Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience, by ERVING GOFFMAN.

MURRAY S. DAVIS
University of California, San Diego

Goffman has devoted most of his work to undermining the integrity of some accepted social entities (like the individual) and the legitimacy of others (like the total institution). Frame Analysis is no exception, except in this book Goffman attempts to undermine everyday reality itself, particularly James' and Schutz' claim that it is the prime reality, more fundamental than other realities (like dreams or play). (One wonders what Goffman will subtly subvert next. Watch out, God!)

Goffman begins by dividing the world into an empirical part—a "strip"—which he defines as "any arbitrary slice or cut from the stream of ongoing activity" (p. 10), and a subjective part—a "frame"—which he defines as the "principles of organization which govern events—of at least social ones—and our subjective involvement in them" (p. 10-11). (In his later, concrete applications of frame analysis, however, he is sometimes unclear whether frames organize the individual experience of events, as he claims (p. 13), or whether they determine the actual social organization of the events themselves.) We "frame" "strips" of activity by seeing them as natural ("unguided events") or social ("guided doings")—the two fundamental frames; or as fantasied or faked—two of the many instances of secondary frames Goffman discusses.

Frame analysis seems to have two aspects, which I will call the cellular and the concentric. The cellular aspect of frame analysis involves describing the membrane around an activity—the spatial and temporal brackets of each particular frame. For instance, the theater frame (which Goffman analyzes in greater detail than other frames) usually has a sharp beginning and ending as well as a highly defined spatial location. Cellular frame analysis also involves distinguishing the nucleus of an activity from its surrounding cytoplasm—the inner official events (the play itself) from the outer spectacular occasion (going to the theater). One of Goffman's most incisive conceptual scalpels dissected framed strips of activity into "tracks" or "channels"—a "main" or "story" line at the center of the frame and several subordinate lines "out of frame" (disattended, direction overlaid, and concealed lines).

The concentric (onion skin) aspect of frame analysis involves discriminating the various levels or "laminations" that frame a strip of activity and specifying the ways natural and social frames (basic) are transformed into other, less fundamental frames. One kind of frame transformation Goffman calls "keying," which he defines as "the set of conventions by which a given activity, one already meaningful in terms of some primary framework, is transformed into something patterned on this activity but seen by the participants to be something quite else" (p. 43-44). We key a strip of activity by making it into a movie, novel, radio drama, theatrical play, cartoon, puppet show, etc. A second kind of frame transformation Goffman calls "fabrication," which he defines as "the intentional effort of one or more individuals to manage activity so that a party of one or more others will be induced to have a false belief about what it is that is actually going on" (p. 83). We fabricate "benign" frames by indulging in leg-pulls, practical jokes, psychology experiments, etc.; we fabricate "exploitative" frames by engaging in espionage, con games, frame-ups, etc. Keyed frames, in which all parties are aware of the transformation, differ from fabricated frames, in which some parties are not aware of the transformation.

Since laminated frames are blown up out of fundamental frames ("upkeying"), they are more vulnerable to definition ("downkeying"). Keyed frames are liable to fall when they are based on ambiguity (someone is not certain which frame to apply), error (someone thought a bank was being robbed but it was only a filming of a bank robbery), or dispute (the police contend someone dies of a heart attack—a natural frame—but the detective contends he was murdered—a social frame). Fabricated frames are liable to fall when the deceived discover that the frame they thought organized their activity naturally

599

CS 1975 4(6)
was actually manufactured by the deceivers artificially (someone finds out he was conned out of his money). Since fabricated frames are based on a differential distribution of knowledge, they are more likely to break down and are more discrediting of their sustainers than keyed frames.

A collapsing frame has several consequences. The collapse of the meaning of the frame may leave everyone disoriented. The collapse of involvement in the frame may leave everyone either uninvolved (like a bored audience at a bad play) or intensely involved with whoever or whatever destroyed the frame and with their own lack of involvement and meaning. The latter, Goffman calls "negative experience—negative in the sense that it takes its character from what it is not..." (p. 379). (In Goffman's model, negative experience seems to be to normal experience as role distance is to role: the individual can define both his experience and his self in terms of what they are not.)

