ERIC HOFFER: IMPLICATIONS FOR A SOCIAL

THEORY OF COMMUNICATION

by

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The idea for this paper first occurred to me when I was taking a course in persuasion from Professor Donn W. Parson. He suggested to me that Eric Hoffer's philosophy had not been analyzed from the perspective of communication and that this might be fruitful ground for research. In subsequent courses, Professor Parson introduced me to the theories of the symbolic interactionists and, thus, I developed the theoretical approach which I have used in this study--that of the social theory of communication. I am grateful for this background as well as the help and advice which Professor Parson has given me while serving as my advisor. I also would like to thank Professors Berg and Hamlin, members of my thesis committee, for their support of my efforts.

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<div align="right">J. A. F.</div>

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CHAPTER I: THE NATURE OF THE STUDY

The true prophet is not he who peers into the future
but he who reads and reveals the present.[1]

Contemporary American philosopher Eric Hoffer has been
labeled a "spokesman for our age." While Hoffer does not
claim to possess an unusual ability to "read and reveal the
present," in the past thirty years his writings and speaking
have received attention because they focus upon that fusion
of human nature with the past which creates the present.
Eric Hoffer talks about men, their relationships to one
another and to the world. He posits a general framework of
conflict which surrounds human striving for adjustment to
environment and to society; and in such a context, he argues
that men must search for self-awareness if they are to exist.
To many, Hoffer's analysis of man's plight in the modern age
appears to be the vision of a prophet--and to others his
ideas about human response to environment are unrealistic.
But because he initiates a "working-man's" approach to the
nature of the world and society, Hoffer lives as a spokesman
for the masses in the contemporary period.

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[1]Eric Hoffer, The Passionate State of Mind (New York:
Harper and Row, 1955), p. 133.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Hoffer's philosophy has received recognition, not only in America but throughout the world, because it represents the efforts of a common, uneducated man to conceptualize the form and nature of his world. His ideas about how men operate in their environment have been popularized through mass media and thus have become familiar to a large and heterogeneous audience. Because Hoffer has achieved fame as the author of a so-called "common man's philosophy," it seems relevant to view his philosophizing in terms of that which is necessary to all men--communication. It is my purpose in this study to consider Hoffer's philosophical position in terms of its implications for a theory of communication. It appears consistent that a theory which deals inherently with the manner in which men draw relationships to one another could be subject to analysis from the standpoint of communication, the quality which ultimately unites all men.

I will attempt to explicate the major assumptions of Hoffer's writings and their relationship to a theory of communication. Upon this basis, hopefully the role that communication plays in Hoffer's philosophy of man and the world will become evident.

Finally, I will analyze the suitability of Hoffer's conceptualization as a theory of man, as the basis for a theory of communication, and as an approach to contemporary society.

FOCUS OF THE STUDY

When Hoffer attempts to interpret the meaning of his world, his ideas range over a wide and diverse area. In this study my purpose is to consider his theorizing in terms of communication and to derive the subsequent implications held for a theory of communication. To accomplish this task, it is necessary to isolate the fundamental themes in Hoffer's writing and speaking which provide a basis for such an analysis; therefore the focus of the study will be on fundamental themes or "core concepts" which comprise the unifying thread between Hoffer's various areas of interest. These core concepts constitute the foundation of Hoffer's philosophy.

The initial emphasis in my treatment of Hoffer's work will be placed upon his conceptualization of the nature of man. This is perhaps the most basic element with which we should be concerned as it provides the underpinning for the whole of his theorizing.

Secondly, I will consider Hoffer's approach to man and change. Hoffer indicates that change is the central problem of our age, and his ideas about how man reacts to change as an inherent part of the world are also basic to his philosophy.

Finally, I will focus upon the implicit role of communication in Hoffer's world-view--his ideas about the nature of man and man's response to change which inherently involve

the concept of communication as it is defined by a social theory of communication.

The focus of this study will be upon the basic themes which are inherent to Hoffer's theorizing. I will center attention upon those ideas which underlie his approach to the nature of man and society, and the manner in which these ideas can be analyzed from the perspective of communication theory.

MATERIALS OF THE STUDY

PRIMARY SOURCES

There are a number of factors which contribute to the relative scarcity of primary source materials available to the analyst. In the first place, all of Hoffer's writing has been done within the last twenty years, and his greatest popularity has not been achieved until the last decade. At the same time, Hoffer composes very slowly and carefully, allowing each idea to mature and improve through revision. With few exceptions, he tends to shy away from the public spotlight; therefore the number of his publications and personal appearances has been kept to a minimum. His ideas and philosophy are most completely outlined in The True Believer, 1951; The Passionate State of Mind, 1955; The Ordeal of Change, 1963; The Temper of Our Time, 1967; and Working and Thinking on the Waterfront, a diary which he kept in 1958 and 1959 which was released in 1969.

Through the years Hoffer has also authored numerous
articles published in leading periodicals such as Harpers,
The Saturday Evening Post, Saturday Review, New York Times
Magazine, and The Reporter, among others. Most of these
articles, however, later appeared as chapters in his books.

In 1967, Hoffer twice appeared on the CBS Television
Network in interviews with CBS news analyst Eric Sevareid.
The first interview was broadcast on September 19, 1967,
and it was aired again in November of that year. Transcripts
of this interview with Sevareid are readily available. In
1965, Hoffer began a series of twelve half-hour interviews
with James Day which were shown nationally by the National
Educational Television Network. This series was called
"Conversations with Eric Hoffer."[2] In early 1968, Hoffer
began a syndicated column which initially was carried in
over two hundred newspapers across the country. The column
was called "Reflections." Transcripts of Hoffer's testimony
before the Committee on Government Operations of the Senate
Subcommittee on Investigations, May, 1969, are available
through the U. S. Government Printing Office.

SECONDARY SOURCES

The number of studies which attempt to analyze Hoffer's

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[2]I attempted to secure tapes or transcripts of these
interviews through the local NET outlet as well as the national
network; however my request was denied. I worked from notes
on the interviews and found that most of the discussions with
Day concerned ideas which Hoffer has developed in his books.

work are also few. Perhaps the most noteworthy attempt to
define Hoffer as an individual and as a writer has been
made by Calvin Tomkins, former staff-writer for The New
Yorker. Tomkins' initial study of Hoffer was published
in The New Yorker, January 7, 1967.[3] This essay was event-
ually expanded into a book, Eric Hoffer: An American Odyssey,
published in 1968.[4] Reviews of Hoffer's work can also be
found in various literary journals.[5]

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF HOFFER

Many of the specific details about Hoffer's background
and life emerge in magazine and television interviews and
in the books and articles which he has authored. The most
complete and thorough attempts to trace the course of his
life have been made, as I mentioned earlier, by former New
Yorker staff writer Calvin Tomkins.

One of the prime factors which has caused observers to
stress the unique position held by Eric Hoffer in America
today is his lack of exposure to the academic tradition.
Although he is one of the most popular writers in this
country, Hoffer has received virtually no formal education.
He was born in New York City in 1902; his parents were

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[3]Calvin Tomkins, "Profiles: The Creative Situation,"
The New Yorker, (January, 1967), pp. 34-36+.

[4]Calvin Tomkins, Eric Hoffer: An American Odyssey,
(New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1968).

[5]To my knowledge there is one study of Hoffer currently
in progress. It is a Ph.D. dissertation authored by Paul
Batty of the University of Illinois.

Alsatian immigrants who had come to America only a few
years before. His father worked as a carpenter and cabinet-
maker, and Hoffer calls him the "small-town atheist or
intellectual."[6] The household was well-stocked with all
types of books, and Hoffer claims that he could read easily
in both English and German by the age of five years. His
mother died when he was only seven years old, and shortly
afterwards Hoffer lost his sight. He was to remain completely
blind until the age of fifteen when his sight returned as
mysteriously as it had gone.

During the time of his blindness, Hoffer never attended
school. When his sight returned, he began to read every
book that he could find. He remarks that he "developed the
bad habit of swallowing any book I liked in one gulp instead
of savoring it slowly."[7] A second-hand bookstore near his
home had acquired a large collection of books from an
auctioned estate, and Hoffer managed to read almost all of
them during a three year period. He claims that in this
way he acquired knowledge about many facets of life to which
he had never been exposed and probably would never have known.

When his father died in 1920, Hoffer was alone with
little knowledge of what it takes to get along in the world.
He decided to leave New York for California because he had
only four objectives in mind: "He wanted to leave New York,

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[6]Tomkins, _Eric Hoffer: An American Odyssey_, p. 7.

[7]"Literary Stevedore," _The New Yorker_, (April 28, 1951),
p. 21.

he wanted to work outdoors, he did not want to be dependent on a boss, and he wished to remain poor."[8] His first few months in Los Angeles were spent on Skid Row where he occupied himself by reading. Finally, he recognized that his ability to survive would depend upon his willingness to work. He secured occasional odd jobs and worked as a migrant farm worker in California throughout much of the thirties. In 1941, he headed for San Francisco and the waterfront where he has remained ever since. In those early years Hoffer worked, at one time or another, at nearly every type of hard labor which can be imagined; yet his desire to learn and to read was never abated. He claims that he has held library cards for nearly every library of any size in California, and he frequently bought used books to carry with him during the long months spent in the goldfields.

