict between one goal and another or between a commitment to goals and a commitment to means. Rather, the clash amounts to the fact that the same goal, even the same intention, will result in different behaviour because of different structural locations within the same basic system. An example may help concretize the discussion.

Although administrators take the task of finishing records very seriously, doctors are not so committed to this principle. The administration's attempts to get records completed amount to a perennial concern: clerks are constantly trying to force record-writers to finish and yet record-writers persist in not finishing. Doctors take a light-hearted attitude toward the threats of record room clerks. One doctor said, "They're sending me threatening letters; I'm gonna report them to the FBI." A doctor yelled to his colleague as the latter was entering the record room: "Welcome to the hole of Calcutta." A serious-minded doctor was just as uncommitted to the task of finishing his records. He commented: "This is such an unrewarding way to spend time."

Once they are in the record room, one of the major jobs for doctors trying to finish their records is the dictation of discharge summaries. Usually, doctors performing this task show distance from what they are doing. Almost uniformly, doctors adopt a bored, steady monotone while doing the dictation. One day, amidst general laughter, a doctor unplugged his colleague's tape recorder while the colleague was dictating. Doctors do not consider finishing

records to be a very important, demanding, or even necessary task. Thus, when the emergency room receptionist asked a doctor to finish his record by signing it, the doctor shouted: "What the hell for? I've got better things to do." Indeed, the very fact that charts, unlike for example, operations, often remain unfinished indicates the relative indifference of doctors to completing their records.

In order to understand these data, we must be quite clear about the sense in which records tend to be unfinished. What is usually seen to be missing by the bureaucrats is either a signature or a discharge summary. Bureaucrats miss these but record-writers do not because of the different ways the two different actors have of doing the same activity. In other words, we shall show how the doctors' indifference and the bureaucrats' concern are products of a deeper agreement between them that knowledge can be obtained only by denying one's own participation so as to let things show themselves. Doctors' indifference to signing a record or writing a discharge summary is an affirmation rather than a denial of the principles of record-keeping.⁴ An adequate record is one in which the self of the record-writer does not intrude on the event. Therefore, the doctor is right to be indifferent to signing because, qua record-writer, he knows that who wrote the record is not supposed to matter. The indifference to signing, then, could represent his commitment to self denial. Indifference to his own name expresses his belief that who he is does not make a difference to the record. Similarly, a discharge summary

4. This is not to deny the point made in the last chapter that the signature is used by the bureaucrat as a device to encourage reliability. In the last chapter, we discussed the issue of why a signature would be relevant to a bureaucrat, here the issue is why a signature would be irrelevant to a record-writer. Below, we discuss further aspects of the relevance of a signature to a bureaucrat. We suggest that the signature serves to make the record into an event.

should also be a matter of indifference since it is (supposed to) add nothing to what has already been said. It is (supposed to) repeat what is already there to be seen anyway. From a record-writer's point of view, a discharge summary does not finish a record at all since a record is finished when the events it reports cease to appear and hence cease to need mirroring. To an observer, a discharge summary is an appendage to an already finished record. Delays in doing discharge summaries are much more common than outright refusals to do them. These delays are also understandable in terms of the record-writer's principles. Unlike the original event, the record which is supposed to mirror it is, at least ideally, permanent. Therefore the discharge summary, which will be a record of the record, can be done at any time. There is no rush since the event it will mirror (the record) will not go away.

The bureaucrat will not accept the record-writer's logic here, of course, but the important point for us to see is the basis of the disagreement. It is obviously elliptical to say, as hospital bureaucrats do, that record-writers do not finish records. Record-writers do finish their own records but they do not finish the bureaucrat's records. The bureaucrat's record will be finished, not when the record completely mirrors the event, but when the record appears to be complete according to bureaucratic standards. By not completing this record, the record-writer is asserting his claim to have said only what the event permits him to say. By demanding this record's completion, the bureaucrat is expressing his desire to be able to make the same claim. The disagreement is the product of a deeper agreement, an agreement that speech can contaminate events and that the solution is to let events or appearances do the speaking.