Given the often greater intensity of experience when it is negative, some people—particularly entertainers—deliberately manipulate the deflation of frames to create this intense, though negative, experience. Pirandello intentionally disorients his audience by continually collapsing their theater frame (some of his characters discuss their own acting or play at being members of the audience). Many staged sports contests, like televised wrestling or roller derby, intentionally involve their audience by continually collapsing their theater frame (some of his characters discuss their own acting or play at being members of the audience). In dramatizing these events, we do to ourselves what the playwright does to his characters and the director does to his actors: withhold information to generate suspense, rehearse and replay, and even split ourselves into several parts (e.g., through irony or mocking) to reduce the responsibility of our present selves for what our past selves did or what our future selves would like to do— all this to gain audience appreciation for ourselves and sympathy for our predicaments.

But whereas life is much like the stage, the stage is not much like life. For in their everyday lives people do not speak nearly as well as characters on the stage, and the events they encounter are much more likely to be irrelevant and unconnected and much less likely to be critical and fateful (p. 557)。

Goffman’s assertion that much of human life consists of dramatizing brings us to the most eerie of his central themes—the disintegration of the individual. Throughout his works, Goffman deepens the sociological enterprise; he is not content with the ordinary sociological excavation of the individual which finds only roles to be social, with the "true" self hidden beneath them. Goffman is much more "radical" than that. He be-
the ordinary stage, and the
59.
.Al.

il:S· -the disin­

dramatization
led and much

of what hap­

he individual

s

lability of our

rachers are primar­

viding evidence

runcan dissolves the social
structure and norms of the situation into
elements are socially transformed (con­

ight, and norms of the situation out of which the
individual is continually created) in much the
same way that Garfinkel dissolves the social
structure and norms of the situation into process
(while holding constant the individual
who continually creates them). Only our cul­
nural ideas about the ongoing biological person
give continuity to the individual's intermittent
characteristics, each of which he socially gen­

ers anew from one situation to the next.

Just as the individual is composed of a
number of loosely integrated characters and
roles, as well as the ways he shows distance from
them, so Goffman—even the sociological
—concludes that everyday reality, too,
is not of one piece but consists of many
loosely integrated frames—traffic systems,
ritual systems, bodily manipulatory systems,
religious systems, etc. Moreover, much of our
ordinary activity is modeled after various
ideal realms, found in folk tales, novels,
advertisements, myths, bibles, etc.: So everyday life . . . often seems to be a
laminated adumbration of a pattern or model
that is itself a typification of quite uncertain
realm status . . Life may not be an imita­
tion of art, but ordinary conduct, in a sense,
is an imitation of the proprieties, a gesture at
the exemplary forms, and the primal realization
of these ideals belongs more to make-believe
than to reality (p. 562).

Of course we do not see everyday life this
way. We see it as unified, and we see a per­
son's everyday behavior as a "direct" indi­
cation of his inner state, of the doer's being,
and of nothing else. But this unified direct­
estness, Goffman affirms, is merely the dis­
tinguishing feature of the frame of every­
day life, not a feature of everyday life itself.

In short, everyday life is not the fundamental
realm, but only one among many realms, for
it is composed of bits and pieces of these
other realms—its distinctness being only that,
unlike these other realms, we believe that it
is fundamental.

Frame Analysis provides a good vehicle for
* * *

in the thought model underlying al­
mass of all of Goffman's work. Goffman has
been called many things from symbolic inter­
actionist to Machiavellian dramaturgist. But
while his writings do reveal the influence of
all these schools, behind them he is, more
essentially, a social constructionist. He is al­
ways trying to point out the social construc­
tion of the seemingly natural—the human
fabrication of what most people consider pre­
fabricated (the individual, the ritual order,
institutions, roles). As a social construction­
ist, he begins by separating his subject into
its basic elements and then shows how these
elements are socially transformed (con­
structed) into something more elaborate.
Furthermore, he believes we can understand
how most people "naturally" construct a
social entity (the ways someone learns the
role of a doctor) by looking at how some
people deceitfully construct this social entity
(they someone impersonates a doctor).
Thus Goffman often studies how something
(like reality) is faked to determine how it is
normally fashioned. Assuming that all social
units, from roles to realities, are constructed
implies that they are essentially arbitrary—a
further feature of his work which unsettles
many of his readers.