During these years which Hoffer spent with people he calls the "undesirables" of American society, he began to reflect upon the qualities of human nature which allow men to be transformed into "True Believers." It was during this period that he began to form ideas about the nature of men as individuals and men in the mass.

During the thirties, Hoffer filled notebooks with his thoughts and quotations from the things which he read. He wrote two novels dealing with his experiences on Skid Row

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[8]Eugene Burdick, "Eric Hoffer: Epigrammatist on the Waterfront," The Reporter, 16 (February 21, 1957), p. 43.

and in the migrant camps, although only one person has ever read them.[9]

In 1938, Hoffer became interested in the content of a magazine, Common Ground, which sought to explain America to foreigners and vice versa. He wrote a letter to the magazine which was read by Margaret Anderson, an associate editor. She forwarded it to Harper and Brothers. In her letters to Hoffer, Miss Anderson encouraged him to continue his writing and thus provided him with the motivation to begin collecting material for what eventually became The True Believer. In correspondence with Miss Anderson, Hoffer explained that he did his writing during the course of an average day, while waiting for freight trains and during lunch breaks. Occasionally, he would take a day off to collect his thoughts and to organize his notes. After he discarded the inappropriate material, the remainder usually amounted to a few paragraphs.[10] This method allowed him to collect many short, concise statements on a variety of issues surrounding a central theme.

Once he was in San Francisco, Hoffer readily adapted to the hard work of the waterfront, and today he feels that many of his best ideas originated there. He frequented the book shops and libraries of San Francisco. Slowly the shape

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[9]Tomkins, Eric Hoffer: An American Odyssey, p. 27.

[10]Letter quoted by Tomkins, Eric Hoffer: An American Odyssey, p. 28.

of The True Believer began to mature. Much of his work in
polishing and finishing the ideas was done in Golden Gate
Park where he still spends much of his time today. The
True Believer was published by Harper and Row in 1951.

With the popularity of The True Believer, Hoffer's
fame increased, but his style of life changed little. He
still lives alone in a small, bare apartment in San Francisco.
The rest of his books appeared between 1955 and 1967. In all
of these books he considers various aspects of the nature of
men, the mass, and human response to change. Harper and
Row's most recent release of Hoffer's work is Working and
Thinking on the Waterfront, a diary which Hoffer kept during
1958 and 1959 recording his experiences and thoughts.

With the publication of each additional book and the
increasing demand for him to appear as a speaker, the se-
clusion which Hoffer had always sought began to be a rare
commodity. In 1964 he agreed to spend one day a week at
the University of California at Berkeley where he would be
available to talk with students. He lectured there three
or four times that year. Through these experiences Hoffer
became more aware of the points where he disagreed with so-
called proponents of the "Student Movement." In 1965, the
series of NET interviews with James Day began. His popu-
larity experienced a dramatic increase, however, after the
national broadcast of his interviews with Eric Sevareid in
1967. For many Americans, the eloquent longshoreman was a

prophet, and his notoriety won him a visit to the White House where he conversed with President Lyndon Johnson. Mutual admiration of the other as a distinct personality brought Johnson and Hoffer together, and subsequently Hoffer testified before President Johnson's violence commission in October of 1968 and before the Senate Subcommittee on Investigations studying violence in America in May of 1969.

In 1967, Hoffer retired from the waterfront and continued his solitary existence. He still follows much the same routine that has characterized his life ever since he arrived in San Francisco. He reads, writes, and walks for miles throughout the city and Golden Gate Park. Infrequently he accepts speaking engagements, but the primary focus of his life is the creation and refinement of ideas which are extensions of his major themes concerning the nature of man and society. The popularity of his books and his widespread fame fail to cause him to distinguish between himself and the average longshoreman. Eric Hoffer speaks for the common man.

STYLE

Hoffer's characteristic form of expression is the aphorism. He defines humanity in terms of generalities. His common method of composition is to express an important idea in less than fifty words. He maintains that in this way it is possible to eliminate superfluous material and

pare the idea down to its vital core. As a result, most of
Hoffer's sentences seem to express ideas that are complete
in and of themselves--his sentences do not necessarily rely
upon the context of the paragraph or chapter for completion.
Hoffer's tendency to go immediately to the crux of a problem
has provoked the comment that:

> His abstractions are those of the moralist and the
> aphorist, with no scientific pretensions, and they
> have little in common with the neo-scholastic fog
> that has obscured large areas of social thought
> where the development of analytical categories has
> become an end in itself, a major industry devoted,
> in Kingsley Amis' wonderful phrase, to "casting
> pseudo-light on non-problems."[11]

He talks about the problems which he feels affect most
working Americans, and he does this best as an aphroist--
one who admittedly operates with limited knowledge of the
world's complexity, but whose perception cuts through the
haze of issues which confront him.

His method of presentation, while irritating to many
scholars because of his reliance upon generalization, is
also startling because it is free from the condescending
tone of much "scholarly" literature. Hoffer's guiding
principle is to say what must be said in the fewest number
of words. The material which comprises his statements is
directly drawn from the substance of his own experience and
observations.

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[11]Joseph Featherstone, "Hoffer as Historian," New
Republic, 156:2 (June 3, 1967), p. 30.

Hoffer has been called "a romantic with his wits about him."[12] His romanticism is rooted in his idealistic concept of the nature of democracy and the mass, his love for his country and fellow workers; but his skepticism and wariness of so-called "intellectuals" and aristocrats whom he perceives as being dangerous to the welfare of the mass seems, at times, to reverse the impact of his romanticism.

PRECIS OF EACH CHAPTER

CHAPTER II

Chapter II develops Hoffer's approach to the nature of man. His approach is a product of the traditional mode of western philosophy which posits dualism as well as continuity between man and nature. Hoffer accepts the continuity between man and nature, and yet he pictures man involved in a never-ending struggle to detach himself from the rule of nature. Man is an "unfinished animal," driven to finish himself by establishing his superiority over the natural environment.

"Humanization" is Hoffer's term for the process of man's separation from nature. Humanization is the record of man's progress through time. Dehumanization is the opposing force which finds man being subsumed, once again, to the irrational, instinctual pattern of nature. To Hoffer,

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[12]Garry Wills, "Eric Hoffer's True Beliefs," National Review, 14 (June 18, 1963), p. 502.

it is man's realization that he is an unfinished animal which dooms him to be, forever, a stranger in his world.

Man's subconscious knowledge of the fact that he is an incomplete animal produces feelings of frustration and insecurity. It is Hoffer's contention that this self-dissatisfaction promotes either desire for self-renunciation or proclivity for action. Such behavior generates a kind of "rebirth" for man. Often this rebirth is achieved through collective action or fanaticism.

Finally, Hoffer's view of the nature of man presupposes a human desire for an ordered or structured environment. He operates on the premise that man establishes and seeks to realize "ultimates" in the form of concepts or material goals. Thus the domain of human existence is structured by human desires to live in an ordered environment.

CHAPTER III

This chapter deals with Hoffer's notion of change and the relationship between man and change. Hoffer functions on a number of levels when he considers change; however his basic conceptualization is that of drastic, revolutionary change which is frequently exogenous to the individual. His analysis can be separated into two general divisions: man as a responder to change and man as an instigator of change.

To Hoffer, three general patterns of behavior result when man faces drastic change: man is exposed to crises

in self-esteem, he is driven to desire action and self-realization, and change prompts man to seek after social order.

On the other hand, man is often driven to seek change due to the state of his self-concept and that of the social order. Hoffer analyzes the mass movement as one of the mechanisms through which men seek change.

CHAPTER IV

This segment of the study attempts to isolate aspects of Hoffer's theorizing which could be considered to have value for the communication theorist. My perspective, or basis for analysis, was drawn from the work of the symbolic interactionists. The argument of symbolic interactionists who propose social theories of communication is that the nature of society grows out of the way in which men use symbols or communicate. The basis which I provide for application of the social theory to Hoffer's work is organized around these four propositions: (1) man is a social, symbol-using animal; (2) man communicates through symbolic forms; (3) identification is a key concept in communication; and (4) man's symbol-usage creates social order.

Hoffer views man as a social creature who derives his identity from the social and physical environment. He can not survive as a single entity. Hoffer also differentiates between man and other animals because man is a symbol-user.

He then can be viewed as dealing with the symbolic means through which men communicate--both verbal and non-verbal. Because human striving for identification is an important part of Hoffer's theorizing, he analyzes the mass movement as an obvious means through which men seek rebirth and a distinct identity. Finally, I discuss an interpretation in which Hoffer can be viewed as describing human attempts to establish social order through symbol-usage.