Especially relevant to the bureaucrat's completed record is the presence of a doctor's or nurse's signature after every entry. Why is the presence of the signature so important? By getting the writer to sign the record the administration has gotten the writer to declare or say (by signing) that the record is adequate. The declaration is then treated by the bureaucrat as that which is showing itself to him. He does not know whether the record mirrors the event but he does know that someone says that the record mirrors the event. That someone has said that the record is adequate becomes the fact (event) which is presenting itself to the administrator. The administration can therefore point to the declaration as its reason for saying what it says about the record or, better, as its reason for not having to say anything about the record. If a record is signed, instead of having to decide (speak) about its adequacy, the bureaucrat takes the fact that the record-writer says it is adequate as deciding things for him. The record appears to be adequate in that the writer has declared it to be adequate. By claiming that his record is adequate, the writer is making his record appear to be adequate and is therefore making it possible for potential readers to treat his record as a thing which is showing them what it is, as a thing which they can observe, as a thing with which they can act precisely as the original observer is supposed to act with the original event.

Unlike the original record-writer's speech, the correctness of the signature need not be determined by matching it against some thing external to itself. The signature's adequacy is not contingent on whether it mirrors the world. Strictly speaking the signature is not a description of another event but itself the event. The bureaucracy needs to be able to treat speech, not as opinionated and therefore uncertain but as knowledgeable and definite. It does this

by insisting on a kind of speech (the signature) which becomes adequate not by being right but merely by being done. Merely by signing, the signer is doing something. He is saying he is responsible. By saying that he is responsible, he is removing the bureaucracy from responsibility for its speech. The bureaucracy need not check his record against the original (now)absent) event. The signer is making it possible for the investigation (of speech) to stop by making a speech which says, claims, shows, and legally establishes where the responsibility lies.

When it is remembered that a signature is not a speech about some other thing but itself an observable thing, it becomes unsurprising to note that whether the "correct" person signs a record is irrelevant to record room clerks. It is easy to document that the clerks do not care who signs the chart. In the record room, it is more important that someone sign a chart, so that it can be considered complete, than that the person who actually wrote the record sign it. A clerk faced with the common problem of a doctor who had left the hospital permanently without signing some of his charts approached a doctor who happened to be in the record room, with the relevant chart and the following statement: "He's not here anymore so you're gonna have to sign it; sorry about that." Clerks often run up to doctors and ask them to sign charts they have not even read, much less written. The record room clerk's indifference to who signs the record does not conflict with the basic idea of requiring a signature. He who signs takes responsibility by making himself appear to be the producer of the record. The signature affirms responsibility by making the signer claim to be and therefore (according to the viewpoint of reader-observers who are supposed to be passive) be the author. Bureaucrats are indifferent to who signs since the signer, merely by signing, will appear to be the writer and so, from the perspective of those who need not decide

about speech since they treat speech (signatures) as things which exist and are adequate merely because they have been done, will be the writer.

Again, a Mertonian analysis would have failed to adequately describe the phenomenon we are studying. We might have thought, if we had followed Merton's principles, that bureaucrats were failing to see the intent behind the rule by accepting any signature rather than the "correct" one and we might therefore have been content to describe our bureaucrats as ritualists. However, it has turned out that the very rule that a signature should be obtained, and not the fortuitous ritualism of some of the rule followers makes possible and rational the clerks' behaviour in accepting any signature. It is not that clerks who accept any signature fail to see the intent behind the rule but that the rule we are studying implicitly asks clerks to ignore the question of intent. The Mertonian approach fails to understand that the idea behind some rules, in this case the rule requiring a signature, is to overcome the constellation of problems implicit in the concept of "intent." To think about speech in terms of its intent is to make speech indefinite all over again. It is to make any speech problematic by asking us to ask the speech: "what does it really mean?" The point of the signature is to rid speech of this problem of intent or meaning by getting someone to declare his intent, in this case his intent to have spoken the truth. The declaration is supposed to solve the problem of intent by making intent into something that can be spoken rather than that which any speech leaves unsaid.