But what upsets them even more is the
other side of Goffman's constructionism, for
Goffman is also a social destructionist. If
something is made, it can easily be unmade
(wheras it is much harder to denature some­
thing natural). After showing how elaborate
social entities are built up, Goffman shows
how they are vulnerable to breaking down, a
painful process. (Our self-claims can be dis­
credited, resulting in our shame; our sense of
reality can be deflated, resulting in our dis­
orientation.) Social constructions are not only
able to collapse: they are likely to, for
small failures have great repercussions. If
we can generate a whole self and a whole
reality from a few small elements, then our
whole self and our whole reality can col­
lapse should its few small supports be
removed. In Goffmanland, both the individ­
ual and the universe are highly unstable: one
embarrassing incident, one mismovement
can spread rapidly until one's whole self as well as one's whole reality is brought down, not only for the individual to whom it occurs but also for everyone connected with him in his vicinity. This repercussive motif is prevalent throughout Goffman's work. But note that Goffman focuses only on negative repercussions, not on positive ones. For instance, he discusses how spreading embarrassment destroys meaning but omits how spreading charisma generates meaning. In this way he makes the world even more desolate than it actually is, thus expanding his personal pessimism into a universal principle of social life.

Alongside Goffman's constructionist subjectivism, there runs a smaller positivist objective stream—often concealed in footnotes—which allows him an escape from the implications of the extreme subjectivist position. Goffman reveals his positivist side when he asserts that beyond our socially constructed world there is a real world impinging on it. This positivist stream—often concealed in footnotes—was especially seductive to graduate students alternately bored and frightened by the insipid, impersonal style of most of their mentors. So they are now greatly saddened by his writing's recent deterioration, much discussed among Goffman watchers in hushed tones. Although Goffman's ideas are as good as ever, stylistic decline has set in on the level of the sentence. Frame Analysis (as well as Relations in Public) is a virtual thesaurus of stylistic gaffes and gafferies. If all the unnecessary "as to," "that's," "so as," "in regard to's," and other useless words and phrases were removed, the book would be 25% shorter with no loss of substance and much gain in impact. It is not clear why Goffman's style has worsened. Perhaps its decay results from the well-known tendency of the successful middle aged to think their every word worth having one's passage fess." he is discussing.

For all its problems recommend this book stron- Simmel has tied to those forms that ensure disaster (mine caps). He has explicated his reflexive approach to realms sociological penetrative insanity, drunkenness, has brought aspects the edge of awareness. The author's approach to realms sociological penetrative insanity, drunkenness has brought aspects the edge of awareness.

Emerald Hill
University of.

If someone were "manesque" to des- ologist, most of us what was meant, be much fuzziness this category, and about whether work or not. Nevertheless.

Unfortunately they co-
Unfortunately they come all too rarely. The book is tedious to read—all 576 pages of the paperback edition. The best way to read Goffman I found is to plow through him slowly, savoring his exquisite examples, underlining the "good parts." Rereading one's underlinings before setting the book aside allows one to appreciate his pearls and to clarify his argument without being distracted by the dross of his overly padded prose. On the conceptual level, however, Goffman is still a master of the systematic and the interesting, whose combination is no easy task. Even on this level he sometimes stresses system at the cost of interest, especially at the beginning, but the ratio improves as the book continues. His most ingenious stylistic technique is his reflexive asides in which he applies frame analysis to the act of writing books in general and his own book in particular. A technique carefully calculated to induce the reader to have the "negative experience" he is discussing.

For all its problems and proximity, I recommend this book strongly. No sociologist since Simmel has tied together so wide a range of apparently disconnected events and activities within a single framework—from natural disasters (mine cave-ins) to verbal disasters (puns). He has extended the sociological approach to realms seemingly immune to sociological penetration (hypnosis, possession, insanity, drunkenness, childishness). And he has brought aspects of human existence from the edge of awareness to the center of scientific concern. Most of all, he has dignified our ordinary insights into everyday life so that we need not forget them but can incorporate them into an ongoing scientific corpus, allowing us to integrate our thought and our life, our work and our leisure—allowing us, in the words of Stendhal, "the joy of having one's passion as part of one's profession."

* * *

WILLIAM A. GANSMAN
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

If someone were to use the term "Goffmanesque" to describe the work of a sociologist, most of us would readily understand what was meant. There would, no doubt, be much fuzziness around the boundaries of this category, and we might well disagree about whether work near the edge was inside or out. Nevertheless, the term is a serviceable member of the sociologist's lexicon, referring to a recognizable genre in the field. Goffman attempts in Frame Analysis to codify this genre—or more accurately, to begin the work of codification by delineating part of the basic conceptual framework. The attempt invites assessment of the genre: an identification of the present state of the art and a laying out of the unfinished business.