CHAPTER V

Eric Hoffer does not provide a detailed communication model, but he does describe in general terms how men function in the world through verbal and non-verbal symbols. He is concerned, as are those who propose social theories of communication, with the general foundations of human behavior. It is my thinking that the social theory of communication provides the most appropriate analytical perspective for approaching the works of Eric Hoffer.

Fundamentally, Hoffer's view of the nature of man necessitates that men be viewed in a communicative situation. His theories about human nature and behavior can clearly be placed within the context of a social theory of communication because Hoffer implicitly talks about the way that men relate to each other and exist through symbolic means. However, the whole tone of Hoffer's philosophy of man is inherently colored by his particular "assumptive world." Hoffer's experience in and approach to his world are

decidedly limited; perhaps herein lies the basis of his
tendency to depict often complex and nebulous issues with
the decisive vocabulary of his clear-cut view of man and
the world. Hoffer frequently over-extends the prevalence
of the so-called "True Believer" psychology in modern
society. His analysis of man and change allows him no
other alternatives. His attempts to understand the world
in which he lives are definitely influenced by his initial
world-view, and the limitations of this world-view place
restrictions upon the applicability of his analysis.

CHAPTER II: HOFFER'S VIEW OF THE NATURE OF MAN

In the introduction to his book, The New World of Philosophy, Abraham Kaplan comments that:

> For the business of philosophy, as I see it, always was--and remains--to articulate the principles by which a man can live: not just as a scientist, citizen, religionist, or whatever, but as the whole man that he is.[1]

Kaplan further contends that this function is not the sole domain of the so-called "professional philosopher," but it can be performed by any individual. What we describe when we refer to an individual's "philosophy" is his world-view, his orientation to the realm of experience, the meanings he ascribes to events, the values he holds, and the standards which guide his choice-making.[2] It is within this context that we can begin to examine the philosophy of Eric Hoffer through reference to his approach to the nature of man which is basic to the whole of his theorizing. In this way, we can attempt to define Hoffer's relationship to the worlds of experience, meaning, and value that shapes the character of his philosophizing and, more particularly, his thoughts on man engaged in interaction with other men.

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[1]Abraham Kaplan, The New World of Philosophy (New York: Vintage Books, Div. of Random House, 1961), p. 4.

[2]Ibid., p. 5.

THE NATURE OF MAN

BACKGROUND

The key to Hoffer's theory of the nature of man re-
volves around man's origin and development in relation to
the world of natural phenomena. He contends that a dich-
otomy exists between men endowed with the power of reflective
thought, on the one hand, and nature consisting of non-
rational forces and creatures, on the other. I will briefly
discuss the context from which he derives such an approach.

This orientation can be seen as a manifestation of
traditional western thought. Kaplan refers to this trad-
itional pattern when he points out that western civilization
has customarily posited a continuity between man and nature;
but, at the same time, it has maintained a dualism between
the two which most eastern philosophies never included.[3]
The origins of this dualism have been isolated in the body
of Greek thought, particularly in the philosophy of Plato
where "rational consciousness as such becomes for the first
time in human history, a differentiated psychic function."[4]
The transition in emphasis occurs, according to William
Barrett, during the period marked by the appearance of the
earliest Presocratic philosophers.

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[3]Kaplan, The New World of Philosophy, p. 9.

[4]William Barrett, Irrational Man: A Study in Existential
Philosophy (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., 1962),
p. 80.

Early Ionian thinkers moved toward rationalism in their efforts to describe the nature of the world which they experienced. Yet they did not distinguish between experience on the level of the physical sciences and that of strictly human experience.[5] The Presocratics asked "What is the world made of?" and formulated their answers from the realm of natural phenomena. As far as we know today, they did not appear to make significant distinctions between the level of human experience and that of natural phenomena. This distinction was crystallized by Plato and Aristotle who pointed to the rationality of man which enables him to examine scientifically the workings of nature.

Thus, man is located within the natural order but possesses the characteristic of reason which allows him to examine his surroundings. The traditional dualism of the West is indicated in Greek thought but developed to a fuller extent in the Hebraist philosophy of Christianity. To St. Augustine, the combination of faith and reason, characterizing the man who asks "Who am I?", puts him clearly outside the boundaries of the animal world.[6] The dualism between man and nature is completely formulated.

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[5]G. S. Kirk and J. E. Raven, The Presocratic Philosophers: A Critical History with a Selection of Texts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 73.

[6]Barrett, Irrational Man, p. 96.

THE UNFINISHED ANIMAL

It is at this point where Hoffer's thinking begins.
He claims that the Hebrews were the first to distinguish
a clear-cut separation between man and nature.[7] This
assertion is based on reference to the fact that Hebrew
thought has traditionally emphasized use of the power of
reason in combination with faith and hope as the means
whereby man separates himself from nature.[8]

In keeping with traditional western dualism, Hoffer
accepts the continuity of man and nature as a function of
Darwinian thought. He pictures man's origin in the realm
of nature but maintains that, "it was only by cutting him-
self off from the nature that man became what he is."[9] Man
only became human insofar as he was able to extricate him-
self from the dominance of nature's rule. Man is engaged
in a never-ending struggle to detach himself from the
irrationality of natural forces; thus the particular
position he occupies in relation to nature is responsible
for his uniqueness and creativity.

Hoffer's most extensive analysis of this idea is found
in an essay "The Unnaturalness of Human Nature" in The Ordeal
of Change. Here he states that man's uniqueness, "the fan-

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[7]Eric Hoffer, "The Unnaturalness of Human Nature," The
Ordeal of Change (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), pp. 125-
126.

[8]Ibid.

[9]Calvin Tomkins, Eric Hoffer: An American Odyssey
(New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1968), p. 62.

tastic quality of human nature," is partially the result
of his "unfinishedness."[10] In other words, man was placed
by God in this world in an unfinished state, lacking the
instinctual equipment through which animals are completely
adapted to their environment. Without the specialized
organs which allow other beings to survive, man is forced
to finish himself through technology and to adapt the en-
vironment to himself. Hoffer states that:

> The unnaturalness of human nature should offer a clue
> to the central meaning of man's ascent through the
> millennia: It was the result of a striving to break
> loose from nature and get out from under the iron
> laws which dominate it.[11]

This striving, which is termed a "process of reflection,"
was initially motivated by man's self-awareness, by his
realization that he was imperfectly equipped to cope with
his surroundings. While at first he worshipped the creatures
who appeared to be more favored than he, gradually man dis-
covered that he could create substitutes for their adapt-
ations. Thus began man's attempt to overtake and subdue
the forces of nature. It was at this point that man was
separated from nature:

> Seen thus, the human uniqueness of an aspiration
> or an achievement should perhaps be gauged by how much
> it accentuates the distinction between human affairs
> and nonhuman nature;. . .[12]

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[10]Hoffer, The Ordeal of Change, p. 118.

[11]Ibid., p. 119.

[12]Ibid., p. 120.

Man's uniqueness is the result of the "never-ending task of finishing himself, of transcending the limits of his physical being."[13]

Secondly, the peculiar position of the human being in the world is the source of his creativity. Hoffer maintains that because animals are endowed with instinctual equipment, action follows perception in a mechanical fashion with unfaltering speed. However, man's lack of "instinctual automatism" produces an interval of hesitation. He says that:

> . . . but in man there is an interval of faltering and groping; and this interval is the seedbed of the images, ideas, dreams, aspirations, irritations, longings, and forebodings which are the warp and woof of the creative process.[14]

Therefore, man is a creature inadequately equipped to survive instinctually in his surroundings; but he is endowed with the capacity for reflective thought and thereby becomes a unique and creative being, set apart in certain respects from nature.

He argues that man remains more closely akin to the animal world when he is "grubbing for necessities," but he becomes "uniquely human when he reaches out for the superfluous and extravagant."[15] In Hoffer's approach, the roots of art reach back to the earliest stages of the pro-

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[13]Hoffer, The Ordeal of Change, p. 119.

[14]Ibid., p. 129.

[15]Eric Hoffer, Working and Thinking on the Waterfront (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), p. 73.

cess of humanization (man detaching himself from nature);
thus there can be no human society without art.

THE PROCESS OF HUMANIZATION

Eric Hoffer posits that the process of humanization is
grounded in man's realization that he is an unfinished, ill-
equipped animal. When man was forced to create substitutes
for the inborn equipment bestowed upon other creatures in
nature by God, his successes launched him into a contest
with nature for supremacy with respect to his own being and
the environment.

> Man became what he is not with the aid, but in
> spite, of nature. Humanization meant breaking away
> from nature, getting out from underneath the iron
> necessities which dominate nature. By the same
> token, dehumanization means the reclamation of man
> by nature. It means the return of nature. It is
> significant that humanization had its start in the
> fact that man was an unfinished, defective animal.[16]

As Hoffer becomes more deeply involved in the dis-
cussion of man as an unfinished animal and the process of
humanization, however, it becomes apparent that he sees
the essence of the conflict between man and nature evidenced
in nature's ability to impose catastrophe on human beings
through the occurrence of floods, earthquakes, famines, and
other events which result in the "massacre of innocents."[17]
It is on this level that he sees the struggle most vividly

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[16]Eric Hoffer, The Temper of Our Time (New York:
Harper and Row, 1967), p. 80.