To query the signature (as Merton might expect a non-ritualistic clerk to do) amounts to querying the speech and so acknowledging exactly what the bureaucracy does not want to acknowledge, namely that the signature is not an event but a speech and so raises a problem (its intent)

by solving a problem (the intent of the record). By not querying the signature, on the other hand, the clerk is being a good bureaucrat by making speech into a thing which establishes itself (an event) rather than a thing which requires participation. Even if the signature turns out in the end to be a fraud, this is still no problem for the bureaucrat since he can still excuse himself (deny the need for participation) by pointing to the signature's existence. His argument can be: the record may be a fraud but he was not to know since what was appearing to him (his event) was that someone said (by signing) that the record was true. At the very least, the clerks' behaviour is not a displacement from the original organizational goal since the original goal implicit in requiring a signature (the goal of ridding speech of its contingent status) is fulfilled rather than displaced by acquiring any rather than a "correct" signature.

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In addition to the signature, other aspects of the record in which the bureaucracy maintains an interest demonstrate how the bureaucracy, by pursuing its goal of letting things speak to it so as to make participation unnecessary, has converted the record into a thing which can show itself to be what it is.

A clerk in the record room was discussing a dilemma concerning a patient's chart. The patient had died in the Emergency Room before two essential parts of the record could be completed, the history of the illness and the physical examination. The clerk suggested to the doctor whose responsibility the chart was that he write: "Patient came in in excellent condition. Deceased fifteen minutes later." We can make sense out of her joke in terms of the principles we have already discussed. From her point of view, what mattered was to have

a record rather than a "correct" record (in a correspondence sense of correct). What mattered was to get something on paper. Again, we have the record as contingent not on another event, but on itself. The record is adequate when it has those things, e.g. a history of the illness and a physical examination, which records are supposed to have. When it has these things, it will appear to be a record and so can be used by the bureaucracy. The clerk is conceiving of the record as a thing. The clerk wants something on paper so that the record can be observably a record. What she wants is compatible with (1) bureaucratic commitment to the principles of observation and (2) her absence at the original event.

Interesting forms to consider from the point of view of the bureaucratic desire to treat the record as a thing are "consent" forms. These must be signed by patients or near relatives before certain major procedures like operations and transfusions can be performed. A patient "consents" by signing a form which reads:

I, _____ hereby give my voluntary consent to the performance of the following procedure, as indicated, with whatever anesthesia is prescribed upon _____. I certify that the above procedure has been explained to me and I understand the diagnostic or treatment necessary for it. Mont Royal Hospital, its medical staff, and employees are hereby released from the liability of the results of this procedure.

There are extensive regulations designed to ensure that these forms are signed and entered into the record before patients undergo surgery. However, there are no written regulations requiring that "consent" forms accurately describe what occurred between patient and doctor.

According to the principles of the activity of observing, consent forms are all wrong. Except for a few blank spaces, these forms are written, not by present observers, but by absent administrators.

All of the forms are uniform so they cannot vary with the peculiarities of individual events. As descriptions of events, clearly, consent forms are inadequate.

However, the purpose of consent forms is not to represent events. What is important is not whether a form accurately describes events. Rather, what is important is the mere presence of a signed form in the record. Although a signed form may not be an accurate representation, it is complete in the sense that it says everything that must be said in order to protect the hospital against malpractice suits. That is, the consent form need not be "accurate" because strictly speaking it is not a description at all. It is not a report of an event. It is an event. Merely by being there it shows all concerned that consent has been obtained. It is the consent. As such it fulfils rather than negates observers' principles by being understandable as an attempt to solve the problem of the administrator's absence by bringing the consent to him and so making it possible for him to reconstitute himself as an observer present at the event (the record).