Judged from the perspective of other kinds of sociology, this genre has certain apparent vulnerabilities. These include the question of its ability to generate testable propositions about its chosen subject matter; the difficulties of transmitting analytic technique from master to novice; and an undeveloped set of methods for implementing its epistemology.

These are serious questions. Some may suspect that they are unanswerable, that they represent fundamental flaws in this way of doing sociology. I argue here that they are fully answerable although in some cases not yet answered in any very satisfactory way. I believe they point to unfinished business rather than fundamental flaws.

Before I address these questions, it is necessary to take a closer look at that part of the unfinished business which Goffman undertakes in Frame Analysis. This is a more ambitious hook than Goffman's earlier work. Where he was satisfied before to illuminate some strip of social activity by doing his kind of analysis, here he takes a step back to consider the enterprise itself. It is, Goffman concedes, "another go at analyzing fraud, deceit, con games, shows of various kinds, and the like" but here "I am trying to order my thoughts on these topics, trying to construct a general statement."

The general statement consists of a set of related concepts that can be used in analyzing how people organize their experience. The question has deep ontological roots but for its translation into a sociological question, Goffman credits William James. Abandon the bewildering issue of what reality is and substitute the manageable question, "Under what circumstances do we think things are real?" By studying the conditions under which a sense of reality is generated, one can isolate a fundamental but workable problem "having to do with the camera and not what it is the camera takes pictures of."

Goffman, then, is talking about the organization of experience—"something that an individual actor can take into his mind"—and not the organization of society. He DISCLAIMS IDEALISTIC DESIGNS ON HIS COLLEAGUES' TERRITORY, GRANTING THE EXISTENCE OF A WIDE ARRAY
of issues of social organization that do not call for frame analysis. The disclaimer, however, is unconvincing because the implication is unavoidable that we ignore how people organize their experiences at considerable peril. It is possible, of course, simply to relate the associations among a set of variables and to eschew any interpretation of what is going on in the black box that connects these variables. Typically, however, interpretations are made that conceal a number of unexamined assumptions about how people's experiences are organized. With luck, the assumptions do not get us into trouble because they are reasonably consistent with what is actually going on. However, a spurious analysis of social organization is the inevitable result of misleading assumptions about how people organize their experience. Modesty of claim is an attractive posture but it should not lull us into a failure to recognize the subversive nature of what is being offered. By making this realm problematic, Goffman necessarily raises fundamental questions for those whose task is understanding the organization of society.

Inside the black box is a very complicated and delicate mechanism—an actor rendering situations meaningful for himself. We use, Goffman suggests, a primary framework centering on whether the event is a natural one or a man-made occurrence. Although Goffman doesn't deal with it as such, presumably the supernatural offers an additional primary framework in some cultures and even in our culture when neither of the alternatives seems adequate to do the job.

Actions viewed entirely in terms of one of these primary perspectives are felt to be "real" or "actual." Participants operating in a primary framework have an acceptable working answer to the question of "what is going on here" and conduct themselves according to the organizing principles that are appropriate to this type of activity. Goffman uses the term "frame" to refer to the set of rules governing a given type of activity. People normally adjust easily to the appropriate frame and operate within it without ever recognizing the principles involved.

This ordinary activity, however, can be transformed into another key. Goffman considers a number of these keys including make-believe, contests, ceremonials, technical reorderings, and regroundings. Some of these terms are, of course, unclear without the exposition that Goffman gives. The important point is that each of these different keyings of ordinary activity has its own characteristic set of rules and regularities. Since these transformations resemble the untransformed activity in many respects, they invite some interesting comparisons that frequently generate insights about the organization of the untransformed activity. Similarly, the illumination of interaction involving shifting frames or ambiguity of frame is a prime accomplishment of this mode of analysis at work.

While each key has some interest in its own right, the conscious design or fabrication of some ordinary strip of activity is especially revealing. Those who undertake the task of fabricating, for whatever reason, must attend to the subtle aspects of ongoing interaction that convince us that such a situation is for real. Whatever we use to check out activity—to discover whether or not what appears to be going on is in fact going on—is exactly what needs to be manipulated to make the fabrication convincing. Some evidence is hard to fake and is especially useful as a check on what is going on. But this very usefulness provides the strongest reason to fake precisely this aspect. Good con artists are intuitive practitioners of what makes a strip of activity seem real. Since the organization of ordinary activity is something we take for granted, it is relatively invisible and inaccessible. The intuition of con artists and other fabricators, if we can glean it systematically, promises to tell us a great deal about the organization of the activities that are being fabricated. Hence, the fascination with and the profitability of having a continual "go at analyzing fraud, deceit, con games, shows of various kinds."