[17]Ibid., p. 80.

depicted. While man has made great strides in his attempts to subdue nature by producing more or less stable access to the basic essentials of life, the significant battles are fought and remain to be fought when man tries to drain the swamp, move the mountain, or prevent the flood. This is the aspect of the struggle between man and nature that Hoffer finds most notable and from which he draws his realization that, "the contest between man and nature has been the central drama of the universe."[18]

According to Hoffer, the history of mankind amounts to the history of the process of humanization--to the history through time of man's efforts and his progress to establish himself as a breed apart from the rest of nature. The process will be a never-ending one because man will never be completely finished within himself. Man will never become complete because he is not only an unfinished animal, but he is an unfinished man. Human uniqueness is something that must be initially achieved and then preserved. "Nature is always around and within us, ready to reclaim us and sweep away all that man has wrought and achieved."[19] Man's objective throughout his lifetime is to guard himself against return to the irrational forces of nature. The essence of humanization is a situation in which man is largely in control of his own being and not subject to the

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[18]Hoffer, The Temper of Our Time, p. 80.

[19]Ibid., p. 81.

control of irrational natural forces. Humanization is the
progress of the conscious man.

In opposition to humanization is the process of de-
humanization. Hoffer implies that man has represented the
forces of dehumanization in his concept of the devil.

> . . . our devil is not a man disguised as a beast but
> a beast disguised as a man. What is the significance
> of this reversion? Perhaps the devil personifies not
> the nature that is around us but the animal nature,
> the dark primordial impulses, sealed in the sub-
> conscious cellars of our mind.[20]

When he is controlled by the irrational lusts and instincts
of nature, man is dehumanized. Human affairs are typified
by the contest between God and man on one side and the
devil and nature on the other. When undergoing humani-
zation, mankind sets itself apart from the rest of nature,
and the individual operates as a conscious being. Dehuman-
ization is the disintegration of the gap between man and
nature, as man falls once again under nature's control.
To Hoffer, the process of dehumanization is most typically
represented by man's desire to subdue, and thus to dehuman-
ize, his fellow men. This desire finds its most fertile
breeding ground in the modern city where men are engaged
in a continual struggle for power, the power to control
other men. This power is "power to dehumanize" as men
strive to strip their fellows of their individuality. He
adds that the city "has been the breeding ground of all

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[20]Hoffer, _Working and Thinking on the Waterfront_, p. 112.

movements and developments that tend to press man back into
the matrix of nature from which he has risen."[21] Hoffer
cites Gobineau's race theories, Marx's economic determin-
ism, Nietzsche's superman concept, and the methods of Stalin
and Hitler, among others, as examples of the dehumanization
of men for these theories equate man with nature and strip
the individual of his human uniqueness.

The result of man's perception of his unfinished
status and his never-ending struggle to detach himself
from the rest of nature lies in the fact, as Hoffer sees
it, that man will forever be a stranger in his world. Man
became a stranger when he applied his reflective thought to
the rest of nature and thus became human. Throughout eter-
nity he will perceive his incompletion and thereby desire
to conquer that nature to which he is so poorly adapted.
Perhaps the motivation for this human desire to command
nature can be found in man's accompanying, sub-conscious
wish to create a security and identity for himself within
his environment. As Hoffer has pointed out, "To feel wholly
at home in this world is to partake of the nature of plants
and animals."[22] The complex and unpredictable quality of
human nature distinguishes it from predictable, orderly,
physical nature which is bound by discernable rules and laws.

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[21]Hoffer, The Temper of Our Time, p. 82.

[22]Hoffer as cited by Calvin Tomkins in Eric Hoffer:
An American Odyssey, p. 85.

MAN'S RESPONSE TO HIS WORLD

The manner in which man reacts to his existence as an unfinished animal, separated in part from the rest of the zoological order of nature, sets the stage in Hoffer's thinking for the later development of his central theme concerning the nature of man's response to change in his environment. A large part of his theory deals with the presence of the frustrated or dissatisfied individual in society. This dissatisfaction originates, as Hoffer indicates in a number of his aphorisms published in The Passionate State of Mind, in man's conscious or subconscious realization that he is incomplete. He claims at one point that most passions involve a "shrinking away from the self" or a "dissatisfaction with ourselves." Fundamentally, these passions have their roots in man's sense of incompletion and insecurity.[23]

> What ails the frustrated? It is the consciousness of an irremediably blemished self. Their chief desire is to escape that self--and it is this desire which manifests itself in a propensity for united action and self-sacrifice.[24]

While this frustration does not always reach proportions which prompt the fanatical behavior that Hoffer attributes to his "True Believer," it does exist universally as an aspect of motivation for human action and creativity.

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[23]Eric Hoffer, The Passionate State of Mind (New York: Harper and Row, 1955), p. 1.

[24]Eric Hoffer, The True Believer (New York: Harper and Row, 1951), p. 58.

In Hoffer's analysis, self-dissatisfaction in general
promotes either a desire for self-renunciation or a pro-
clivity for action. The drive for self-renunciation is
usually mirrored in an intense desire which Hoffer views
as "a desire to be different from what we are. . . There
is even in the most selfish passion a large element of
self-abnegation."[25] The individual wants to lose his old
identity, to forget his past inadequacies. Frequently his
search for rebirth prompts him to attempt to rid himself
of his former identity through collectivization and the
mass. Hoffer does not claim that each individual, aware
of the inadequacy and lack of environmental adaptation of
the human species, is motivated as a direct result of this
awareness to lose himself in the collectivity. He does
posit this condition as a general context through which we
can approach man's struggle with his environment and his
tendencies toward self-renunciation and activity in the
presence of frustration. He maintains that by renouncing
himself, man attempts to escape his real problems. When
he unites with others in a form of mass activity, he adopts
the concerns of the mass as a substitute for the reality of
his individual burdens. These substitutions are of less
real importance to him and, therefore, are easier to face.
Thus, integration into a group effort of some type provides

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[25]Hoffer, The Passionate State of Mind, p. 4.

the individual with both a release from and a substitute for the realities of his former identity.

Hoffer asserts consistently that throughout history the so-called "weak" of the human species, those not endowed with exceptional ability or achievements, have purged their self-hatred through daring and effective forms of collective activity. Here again, the human species is differentiated from the rest of the zoological order by the mere fact that, contrary to the strict rule of "survival of the fittest," relatively weak humans are often destined to play an important role in the history of man.

He also views dissatisfaction-with-self as a basis for human action. In The Passionate State of Mind Hoffer observes: "The craving to change the world is perhaps a reflection of the craving to change ourselves."[26] Propensity for action, in Hoffer's opinion, is often symptomatic of an inner turmoil or imbalance caused by the individual's rejection of his self-image and his surroundings. In this area as well, Hoffer sees man's peculiar position with relation to the environment as the general framework through which we should view his proclivity for action:

> Since it was man's unfitness--his being an outcast and an outsider on this planet--which started him on his unique course, it should not seem anomalous that misfits and outsiders are often in the forefront of human endeavor. . . The impulse to

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[26]Hoffer, The Passionate State of Mind, p. 66.

escape an untenable situation often prompts human
beings not to shrink back but to plunge ahead.[27]

Hoffer stresses the tendency for the single individual to
remain off-balance by saying: "The individual on his own
remains a chronically incomplete and unbalanced entity."[28]
Through his strivings to create security and an identity
for himself, man becomes creative. If he can not realize
himself through this mechanism, he becomes a "breeding
cell of frustration." Action exists as the reaction to
imbalance and rejection of self.

Man's response to his environment must also be consid-
ered in terms of social change as it relates to his desire
for self-renunciation or action. The factor of change is
a dominant theme in Hoffer's work which will be considered
at length in another chapter; however, a few significant
points should be discussed here.

In the first place, Hoffer asserts that desire for re-
birth is a characteristic human response to the existence
of frustration or dissatisfaction. In The Temper of Our
Time, he maintains that drastic changes overtake entire
populations with increasing frequency in the contemporary
period. As society is automatically modified in response
to this change, then:

> Here the sense of rebirth and a new identity is
> created by mass movements, mass migrations, or by

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[27]Hoffer, The Ordeal of Change, p. 126.

[28]Ibid., p. 130.

a plunge into the perpetual becoming of sheer
action and hustling.[29]

Thus, we find in recent times a trend, becoming more common,
toward "mass" rebirth as exemplified by nationalistic move-
ments and mass migrations (such as the movement of Jews to
Israel and European migrations to America).