CHAPTER VI

C O N C L U S I O N

Insights into various other topics besides records can be obtained through a consideration of the results of this study. It is perhaps fitting to conclude by mentioning ways of beginning to think about other potential studies. First we shall briefly apply our results to the issue of whether empirical analysis can be said to "test" theories. Using examples from Marcuse and Sacks, we shall suggest that the very idea of being empirical predetermines what questions can be asked and so precludes the testing of some theories. Next we shall try to analyze the speech of two sociological theorists in much the same way that we have analyzed the idea of a record, i.e. as phenomena which require a method of production. It will be suggested that Erving Goffman speaks by presenting some thing to an audience and that Harold Garfinkel wants us to understand his speech by understanding its method of production. Finally, we suggest that, in the body of this work, our method of treating speech has been more like Garfinkel's than Goffman's.

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Most modern social scientists are uncomfortable with the notion that even the most rigorous use of empirical methods permits one to see "the" world. Instead, sociologists tend to say that the use of empirical methods affects the world. The usual way to make this point is to equate the effect of empirical methods with the effect of the observer and therefore to imply that the empirical effect can be reduced to the extent that the observer's "bias" can be reduced. While we would not, of course, deny that concrete observers can have an effect on things, we have been able to understand the idea of empirical effects differently: the very idea of empirical analysis affects "things" in that the idea of being empirical presupposes a particular

definition of thingness. Being empirical requires conceiving of "things" as that which can appear or show itself. Given this formulation of the effect of observation, we can say that observer effects are not merely the result of what concrete observers do or do not do. Even if freedom from bias were possible, it would still be true that observing affects the world in the sense that the idea of observation enforces a specific notion of "the world".

The extent to which theories can be "tested" by observation is limited, since if a central tenet of the theory were that appearances need not be true, observation would not "test" the theory. Perhaps Marcuse's objections to "one-dimensional" social science could be rephrased along these lines.¹ Marx, as Marcuse reads him, makes a distinction between true and false needs.² Man's true needs are not necessarily to be identified with what man says he needs. Nor should true needs be equated with what the evidence of behaviour shows that man appears to need. Therefore, "tests" of whether man needs what Marcuse (or Marx as Marcuse reads him) thinks he needs, could not be carried out by observational methods. We could not refute Marcuse by observing man. Indeed, the very idea that a determination of man's needs could be obtained by observation is anti-Marcusean because the idea presupposes that a man's needs are what they appear to be.

If our analysis of observation offers some support for Marcuse's critique of social science, it also undercuts some of the conclusions of a very influential ethnomethodologist - Harvey Sacks.³ By deciding

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1. Marcuse, Herbert, One Dimensional Man, London: Abacus, 1972, esp. pages 78-103.
 2. Ibid. page 19. See also Eros and Civilization, Boston: Beacon Press, 1955.
 3. Sacks' most important work has not been published yet. The ideas we discuss are developed by Sacks in unpublished lectures.

to answer the question of how speech is possible through a study of transcripts of tape recordings, Sacks has predetermined the sort of answer he can offer to the question. Sacks believes that he has "discovered" that speech is produced by "current speakers" doing one of three things: (1) selecting next speakers, (2) selecting next action but not next speaker, or (3) showing other potential speakers that they are finished so that these others may "self select". As is obvious from the nature of these three techniques, Sacks has converted the question of the possibility of speech into the question of the possibility of a next speech. Basically, Sacks takes the possibility of speech as a given and investigates only the question of how further speeches are possible given the existence of a first speech.⁴ Instead of considering the very possibility of speech as Blum and Rosen have done recently,⁵ Sacks can consider only the organizational practices which lead to the continuance of speech. Sacks' "findings" do not, of course, refute Blum's and Rosen's accounts of speech. Sacks' method of analysis makes it impossible for him to even ask their question. Their topic is inaccessible to him because of his method.