The organization of activity, in Goffman's argument, is not merely a matter of mind. Rules that govern activity are something that we discover and gear ourselves to, not something our minds invent. The locus of organization is in the activity or interaction and if we fail to operate in terms of the appropriate frame, our neighbors will let us know this in one way or another. Operating in terms of an inappropriate frame will lead us into mid embarrassing at a minimum and, if sufficiently prolonged, into a mental institution.

At this point, Goffman introduces the concept of anchoring an activity and a particularly brilliant and exciting analysis follows. Any strip of activity is anchored in a surrounding context— it has a rim. This rim has the paradoxical feature of being both part of the primary activity and part of the surrounding world—it is simultaneously internal and external. Take a group of people at a conference, activity of presence clearly internal to the participants and shelter and to the bathroom content of the activities are the activities. If one steps outside and into territory it becomes securely activity has its logistics of organizing for participants, conference organizers, relationships with the participants of who conference. The activity of running a conference turns out that the problems derive shifting from the fact that people are not lull us into a failure to recognize the organization of the activities that are being fabricated. Hence, the fascination with and the profitability of having a continual "go at analyzing fraud, deceit, con games, shows of various kinds."

Can one use the activities of social relations to assert students to believe, contests, ceremonies, technical reorderings, and regroundings. Some of these terms are, of course, unclear without the exposition that Goffman gives. The important point is that each of these different keyings of ordinary activity has its own characteristic set of rules and regularities. Since these transformations resemble the untransformed activity in many respects, they invite some interesting comparisons that frequently generate insights about the organization of the untransformed activity. Similarly, the illumination of interaction involving shifting frames or ambiguity of frame is a prime accomplishment of this mode of analysis at work.

While each key has some interest in its own right, the conscious design or fabrication of some ordinary strip of activity is especially revealing. Those who undertake the task of fabricating, for whatever reason, must attend to the subtle aspects of ongoing interaction that convince us that such a situation is for real. Whatever we use to check out activity—to discover whether or not what appears to be going on is in fact going on—is exactly what needs to be manipulated to make the fabrication convincing. Some evidence is hard to fake and is especially useful as a check on what is going on. But this very usefulness provides the strongest reason to fake precisely this aspect. Good con artists are intuitive practitioners of what makes a strip of activity seem real. Since the organization of ordinary activity is something we take for granted, it is relatively invisible and inaccessible. The intuition of con artists and other fabricators, if we can glean it systematically, promises to tell us a great deal about the organization of the activities that are being fabricated. Hence, the fascination with and the profitability of having a continual "go at analyzing fraud, deceit, con games, shows of various kinds."

At this point, Goffman introduces the concept of anchoring an activity and a particularly brilliant and exciting analysis follows. Any strip of activity is anchored in a surrounding context— it has a rim. This rim has the paradoxical feature of being both part of the primary activity and part of the surrounding world—it is simultaneously internal and external. Take a group of people
Rake a group of people and frame Will lead us into something we take for granted activity and part of the activity are something that activity itself and, if any, introduces the content of the conference, these supporting activities are the rim.

If one steps back and asks about the activity of running conferences, this rim becomes securely internal but the new focus of activity has its own rim. The immediate logistics of organizing an intellectual activity for participants are now internal, but the conference organizer is likely to have certain relationships with an external sponsor, a representative of whom may be present at the conference. There is always an interface between the activity being framed and the external world in which it is anchored. I find it helpful to think of a zoom lens. Each time we alter the frame by zooming in or out, we change the location of the rim. It turns out that there is an interesting class of problems deriving from this possibility of shifting rims.

There are a number of other useful concepts—for example, bracketing of activities—which I will not pursue here. That Goffman is able to use this conceptual apparatus in a brilliant fashion is undeniable. It is relatively easy to be clear and obvious, or to be subtle and obscure, but Goffman’s special virtue is his ability to be clear and subtle. It is tempting to allow oneself to be dazzled and, hence, distracted from the serious questions about the genre raised earlier.