Secondly, Hoffer states that under certain conditions,
when men are not presented with adequate opportunities for
effective action or endowed with a tradition of self-
reliance, drastic change can lead to a propensity for
fanaticism and revolutionary attitudes. This occurs to
such an extreme that the process of dehumanization is set
in motion. To Hoffer, action as a result of fanatical
motivation and revolutionary mass movements necessarily
lead to the degradation of human spirit which comprises
dehumanization.

· An important aspect of the process of dehumanization
is the desire to have power over and to control other men.
In Hoffer's terminology, "power" represents the dark forces
of dehumanization and connotes suppression. He uses the
term with a negative connotation, akin to the sense with
which many people use the word "propaganda." The human
desire for power over nature is seen as an early stage in
man's struggle to detach himself from nature. Soon after
the initial introduction of this primary motivation, man

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[29]Hoffer, The Temper of Our Time, p. 10.

began to realize that even greater satisfaction could be gained from the exercise of power over his fellow men. "Power, whether exercised over matter or over man, is partial to simplification."[30] This simplification involves the fact that those in power attempt to equate human nature with physical nature, and thereby they reduce men to the state of animals. "Absolute power," Hoffer adds, "tends to turn people into matter."[31]

Even in the free or democratic society, the tendency for certain men to strive for power over their fellows exists, but in democratic society lies another differentiation between the human community and animal order. Hoffer idealistically claims that leadership in a democratic government is diversified; therefore it can be distinguished from the rest of nature which is organized on the basis of the absolute dictatorship of the strong. Thus it would appear as if the so-called "free" society, when compared with other forms of human organization, would represent the greatest departure from the rule of nature. The role that "power politics" plays in American society is recognized by Hoffer, but his faith in the basic concepts underlying American democracy and the equality of opportunity it proposes causes him to maintain steadfast optimism.

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[30]Hoffer, The Ordeal of Change, p. 122.

[31]Hoffer, Working and Thinking on the Waterfront, p. 152.

Man's desire to control others may contain elements of a dehumanizing nature, but Hoffer notes a brighter side of the picture in the humanizing influences of man's artistic creativity and inventiveness.

THE SEARCH FOR AN ULTIMATE

A theme which Hoffer presupposes throughout much of his analysis but never discusses explicitly concerns the hierarchal structuring of society. As will be seen through discussion of Hoffer's approach to social change, much of his theory is built on the premise that man establishes and seeks to realize ultimates in the form of concepts or material goals. When Hoffer does speak directly of this point, he usually draws his examples from the doctrines of Christianity. He points out in The Ordeal of Change that:

> God making could be a part of the process by which a society realizes its aspirations: it first embodies them in the conception of a particular God, and then proceeds to imitate that God.[32]

He argues that the creation of a Christian God was in large part responsible for the developmental course of Occidental society. In other words, the West had to first formulate a God which was a "scientist and technician" before it could create a society dominated by these ideas. Hoffer speculates that perhaps man constructs his god-terms in light of his desires and dreams--the things which he wishes he could be.

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[32]Hoffer, The Ordeal of Change, p. 75.

The formulation of ultimate terms is not restricted to the field of the theologian, however. Hoffer suggests that perhaps every era may need to construct, at least partially, its own gods. He notes that there have been times in history when the assertion that an intangible God exists and is to be sought would satisfy mankind. In contemporary times, though, men would rather embody their hopes and strivings in the form of more concrete or material object-ives. Thus we find men seeking after monetary and material ultimates. It is suggested that perhaps a desire for tang-ible gods is rooted in man's lack of faith in the future; that the contemporary need for a concrete idol is sympto-matic of the hopelessness of our age.[33] With the disin-tegration of established religion as the central focus of all society, man is still concerned with the salvation of his soul, even though his strivings may be couched in term-inology foreign to religion. Hence, other means of "soul-saving" have been developed and this leads to increasing fanaticism in all walks of life. In other words, man begins to construct and to realize ultimates in secular areas, utilizing the same religious fervor that we would have applied to his strivings to please the Christian God. It seems apparent to Hoffer that if the masses are left alone, they will tend to construct their hierarchies and to develop their ultimates in accordance with their work; whereas, the

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[33]Hoffer, The Passionate State of Mind, p. 99.

intellectual is more comfortable and creative in the midst of an aristocratic social order which determines his rank and accords him dignity.[34]

The implication is, however, as indicated by the tone of Hoffer's thinking, that the universe of human life is structured from the very beginning by some type of motivation, whether it is to become dominant in a struggle with nature or to idealize a certain type of god. The problem with contemporary society is that it has abandoned traditional religious gods in favor of secularized searchings, often characterized by fanaticism.

A major distinction between human nature and physical nature is that the latter runs according to predictable and prescribed rules while the former is totally unpredictable, complex, and impossible to foresee. There is a great lack of depth to the inherently superficial human personality.

> Man's being is neither profound nor sublime. To search for something deep underneath the surface in order to explain human phenomena is to discard the nutritious outer layer for a nonexistent core.[35]

In a number of instances, Hoffer speaks of the "uniformity of the mass." In The True Believer, he repeatedly makes the statement that all mass movements draw from the same "type of mind."

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[34]Hoffer, Working and Thinking on the Waterfront, p. 117.

[35]Hoffer, The Passionate State of Mind, p. 62.

> The reason that man is so fantastic a creature is
> that he is so superficial. . . The sudden drastic
> transformations of which he is capable are due to
> the fact that his complex differentiation and the
> tensions which shape his attitudes are wholly sur-
> face phenomena.[36]

We can not say that because human nature is complex and

unpredictable there is a profound being lurking under the

skin of each individual. Human nature may be complex as

a result of the formation of intricate attitudinal patterns

(those situations which combine to give rise to attitudes);

however man himself is a superficial being characterized

by barely submerged passions. He operates in a world in

which questions have no final answers.

> . . . basic human problems can have no final
> solutions, our freedom, justice, equality, etc.
> are far from absolute, and the good life is
> compounded of half measures, compromises, lesser
> evils, and gropings toward the perfect.[37]

The human being, emotively equipped, may not be complex

within himself, but when he is confronted with the external

trappings of his complex world and forced to make choices,

using his God-given rational ability, the intricacy of the

situation increases. Eric Hoffer contends that when it is

realized that man operates in a realm where the ultimate

solutions to his problems may never be found, acknowledg-

ment of his unique position should follow.

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[36]Hoffer, The Passionate State of Mind, p. 123.

[37]Hoffer, The Temper of Our Time, p. 103.

CHAPTER III: HOFFER'S VIEW OF MAN AND CHANGE

Perhaps the most significant aspect of Hoffer's

approach to the nature of man is his conceptualization of

the relationship between man and change.

> To know the central problem of an age is to have our
> fingers on a thread of continuity through the welter
> of willful events and unforeseen crises. It is my
> assumption that the main difficulty and challenge of
> our age is drastic change. . . Yet it is becoming
> evident that, no matter how desirable, drastic
> change is the most difficult and dangerous experience
> mankind has undergone.[1]

In the course of man's never-ending struggle against dehuman-

ization, change functions to promote the cause of nature and

human instability. The effect of such a force on the human

condition will be the subject of this discussion.

In order to analyze Hoffer's concept of man and change,

however, it is first necessary to determine the type of

phenomenon with which he is concerned. Students of social

change have demonstrated that there exists a number of

levels on which change can be approached. For instance,

the analyst can consider change in terms of the macrocosm

or of the microcosm: (1) from the perspective of variations

discovered through study of the social system as a whole, or

(2) through concern with behavior promoted by individual

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[1]Eric Hoffer, The Temper of Our Time (New York: Harper
and Row, 1967), p. xi.

personality needs and tensions.[2] These levels can be called
the "social system" or the "personality system." Another
dichotomy is found in the theories of analysts who emphasize
environmental change (change produced by natural phenomena,
irrespective of social action) and social change (change
that is directly related to aspects of the social system).
The well known proponent of functionalist theory in sociology,
Wilbert E. Moore, refers to still another distinction between
"mere sequences of small actions, that in sum essentially
comprise the pattern, the system, and changes in the system
itself."[3] In other words, Moore differentiates between
normal change which is inherent in the system and revolution-
ary change. Frequently those concerned with human social
activity tend to fluctuate among many levels of analysis,
failing to indicate the perspective from which they operate.
The first part of this chapter will attempt to describe
Hoffer's orientation to the concept of change.

Four generalizations drawn from his approach to the
nature of man should be kept in mind when viewing Hoffer's
ideas on man and change as they provide a basis for these
ideas.

(1) Man is an unfinished animal, inadequately equipped

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[2]Chalmers Johnson, Revolutionary Change (Boston: Little,
Brown and Co., 1966). A good discussion of this dichotomy is
found in the chapter entitled "The Disequilibrated Social
System."

[3]Wilbert E. Moore, Social Change (Englewood Cliffs,
New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), pp. 5-6.

to adapt instinctually to his environment but endowed
with the power of reflective thought and, thus,
creativity.