How does Sacks' method preclude discussion of the issue Blum and Rosen have raised? As they have argued, providing for the possibility of speech requires postulating something which comes before speech and which could generate it. It is therefore impossible to provide for speech by beginning with speech. Yet Sacks' method forces him to consider only what is presenting itself on the transcript. Hence he

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4. I am indebted to Moira McKinlay for an extremely perceptive remark in a tutorial which helped me to develop this formulation.
 5. See Blum, Alan, Theorizing, London: Heinemann, 1974 and Rosen, Stanley, Nihilism, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969.

must start with speech. Sacks cannot consider the question of the possibility of speech because he restricts what he can say to what he can see (or hear). All he can see or hear is what is showing itself, in this case speech. Since that which could generate a first speech, that which could generate the possibility of speech, is not disclosing itself in the transcript, (where only speeches are disclosing themselves), Sacks has no way to talk about the possibility of speech. By restricting himself to what shows itself (speech), he is not able to discuss the issue of what makes the showings (speeches) possible. By way of contrast, in our study we did try to consider the possibility of at least one kind of speech. Instead of treating the observer's speech (record) as a given, we tried to explicate how the observer manages to produce his kind of speech. Whereas we moved from the possibility of the observer's speech to an explication of how that possibility is achieved, Sacks treats speech as already achieved and investigates only the question of how further speeches are possible.

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In Chapter V we came to the conclusion that evaluating records in terms of completeness amounts to treating the record as an event, i.e. as a self-disclosing thing. However it is not only bureaucrats who treat speech as a thing for the same basic formulation can prove useful in developing analyses of sociological theorists. It became possible to notice that non-observers treat speech as a self-revealing thing only after a clear notion of an alternative approach to speech had been articulated. It is this alternative which is providing the method for an investigation of various sociological theorists. The alternative is to treat the speech of sociologists in terms of its method of production, i.e. not as a thing which discloses itself but

as a thing which has been achieved through the unspoken procedures which make it possible. The procedure involves conceiving of speech, not as a secure thing, but as an accomplishment whose method of production can be explicated. We shall exemplify the procedure by applying it to two books, Goffman's The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life,⁶ and Garfinkel's Studies in Ethnomethodology.

In The Presentation of Self, Goffman is obviously saying something about how persons present themselves to others. Less obviously though, in order to make his speech, Goffman is implicitly relying on a version of what it is to speak. In a sense, Goffman's book is generated by his version of speech and therefore we can seek to understand him by understanding how it is possible for him to speak. Our very tentative proposal is that Goffman speaks by using the self-same principle which he talks about in his discussion of ordinary people: Goffman speaks by presenting some thing to the reader. In other words, he speaks by being an actor who brings things (speeches) to appearance and asks readers to respond by being an audience who will passively accept the appearance (speech) he creates. Goffman's topic, the presentation of self, is also his method of speaking. Being able to speak, for Goffman, amounts to being able to present things (speeches) which will serve to impress and control others (readers) in desired ways.

We can further develop our analysis of Goffman's version of speech by specifying how it makes sense of some otherwise puzzling features of his book. As first year sociology students readily notice, there are no hypotheses in Goffman. Two books as different from each other as Suicide and The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure⁷ both

6. Goffman, Erving, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, New York: Anchor Books, 1959.

7. Goldthorpe, John, Lockwood, David, Beckhofer, Frank, and Platt, Jenifer, The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971.

pass the most conventional test of scientific status by having hypotheses which can be confirmed or disproved. According to this test, Goffman's study is sadly lacking. The closest thing to a hypothesis in the book is perhaps the first sentence:

When an individual enters the presence of others, they commonly seek to acquire information about him or to bring into play information about him already possessed.⁸

However, Goffman does not so much test this statement as apply it. Goffman's ideal reader is certainly not supposed to question this statement. He is supposed to accept it and then consider what follows from what he has accepted. In general, the reader should not question Goffman's speech, he should receive it, much as he would receive an impression. The statement of what individuals "commonly do" amounts to a presentation. It is a thing Goffman wants to impress on us, and therefore, as Goffman would see it, it is not its truth or falsity which matters. Unlike a hypothesis, the statement need not be question-able. What matters to Goffman is whether he can make us do what he wants with the speech, apply it to things so that we can see things as he sees them. There are no hypotheses in Goffman since Goffman uses his speech to create things (and present them to readers) rather than to question things.