Can one use this framework to do systematic social research? Can we train graduate students to be Goffmans? Note that there are a number of young sociologists doing this kind of work. Somehow they learned to do it, although not all of them equally well. The question of whether we can train people to do frame analysis really boils down to how well the enterprise is codified. If it remains a sociological art form, then only certain talented individuals with inclinations in this direction will grasp the underlying principles intuitively and be able to perform.

The more appropriate test is whether one can teach a conscientious clod to do this kind of analysis. After all, the most ordinary graduate student can be taught how to collect survey data and analyze it. There remain vast differences between the people who do this brilliantly and those who do it in a mechanical and mindless way, but one does not have to be brilliant to do an acceptable piece of survey research. It seems reasonable to ask that the same standard be applied to frame analysis as a genre.

To imagine how this might be done, I suggest the following exercise. Suppose a research center is created, dedicated to carrying out systematic study of social interaction using the intellectual apparatus of frame analysis. Think of such a Center as directly analogous to a Survey Research Center. Such Centers draw their raison d’etre from the fact that highly trained and talented people are in scarce supply and their time can be most profitably used by employing a division of labor in the research task. In practice, this means that the total research enterprise must be broken down into component steps, some of which can be performed by para-professionals. Thus, a Survey Research Center has a coding section, a field section, a sampling section, a computer section, and the like.

Each of these sub-parts needs a certain number of full-fledged professionals who are concerned with improving the technology of their particular aspect of the research enterprise. A design for drawing a national sample is a major task and there remain challenging, unsolved problems about the best way of doing it. By the same token, there are numerous subsidiary tasks involved such as block listing that do not require the training of a Ph.D. Developing codes is a fine art that cannot easily be delegated by the principal investigator but people can be trained to use the investigator’s categories in a reliable way. Furthermore, many different investigators may wish to code the same things—occupation of respondent, for example. Specialists in coding occupation can be trained and the investigator spared the task of training coders de novo for this repetitive part of the research enterprise. The result is that in a well functioning survey research operation, the principal investigator can focus on those aspects of the enterprise that most utilize his or her professional ability and can delegate a wide range of important tasks to a supporting cast.

There remain a number of primary tasks in any social research operation that cannot be readily delegated. These are, for the most part, tasks that are most difficult to train graduate students to do well. They concern the relatively uncodified portion of the research process—asking a good research question, figuring out a design that will yield a relatively unambiguous answer, and interpreting one’s results at the end. Graduate students...
typically struggle with these problems and learn to solve them in a relatively unsystematic way if indeed they learn to solve them at all. The host are distinguished from the ordinary ones precisely by their ability to handle these uncodified aspects of the process.

If a Frame Analysis Research Center (FARC) were created, could it operate in a fashion similar to a Survey Research Center? By this, I mean to allow for a substantial amount of uncodified, creative contribution from full-fledged professionals just as with any other kind of social research. But if no division of labor in the research enterprise is possible, if FARC must rely entirely on this creative input at all stages, then this is a serious problem indeed. The world is not sufficiently endowed with such creative people to begin with, they are expensive and time consuming to train, and if we can’t break the enterprise into component parts, then the only type of training we know is the long apprenticeship with a master.

The central problem that FARC would need to solve is the codification of the research process involved in frame analysis. To operate successfully, tentative, working solutions would need to be found to deal with a number of methodological issues. This is a major task, barely begun, and I mean to suggest only enough of how it might be done to persuade that it can be done.

Let’s start with the problem of sampling. The central problem that the sampling section of FARC would face is the problem of the unit of analysis. The most likely candidate for the basic sampling unit is a strip of activity, or ongoing interaction. If I were the head of the sampling section, I might start with an hour of video taped interaction as a primary sampling unit. An investigator would have enough money to pay for a sample of a given size—for example, 500 hours. The precise nature of the sample would, of course, depend on the nature of the problem but any FARC investigator would face the task of translating what he wants into a certain number of strips of type A, a certain number of type B, and so forth, adding up to the total he could afford.

The need for systematic sampling is as appropriate for FARC as it is for any other type of social research. It is not true, for example, that representative sampling is only relevant to a concern with verification and testing of knowledge as opposed to its discovery and the generation of insight. A systematic sample forces one to define the universe being examined in a precise way and frequently leads to the inclusion of members of this universe that were unexpected by the investigator. The possibility of surprise increases the probability of unexpected insights that are inconsistent with the investigator's conceptions or hunches. Similarly, frame analysis no less than other forms of research has the problem of identifying the universe to which its observations are intended to apply and the systematic sample forces one to face this problem.