(2) Man is engaged in a never-ending struggle to
exert control over nature--the process of humanization.
Frequently he succumbs to the forces of irrational
nature--the process of dehumanization.

(3) Man is a stranger in his world, often dissatis-
fied with himself and striving for rebirth through the
collectivity and action.

(4) Man is a being who orders his surroundings through
the creation of hierarchies and ultimate goals.

The purpose of this chapter on man and change will be
to provide a framework for discussion of the implications
that Hoffer's theorizing might have for a theory of com-
munication--what ground is provided for communication theory
and what is omitted.

MAN AND CHANGE

HOFFER'S APPROACH TO CHANGE

Researchers have generated a number of theoretical con-
ceptualizations to describe the nature of change and its
effect on the human condition. Chalmers Johnson proposes
that the "primary determinant of a social system's equil-
ibrium is the degree of value-environmental synchronization."[4]

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[4]Johnson, Revolutionary Change, p. 64.

By means of this orientation, he posits that the pressures
which destroy a system's equilibrium can be grouped into
four general categories: (1) exogenous value-changing
sources; (2) endogenous value-changing sources; (3) exo-
genous environment-changing sources; and (4) endogenous
environment-changing sources.[5] The two basic sources of
change are human values and the environment, affected by
externally or internally derived factors. Richard T.
LaPiere takes a slightly different tack in approaching
change. He distinguishes between normal change and events
which transcend the personal level, supposedly having sig-
nificance for an entire population (great social events or
"crises").[6] S. N. Eisenstadt conceives of change as being
the handmaiden of "modernization":

> The common characteristics of modernization refer to
> both what may be called socio-demographic aspects of
> societies, and to structural aspects of social organ-
> ization.[7]

Yet there are still others who view the process of change
in a different light, in terms of its effect on the psy-
chology of mankind. Hans Toch and E. DeVries utilize this
method by stressing the manner in which change affects the
human personality as well as the conditions which prompt

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[5]Johnson, Revolutionary Change, p. 64.

[6]Richard T. LaPiere, Social Change (New York: McGraw-
Hill Book Company, 1965), pp. 41-45.

[7]S. N. Eisenstadt, Modernization: Protest and Change
(Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966),
p. 2.

men to seek additional change.[8]

Thus a number of positions have been taken with respect to analysis of change; among them are those which attempt to distinguish between value-oriented and environmental factors, endogenous or exogenous sources of change, normal or exceptional social events, socio-demographic or structural-organizational aspects of society, and societal or psychological characteristics. Often these areas overlap and blend together. In many cases the researcher does not clearly indicate the assumptions from which he works. When Eric Hoffer calls change the "main challenge of our age," on what grounds does he make this assertion? It is necessary to determine whether he operates on the basis of one or many of these presuppositions.

Analysis of Hoffer's writings indicates that he views the origin of change from a multitude of perspectives, utilizing at one time or another nearly all of the theoretical approaches discussed above. However, he rarely emphasizes distinctions among the origins of change but tends to view change, in general, in terms of the effects which it imposes on human existence. This is probably true because it is human response to change, the nature of man, which is Hoffer's central theme.

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[8]See Hans Toch, The Social Psychology of Social Movements (Kansas City: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1965), and Egbert DeVries, Man in Rapid Social Change (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., 1961).

If Hoffer's concept of change is limited in any way, it is because he deals primarily with what he calls "drastic" or "revolutionary" change. He is not so much concerned with LaPiere's category of "normal" or "normative" change unless the cumulative effects of such change create a radical alteration in the environment and social system of individuals. Nearly all of his writing revolves, in some manner, around this aspect of change. Notably, The True Believer, The Ordeal of Change, and The Temper of Our Time consider different qualities of and human responses to drastic change. The Temper of Our Time consists of a series of essays on various facets of change, including the effects on modern societies of industrialization, technological modernization, and social upheaval--forces which have served to reshape existing social orders.

It is more difficult to determine whether Hoffer takes a macrocosmic or a microcosmic approach to change. His writing is full of generalizations about human conduct, and he frequently speaks in terms of "the masses": "The general impression seems to be that the age in which we live is the age of the masses."[9] Examples used to support his theory of man's response to change often concern historical events such as the Russian or French Revolutions which transformed distinct social systems. However, the foundation of his

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[9]Hoffer, The Temper of Our Time, p. 61.

analysis is still built upon the conception of individual psychological predispositions which prompt men to behave in certain ways. The framework of theory is constructed from a macrocosmic orientation, but supportive data is formulated from the realm of the "personality system," the microcosmic approach. Human resistance to or desire for change is a distant manifestation of man's subconscious awareness of his own incompletion. The theory of change is a derivation of Hoffer's approach to the general nature of man.

Hoffer also moves freely among the endogenous/exogenous, value-oriented/environmental categories as he discusses man and change. The nature of the source of change is not crucial to the formulation of his theory regarding human response. In earlier works (The True Believer and The Ordeal of Change), Hoffer seems to have been particularly preoccupied with the effects of environmental changes caused by natural phenomena. He also dealt extensively with exogenous sources of change such as invasion or other forms of foreign influence:

> For Western influence [in Asia] irrespective of its intentions, almost always brought about a fateful change wherever it penetrated, and it is this change that is at the root of the present revolutionary unrest.[10]

With the passage of time, however, his examples came with increasing frequency from the areas of endogenous, value-

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[10]Eric Hoffer, The Ordeal of Change (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 8.

oriented change. This fact is evidenced by his treatment of the effects of automation and the Black Revolution in America in The Temper of Our Time.

It is obvious that Hoffer operates on a number of levels when discussing "change." He makes little effort to discriminate between these levels with respect to his theory of the relationship between human conduct and change; however it should be kept in mind that, for the most part, he views significant change as being revolutionary in character--having vital implications for the state of human affairs. Within this context, he tends to view man acting within the mass according to individual psychological predispositions. His view of human response to change is an integral part of the philosophy. The importance which he assigns to this area is well described in Working and Thinking on the Waterfront:

> If, as seems to be true, my chief preoccupation is
> with change, then practically everything I have
> written should be connected with this theme. Mass
> movements, the true believer, the intellectual, the
> masses, freedom, America, the Occident, the antagon-
> ism between man and nature should all be facets and
> phases of the phenomenon of change.[11]

The remaining portion of this chapter will deal with two interrelated aspects of the theory of man and change: man as a responder to change and man as an instigator of change. In light of the four generalizations drawn from Hoffer's

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[11]Eric Hoffer, Working and Thinking on the Waterfront (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), p. 144.

approach to the nature of man, his views on man and change

should be regarded as existing on a level of greater spec-

ificity. When individuals respond to and instigate change,

they act as "incomplete men" attempting to determine their

relationships to the natural order. Change thus functions

as the instrument of physical nature.

MAN AS A RESPONDER TO CHANGE

Joseph Gusfield, writing for the International Ency-

clopedia of the Social Sciences, remarks that:

> A major hypothesis in the field is that social
> movements are the products of social change. Cir-
> cumstances arise in which long established relation-
> ships are no longer appropriate; the result of this
> strain between old and new is discontent. One of
> the sociologist's tasks in analyzing a movement is
> to identify the particular social changes that have
> generated discontent and to specify their relation
> to the movement.[12]

A great share of Eric Hoffer's writing is concerned with

this hypothesis and the mass movement as a human response

to change. Many types of human behavior, from formal assoc-

iation to informal activity, are characteristically grouped

under the label "social movement" by sociologists investi-

gating collective behavior.[13] Hoffer himself varies in his

use of the term. He applies it to the highly structured

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[12]Joseph R. Gusfield, "The Study of Social Movements,"
reprinted from the International Encyclopedia of the Social
Sciences, Vol. 14 (New York: Crowell Collier and MacMillan,
Inc., 1968), p. 446.

[13]A discussion of Herbert Blumer's distinction between
"general" and "specific" movements can be found in Alfred M.
Lee (ed.), New Outline of the Principles of Sociology, 2nd.
ed. rev.; (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1951), pp. 167-222.
Also see Gusfield's treatment of "directed" and "undirected"
movements, "The Study of Social Movements," p. 445.

types of behavior discussed in The True Believer as well as
more diffuse activity because he is fundamentally interested
in man's reaction to the forces of change, through the mass
movement or otherwise. Wilbert Moore claims that:

> Even if external sources of change are beyond the
> reach of sociological theory, they may still be
> left within the analytical system if the conse-
> quences have sufficient pattern to warrant gen-
> eralization.[14]

In Hoffer's view of man as a responder to change, he makes
generalizations about three "patterns" of human behavior:
(1) change exposes humans to crises in self-esteem; (2)
change creates in men desires for action and self-reali-
zation; and (3) change prompts men to seek after order.
Discussion of these three generalizations comprises the
heart of his particular theory regarding man as a responder
to change. In and of themselves, they are representative
of man's on-going struggle with nature because change sweeps
man into a situation where he is forced to battle for the
maintenance of his human uniqueness.