As a creative presentation, Goffman's speech comes to us out of whole cloth. Like the observer's events, what Goffman says has an essentially independent existence, it is self-contained. On the other hand, the authors of The Affluent Worker manage to speak (write a book) by establishing a relationship with their predecessors, i.e. the "proponents" of the "embourgeoisement" thesis. These authors'

8. Goffman, op. cit., page 1.

speech constitutes itself as a "test" of what has been said before. Goffman has no such relationship with predecessors. Goffman's speech is a beginning rather than a continuation. The beginning of his speech (book) like the beginning of a new event is the beginning of an essentially new time period rather than a new moment in an old tradition. The "ahistoricism" which Gouldner finds in Goffman, then, extends to his very method of speaking.⁹ Goffman speaks, not by relating himself to what has come before, but by beginning anew. He begins anew by presenting readers with his own beginning, the conceptual apparatus he wants us to use. We, as readers, are not supposed to look for what has produced these concepts, i.e. for what came before them. Instead of being part of a tradition, these concepts create a tradition, a new history which begins with the concepts Goffman gives us. Just as Goffman's actors give and give off what they want the audience to receive, Goffman speaks by giving. The reader's task, such as it is, is not to question but merely to receive the gift that is Goffman's speech.

The same analysis can clarify why, as many have noted, Goffman's concepts are only metaphors. Basically, Goffman would not accept the "only" since if a speech is supposed to do nothing but present a way to see things which readers are supposed to accept but not question, then a metaphor becomes an adequate speech. The distinction between metaphor and description is a distinction between speech about how

9. Gouldner, Alvin, The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology, New York: Avon Books, 1970, page 391. Gouldner believes that his remark applies to both Goffman and Garfinkel. However, as we suggest below, Garfinkel's speech is certainly not outside of time in the way Goffman's is.

things look and speech about the way things are. Such a distinction is not accessible to Goffman since, for Goffman, the point of talk is to tell us how to look at things.¹⁰

-3-

A distinguishing feature of Goffman's speech is that it does not lend itself easily to a reflexive treatment. To some extent, one is violating the spirit of Goffman by thinking about how his speech is produced. However there are other thinkers who use their speech to ask us to read them reflexively. We shall suggest that Harold Garfinkel is one sociologist who wants to be treated reflexively, and further, that various problematic features of his work and its reception begin to make sense if we realize that his speech is not supposed to be accepted and used.

Garfinkel begins his book with a chapter called "What is Ethnomethodology?"¹¹ A careful reading of the chapter reveals that Garfinkel never answers the question. He gives various examples of studies which would qualify as ethnomethodology, but he never actually tells us what ethnomethodology is. We might wonder why Garfinkel needs a whole chapter just to say what ethnomethodology is and further, why, in the chapter, he seemingly fails to answer his own question by never saying what ethnomethodology is. However, perhaps we are bewildered only because we are falsely assuming that Garfinkel is actually trying to say what ethnomethodology is. If he were to say what ethnomethodology is, he would be producing a definitive speech, a speech which told us what to think. But the whole idea of ethno-

10. Since our analysis of Goffman may appear to coincide with Gouldner's at this point, it might be helpful to differentiate his from ours. Gouldner certainly notices that Goffman equates appearance and reality. However, Gouldner does not go on to consider the implications of this equation for Goffman's speech. See Gouldner, op.cit., pages 378-390.