Someone has to make the video tapes. This is a job for the field section. The problem of gaining access and rapport without seriously altering the frame of the activity being studied is a severe one. Nevertheless, anyone who has seen a Fred Wiseman film such as Law and Order or High School should need no convincing that this can be done. There is a body of technique here which, although we may not know it at the moment, seems just as knowable as the techniques involved in survey interviewing.

Having obtained the sample of video-taped interactions, our investigator does not want to spend his precious time wading through 500 hours of basic data, a large proportion of which may be irrelevant. It does not seem an overly ambitious task to train coders in distinguishing the relevant from the irrelevant. Here the concept of brackets—those punctuation marks of social interaction—may be very helpful. Coders can be trained to utilize the concept to isolate the strips of activity of relevance from adjacent activity that is out of frame. The location of the rim will vary depending on the problem being studied but there is no reason why the investigator has to perform this sorting into relevant and irrelevant material. If he cannot explain what is relevant to coders, he probably does not have it clearly enough defined in his own mind.

Within the subset of relevant material, an investigator would no doubt want to view a systematic sample of sufficient size that he has a good sense for the concrete data. I see absolutely no inherent reason why the investigator cannot suggest testable propositions based on this data and to work with it in a fully systematic way. If something seems too subtle for a coder to grasp, he can code the material himself or use more highly skilled coders. More often, what originally appears to have been excessive complexity will turn out to be vagueness and lack of conceptual clarity on the part of the investigator. Making formal in a way that is communicated to others is the theoretical slop. Clearly there is a need for systematic sample forces one to face this problem.

It is not true, for example, that representative sampling is only relevant to a concern with verification and testing of knowledge as opposed to its discovery and the generation of insight. A
FEATURE ESSAYS

Regulating the Poor, by Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, New York: Pantheon Books, 1971, 386 pp. $10.00 cloth.

William A. Muraskin *
Queens College/CUNY

Regulating the Poor is the most influential of the recent books expounding a "social control" interpretation of American society. The last few years have seen an outpouring of such studies dealing with justice (Anthony Platt), education (Michael Katz), political reform (Samuel Hays), and humanitarianism (Raymond Mohl) all of which share an entity to the "idealistic" interpretation of history which emphasizes the dominant role of ideas (usually of a "progressive" nature) in directing social change. The social control writers believe that most of the major reforms of the last 150 years were directed by the upper classes, primarily to control the lower classes. Humanitarian and reformist rhetoric notwithstanding, the real reason for "ameliorative" activity in favor of the average man has been the elite's fear of disruption from below. According to social control theorists, the elite has tried to protect itself and maintain its economic, political, and social advantages by a combination of tactics: manipulation and cooptation of the masses by shaping their opinions and world view; direct buying off of the population with short-term or long-term but inadequate benefits; use of repressive force (normally cloaked by and simultaneous with cooptive measures so as not to appear explicitly oppressive).

Regulating the Poor is the social control thesis in exceptionally clear and forceful form. While basically concerned with explaining the welfare explosion of the 1960s, Piven and Cloward use historical sources to create a powerful model of the forces and functions underlying relief systems. The use of the historical model is seductive because it not only gives clarity to a fragmented past, but this clarity of historical interpretation makes the authors' conception of contemporary America that much more compelling and inevitable.

The Piven and Cloward interpretation has been exceptionally well received among left-liberal and radical readers. Regulating the Poor has indeed become required reading for college students and professors concerned with the problem of urban poverty. While the acclaim has not been universal, (such old-style liberals as Nathan Glazer have been horrified) the dissenters have lacked the political credentials for their views to carry much weight with the left. Further, the weakness of the orthodox idealistic position, brought on by the glaring failures of humanitarian reform, has made opposition to the Piven and Cloward welfare thesis, or the social control theory of reform generally, an unpopular if not untenable position.

The basic thesis of Regulating the Poor is simple and powerful. It is that public relief serves two functions, to protect the social system by buying off the poor at times of social unrest, and to discipline the labor force into supporting the work ethic—-and thus tends to weaken the social system through demoralization rather than violence. Demoralization is ignored as long as lower class discontent is seen as immedi-