> We can never be really prepared for that which is
> wholly new. We have to adjust ourselves, and every
> radical adjustment is a crisis in self-esteem: we
> undergo a test, we have to prove ourselves. It
> needs inordinate self-confidence to face drastic change
> without inner trembling.[15]

Drastic change is a force whose pressure "cracks the upper-

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[14]Wilbert E. Moore, "A Reconsideration of Theories of
Social Change," American Sociological Review, 25:6 (Dec-
ember, 1960), p. 812.

[15]Hoffer, The Ordeal of Change, pp. 1-2.

most mature layers of the mind and lays bare the less

mature layers."[16] It is able to "juvenilize" even the

most well-adjusted individual. The view of mankind ex-

pressed here is not a totally pessimistic one--Hoffer does

distinguish between the mature and the less mature, those

better able to undergo change and those lacking in this

ability. However, he clearly stresses the insecurity in

us all, regardless of age, which makes us susceptible to

the disruptive influence of drastic change.[17] Therefore,

within the human spirit is harbored an inborn resistance

to change:

> It is not only that we are afraid of the new, but
> that deep within us there is the conviction that
> we cannot really change, that we cannot adapt
> ourselves to the new and remain our old selves. . .
> In other words, drastic change creates an estrange-
> ment from the self, and generates a need for a new
> birth and a new identity.[18]

When considering the same topic, Eisenstadt locates the

roots of such disruptive influences in the process of

modernization: disorganization and dislocation which prompt

human resistance to change.[19] In Hans Toch's analysis,

change contributes to human feelings of abandonment and

frustration, but it also leads men to create devices through

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[16]Hoffer, Working and Thinking on the Waterfront, p. 146.

[17]A good discussion of this matter is found in "A Time
of Juveniles," The Temper of Our Time, pp. 3-16.

[18]Hoffer, The Temper of Our Time, p. 9.

[19]Eisenstadt, Modernization, p. 20.

which such tensions are released and damaged self-concepts
are repaired.[20] This is Hoffer's point. Man defines him-
self in terms of his surroundings. When this environment
is disturbed, he is thrown off-balance and forced to re-
define himself. As he remarks in The Temper of Our Time,
rapid urbanization in recent years has pushed millions of
people into a state of disorientation, and as a result,
their needs for a new identity have shaped the temper of
our time.[21]

Secondly, when man undergoes such crises in self-
esteem, his natural tendency is to strive for rebirth and
self-realization, usually through forms of action. The
insecurity brought by periods of drastic change affects
individuals of all ages. The old no longer feel that they
have a place in the world, and young people sense a kind of
futility in growing up. Hoffer turns to the so-called
"awakening in Asia" as exemplary of this type of situation.
Here the erosion of traditional communal frameworks, com-
bined with the onslaught of Western influence, has placed
individuals in a state of turmoil.[22] Similarly, DeVries
notes:

> In a time of social change people are forced to
> determine for themselves how to live, how to work,

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[20]Hans Toch, The Social Psychology of Social Movements,
p. 3.

[21]Hoffer, The Temper of Our Time, p. 13.

[22]See "The Awakening of Asia," The Ordeal of Change,
pp. 6-13.

how to react. And in this self-determination they
are removed from a sheltering and limiting environ-
ment into the loneliness and wider horizons of a
larger society.[23]

Such disoriented individuals, according to Hoffer, seek the

most obvious way through which they can gain confidence and

a sense of worth. Given certain conditions, such as oppor-

tunity and a tradition of self-reliance, they become men of

action.[24]

And, indeed, action is basically a reaction against
loss of balance--a flailing of the arms to regain
one's balance. To dispose a soul to action we must
upset its equilibrium.[25]

While it is change that leads to the emergence of the auto-

nomous individual, it is this same change and the insecurity

which it prompts that provoke men to attempt to realize

themselves through action and collectivization. The intel-

lectual who hastens to espouse a new cause and the working

man who becomes a "true believer" are responding to change

through a search for self-realization. Johnson testifies

to this effect:

But in the disequilibrated system, some degree of
personal tension will be experienced by every actor,
possibly leading him to relieve it through behavior
that he would have considered deviant before the
system lost its equilibrium.[26]

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[23]DeVries, Man in Rapid Social Change, p. 91.

[24]Hoffer, The Ordeal of Change, pp. 2-3.

[25]Ibid., p. 32.

[26]Johnson, Revolutionary Change, p. 75.

In individualistic societies such as America, the problem
is more acute because individuals are not sheltered by the
extended family system and institutions to the extent that
they are protected in certain other cultures. The autonomous
disoriented individual values the path of self-realization
above all and, under normal circumstances, is continually
striving for this quality. The courses most frequently
pursued in his strivings are utilization of individual tal-
ents, keeping oneself busy, or identification with an out-
side factor--be it a cause, a group, material possessions,
another individual, and so on.[27] The motivation is essent-
ially provided by a human desire for security which King
discusses in Social Movements in the United States:

> The individual does not always understand or recog-
> nize the "real" reasons why his aims are unfulfilled.
> He is often bewildered, confused, knowing something
> is wrong but not knowing why. Caught in such sit-
> uations, many individuals experience a strong "desire
> for meaning" . . . This feeling stems from an absence
> of ready-made interpretations of problems and sit-
> uations.[28]

Finally, the fact that (1) human beings experience a
crisis in self-esteem, and (2) strive for self-realization
and security following a period of drastic change, leads to
one conclusion: Human beings have an inborn desire for
social order without which it would be impossible for
society to exist. In order to be secure, individuals must

[27]Johnson, Revolutionary Change, p. 19.

[28]Wendell C. King, Social Movements in the United
States (New York: Random House, 1956), p. 20.

have some idea of their relationship to the rest of the environment. As Hoffer points out in The Passionate State of Mind, when individuals are insecure and unsure of their status, they usually profess to know the "truth" more vehemently.[29] Mankind is always searching for a purpose, a cause, and this is "largely a search for a plot and a pattern in the development of his life story."[30] The concepts of culture and society which place personalities in relation to one another embody the "minded order," and as such they must be viewed as manifestations of human nature.[31]

MAN AS AN INSTIGATOR OF CHANGE

In this study, we are looking at two sides of a coin: the first side pictures disruptive change (both environmental and social) which prompts human crises in self-esteem, strivings for self-realization, and the search for social order; the other side of the coin shows man seeking change, due to the state of his self-concept as well as that of the social order. The primary vehicle through which man pursues change is the mass movement. The duality of the relationship between change and the social movement has been described by W. King:

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[29]Eric Hoffer, The Passionate State of Mind (New York: Harper and Row, 1955), pp. 40-41.

[30]Ibid.

[31]E. T. Hiller, The Nature and Basis of Social Order (New Haven, Conn.: College and University Press, 1966), p. 84.

> In the first place, social movements themselves
> involve one type of social planning, and movements
> are one kind of agency for deliberately altering
> the social order and for attempting to predetermine
> events and situations of the future. In the second
> place, the study of movements has a relevance for the
> field of social change because movements are both a
> manifestation and an agency of change.[32]

In The True Believer, Hoffer argues that "every mass move-
ment is in a sense a migration--a movement toward a promised
land."[33] Movements, in Hoffer's mind, are naturally ori-
ented toward the future, toward change. It will be the
purpose of this discussion to examine human proclivity for
change in light of assertions, treated earlier, that man
inherently resists and is disoriented by change.

As has been pointed out, man naturally opposes drastic
change and is unbalanced by exposure to it. When disori-
ented in this manner, the unbalanced individual usually
tries to prove his worth through frantic action and the
security of the mass. Because we harbor a human tendency
to perceive the shaping forces of our existence as being
outside ourselves, "success and failure are unavoidably
related in our minds with the state of things around us."[34]
Therefore, the fulfilled view the world as being good; the
frustrated favor radical change: "Thus the resistance to
change and the ardent desire for it spring from the same

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[32]King, Social Movements in the United States, pp. v-vi.

[33]Hoffer, The True Believer (New York: Harper and Row,
1951), p. 28.

[34]Ibid., p. 16.

conviction, and the one can be as vehement as the other."[35]
The "crisis in self-esteem" which individuals suffer and
manifest through a desire to "change the world" is, in
reality, prompted by a wish for a change of self. Wilbert
Moore's analysis comes close to Hoffer's in this respect.
He indicates that a person's "search for meaning" may also
provide a vehicle for social change.[36]

The frustrated or discontented individual's desire for
change may overwhelm his initial resistance if certain con-
ditions are present. To Hoffer, these conditions include
discontent but not destitution, a degree of power, hope
for the future, and ignorance of the difficulties involved
in realization of the change.[37] Hope must be of the "around
the corner" variety if people are to launch themselves into
the struggle for change.[38] Hans Toch supports Hoffer here:

> For a person to be led to join a social movement,
> he must not only sense a problem, but must also
> (1) feel that something can be done about it and
> (2) want to do something about it himself. At the
> very least he must feel that the status quo is not
> inevitable, and that change is conceivable.[39]

In Hoffer's theory, feelings of frustration are the prime
motivation for individual involvement in social movements.
Walter Laquer supports this thesis when he says that:

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[35]Hoffer, The True Believer, p. 16.