11. Garfinkel, op. cit., pages 1-34.

methodology is that no speech is definitive since every speech achieves something without saying how the achievement is possible. Since Garfinkel's notion of speech is that it is an accomplishment which can only be understood reflexively, i.e. in terms of its possibility, had he defined ethnomethodology he would have denied his main point.

According to Garfinkel, every speech is unfinished in that it does not speak about its own possibility. Understanding a speech involves not merely accepting it but grasping how it was possible to say it. Had Garfinkel used his speech to produce a definition of ethnomethodology, he would have failed to engage the reader in the reflexive process that is understanding. Garfinkel would have failed to show the reader that ethnomethodology cannot be understood merely by the passive act of accepting the speeches, e.g. the definitions, which ethnomethodologists make. Ethnomethodology can be understood only by reflecting on how Garfinkel can say what he says. Garfinkel can spend a whole chapter and, in a sense, a whole book discussing what ethnomethodology is, since what ethnomethodology is cannot be said definitively. Though what ethnomethodology is cannot be stated definitively, it can be understood by thinking about how any saying (including of course sayings about what ethnomethodology is) depends on, yet does not formulate, its method of production. The reason for the absence of a definition of ethnomethodology is that ethnomethodological understanding is not just a matter of speaking, e.g. defining, and accepting the speech. It is a matter of understanding the possibility of speech.

Garfinkel's reader must be involved in the process of understanding. He must supply the method which Garfinkel's speech leaves unsaid. Some surprising consequences concerning the status of ethnomethodological work follow from this point. For one thing, to repeat in shortened

form what Garfinkel says, i.e. to "summarize" him, is to produce banality. We suspect that the lesson to be taken from the banality of summaries of Garfinkel is not that Garfinkel is banal but that Garfinkel's kind of speech does not lend itself to summary. To summarize Garfinkel is to identify the point of Garfinkel with what he says. To summarize is to treat Garfinkel as what he says rather than how he could have said it. Garfinkel's speech resists repetition, even in the abbreviated form of summary, because the point of his speech is that every speech (including his of course) raises a new question, namely how it could have been said, i.e. accomplished. To summarize or otherwise repeat Garfinkel is to fail to see the point of his speech, namely the question of method which is implicit in every speech. Every speech calls for something that it has not itself articulated, every speech calls for its method of production.

For much the same reason that summary fails, Garfinkel's disciples, if they do not differentiate themselves from him, tend to produce banal studies. They hear Garfinkel's speech as definitive speech, speech which tells them what to say or do. By hearing him in this way, they are failing to listen to the message of his speech. They fail to see that no speech resolves the problem of what to say or do. Rather, speech is something we do. It is an accomplishment and therefore must be thought of ethnomethodologically, i.e. in terms of its method of production. Garfinkel thinks of his own speech as an active accomplishment which makes a difference to the world. As he often puts it, all speech is a feature of the setting in which it is produced. That is, accounts do not just report on things; accounts are things; accounts are themselves constitutive of settings.

What are the consequences of this view of speech for the speech of disciples? If one tries to accept Garfinkel's speech, one is failing to understand oneself as a speaker. By passively accepting Garfinkel's speech, one is failing to speak (in Garfinkel's sense) by failing to accomplish anything, by failing to make a difference with one's own speech. By becoming a "loyal" disciple, one fails to have anything to say, hence the banality of his disciples' work. If speech is making a difference or accomplishing something, then true loyalty to the spirit of Garfinkel's speech involves not saying (nor summarizing) what he says. Loyalty would involve continuing to think about speech in a Garfinklean way, i.e. as an accomplishment, perhaps by thinking about how Garfinkel's (or anyone else's) speech was produced. Whereas Goffman wants us to accept the difference his speech has made by accepting his conceptual apparatus, Garfinkel wants us to think about what speech is such that it could make a difference, by thinking about his (or anyone's) speech.

It is a common-place among sociologists that Garfinkel is a writer who is difficult to understand. Perhaps we can enliven this notion by considering how it might be a suitable characterization of him. In the light of our discussion we can say that it is only possible to understand Garfinkel when one understands what Garfinkel means by understanding. If we try to "understand" by treating Garfinkel's speech as thing rather than accomplishment, if we try to accept and perhaps repeat "what" he is saying, we are already lost since Garfinkel's speech does not have the status of a thing, and so the point of his speech is not "what" he says. The point of his speech is what he does not say, namely the method, the "how" which his conclusions cover over. We have missed the point of Garfinkel - we have failed to

understand him in his own sense of understanding - if we think of his speech as an unquestionable thing rather than as an achievement whose possibility is left unsaid by the speaker. When we find it difficult to understand Garfinkel, actually we are experiencing Garfinkel's point. We might say (in this context) that understanding is difficult. Garfinkel tries to show us (among other things) the source of the difficulty. Understanding is difficult because we do not understand a speech when we merely accept it or reject it. Since every speech is an accomplishment which leaves its method of accomplishment unsaid, we can understand a speech only when we do something, i.e. say what the speech leaves unsaid. Garfinkel makes understanding into a truly demanding and involving activity by giving the reader something active to do. The reader's job is not to accept or reject what Garfinkel says. His job is to say what Garfinkel leaves unsaid.

Needless to say other theorists besides Garfinkel and Goffman can be analyzed in terms of how their speech is produced. However instead of pursuing these studies now, we might note by way of conclusion that what we have been doing to Goffman and Garfinkel is basically similar to what we have been doing in the body of the work to most of the writers we have quoted. We have tried not to let the quotations we have used stand as definitive speeches, even if we "agreed" with them. Starting from what someone said (the quotation) we tried to provide a method which would permit them to say it. In Chapter I we discussed how various authors could see records as a contingency. In Chapter II we discussed (among other things) how it was possible for Selltitz, Cicourel, and others to link observation and note taking. In Chapter III, we tried to provide grounds for the link between records and events, and for the idea that observers can see one thing at a time.

In Chapter IV, we tried to provide for the accepted idea that observers must be reliable and in Chapter V we tried to provide grounds for the accepted idea that records can be evaluated. Throughout, we have been trying to articulate that which other speakers have left unsaid. Implicit in our whole study, then, is an alternative to the kind of speech represented by records. The alternative requires not making one's own speech into nothing (as record-writers do) but instead, trying to accomplish something with speech, namely an understanding of what others have not said.

Research Note

All the hospital data were gathered between September, 1969 and August, 1971 when I was a project supervisor at a large public hospital in New York City.¹ As a social scientist actually working for the hospital I was allowed ready access to all areas of the hospital which I wished to study. Most of my research time was spent in the hospital's Medical Record room. I identified myself as a researcher interested in medical records and was allowed to examine the files as often and as thoroughly as I liked. I noted down verbatim any parts of the record which seemed to me to be of interest. I was also able to observe the various kinds of interaction that occurred in the record room since my desk was conveniently located in the same room where all the clerks worked and where doctors came to complete their records.

The other major piece of research I carried out was the observation of the actual process of record-writing in two areas of the hospital: the emergency room and a rehabilitation centre. In both cases, I told persons in charge that I was interested in the record-keeping process and was invited to stand (or sit) at the main desk and observe the on-going business of the hospital (including the writing of records). In the rehabilitation centre, where the pace was slower, I also participated in a good deal of the routine daily work, attending meetings, accompanying nurses on visits to patients' rooms, etc.

From time to time I conducted both formal and informal interviews with doctors, nurses, and administrators in order to elicit their opinions about issues and problems involved in record-keeping. In addition, the administration allowed me to study an extensive collection of memoranda concerning records and related topics.

1. "Mont Royal" is a cover name for the hospital.

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This thesis has been composed by
myself and the work reported was
entirely my own.

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