[36]Moore, "A Reconsideration of Theories of Social
Change," p. 812.

[37]Hoffer, The True Believer, p. 20.

[38]Hoffer, The Ordeal of Change, p. 84.

[39]Toch, The Social Psychology of Social Movements, p. 11.

> The majority of leaders of socialist movements and
> of proletarian revolutions have been of middle-class
> origin; this fact suggests that the feeling of frus-
> tration, the quest for power, the sense of injustice,
> and various idealistic aspirations are of greater
> importance in the formation of a revolutionary than
> is economic discontent.[40]

A contemporary example of this phenomena at work is pro-
vided by Eisenstadt in Modernization: Protest and Change.
He discusses the rising popularity of youth-oriented move-
ments in terms of the "dissatisfaction and restlessness"
of youth confronted with the cultural and political frame-
works provided by developing society.[41] When testifying
before the Senate Subcommittee on Investigations in 1969,
Hoffer maintained that the crucial element has been added
to this basis of dissatisfaction--now students have had a
taste of power, they are aware of opportunities for change,
and the foundation for social movement has been completed.[42]

Human desire for change is more likely to develop
during periods when customarily stable institutions and
values are in a state of decline.

> The milieu most favorable for the rise and
> propagation of mass movements is one in which a
> once compact corporate structure is, for one
> reason or another, in a state of disintegration.[43]

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[40]Walter Laquer, "Revolution," reprinted from the Inter-
national Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, Vol. 13 (New
York: Crowell Collier and Macmillan Inc., 1968), p. 503.

[41]Eisenstadt, Modernization, pp. 26-31.

[42]U.S., Congress, Senate, Subcommittee on Investiga-
tions of the Committee on Government Operations, Hearings,
Riots, Civil and Criminal Disorders, 91st Cong., 1st Sess.,
1969, pp. 2979-2996.

[43]Hoffer, The True Believer, p. 45.

Hoffer frequently refers to the onset of the Reformation, following the "shattering of the authoritarian church" in the sixteenth century, as support of this point.[44] Mass societies, where organization is typically large-scale and primary group attachments tend to be weak, are particularly condusive to the growth of social movements.

> Most students of revolution appear to agree that a necessary, although perhaps not sufficient, condition for revolutions is a deterioration in one or another of the major meaningful aspects of human "welfare": for example in levels of living or in guarantees of personal safety against violence.[45]

The foundation of the social movement's ability to provide a mechanism through which change is realized lies in its capacity to absorb the frustrated, discontented individual and to relieve him of his burdens. The innermost craving of the potential "true believer" is for a sense of purpose and worth.

> But the true believer who is wholly assimilated into a compact collective body is no longer frustrated. He has found a new identity and a new life. He is one of the chosen, bolstered and protected by invincible powers, and destined to inherit the earth. His is a state of mind the very opposite of that of the frustrated individual; yet he displays, with increased intensity, all the reactions which are symptomatic of inner tensions and insecurity.[46]

The movement, then, supplies the individual with an opportunity for rebirth. In order to actuate change, the indi-

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[44]Tomkins, The American Odyssey, p. 99.

[45]Moore, Social Change, p. 82.

[46]Hoffer, The True Believer, p. 116.

vidual must be able to associate himself in thought with some type of collective body.[47] He must harbor a feeling of "group consciousness." The bases for social change outlined in Cameron's Modern Social Movements are very similar to those conceptualized by Hoffer: (1) change must come in response to dissatisfaction, (2) men must recognize their dissatisfactions and share them with others (group consciousness), (3) men must believe that it is possible to reshape their own lives (hope), and (4) men must live under conditions where banding together for change is possible and plausible (power).[48]

Brief mention should be given to the role which Hoffer assigns to the "intellectual" or "man of words" as an instigator of social change. In this case, "intellectual" is defined in a specialized way. Hoffer views the intellectual as one who, due to deep-rooted feelings of inadequacy, believes that his knowledge gives him the right to control other men. He maintains that the intellectual has always been on the fringe of the social order and, therefore, feels compelled to justify his existence and importance. To accomplish this, he goes to the masses in search of leadership roles.

> The intellectual's concern for the masses is as a rule a symptom of his uncertain status and his lack of an unquestionable sense of social usefulness.[49]

[47]Hoffer, The Ordeal of Change, p. 86.

[48]Wm. Bruce Cameron, Modern Social Movements (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 10.

[49]Hoffer, The Ordeal of Change, p. 55.

When the intellectual obtains such positions and is suc-
cessful in satisfying his craving for status and social
usefulness, he usually ceases to be the champion of the
masses and becomes their enemy.[50] However, the intellectual
prepares the ground for social change by discrediting the
prevailing order and furnishing the ideology for the move-
ment.[51] Without using the term "intellectual," Johnson
describes a similar process:

> Where do ideologies come from? They are created by
> individuals who may be motivated by personal psy-
> chological needs, life experiences, disequilibrium-
> induced tensions, or a combination of all these
> forces.[52]

These, then, are the two sides of the coin: man as a
responder to change and man as an instigator of change.
Hoffer's theory of man and change, when viewed within the
framework of his general approach to the nature of man,
provides a valuable perspective for the analyst who is
interested in the communicative aspects of his philosophy.
Investigation of this perspective will follow.

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[50]Hoffer, The Ordeal of Change, p. 48.

[51]Hoffer, The True Believer, pp. 119-130.

[52]Johnson, Revolutionary Change, p. 85.

CHAPTER IV: HOFFER AND A SOCIAL THEORY OF COMMUNICATION

In an article on the conceptual problems of theory-building in communication, Lee Thayer noted that every theorizer brings his own image of the world to his work--his assumptive world which is built on guesses, hunches, expectations, hypotheses, or personal constructs.[1] In this instance, we are working with Eric Hoffer's "assumptive world." It must be kept in mind that the basis for this study is Hoffer's personalized view of the nature of the universe and its human components. Thus far, I have outlined the framework of Hoffer's approach to the essence of man. I have dealt with his concept of human uniqueness and its manifestations through human behavior in society. Hoffer sees man as a social animal who derives his individuality from the society which surrounds him, and he believes that this characteristic is common to all men. Both the successful individual who feels secure within himself and the person who suffers from a deficiency in self-esteem draw their strength from the social world, although in varying degrees. As Hoffer indicates fre-

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[1]Lee O. Thayer, "On Theory-Building in Communication: Some Conceptual Problems," Journal of Communication, 13 (December, 1963), p. 217.

quently, autonomy is a state which is inimical to human nature.

With Hoffer's approach to the nature of man and human response to change in mind, what considerations can be drawn from them for the theory-builder who is interested in the process of communication? In his writing Hoffer never refers directly to the concept of communication as such. Yet his books are widely used by people involved in consideration of "communication" or "persuasion." What aspects of Hoffer's theorizing can be interpreted as having value for the communication theorist?

HOFFER AND COMMUNICATION

It is my belief that much of Eric Hoffer's theorizing can be viewed as contributory to a theory of communication. I say this because I believe that implicitly what Hoffer has written in The True Believer, The Ordeal of Change, and elsewhere, comprises a statement of his ideas about how men function, use symbols, establish relationships, and thereby create society. From his vantage point, the communication theorist might see concern for the manner in which men use symbols to establish self-identification and social order, and in turn, the way that society is affected by these symbols, implied in Hoffer's writing. This is the approach that many symbolic interactionists have taken to the matter of communication. Their interest is in the

relationship between man's use of symbols and the social order. I think that Hoffer's writings are subject to meaningful analysis from this point of view.

When the many facets of Hoffer's writing are considered, it seems that the basis of his argument is this: man always struggles to define himself in relation to his social and physical environment. As a result, man is driven to create an identity for himself. He attempts to establish and promote attitudes, beliefs, thought, and so forth. In this way, much of The True Believer reads like Kenneth Burke's discussion of the "medicine" that Hitler created in Germany in "The Rhetoric of Hitler's Battle." Sections of The True Believer contain analyses similar to Burke's treatment of the means whereby Hitler sought public support.[2]

Certain theories which posit that society is created through human symbol usage have been labeled "social theories of communication." The argument is that the nature of society grows out of the way in which men use symbols--communicate--rather than the reverse process. By this way of thinking, the concept of communication becomes a fairly broad one. Hoffer himself does not draw a model of the communication process and claim that the communication act

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[2]Kenneth Burke, "The Rhetoric of Hitler's Battle," The Philosophy of Literary Form (New York: Vintage Books, a division of Random House, 1941), pp. 173-174.

consists of a certain number of elements. As I have pointed out, he does not even use the term "communication." However, if we assume that fundamentally Hoffer is concerned with man's efforts to define his relationship to the environment, the nature of such efforts, verbal or non-verbal, becomes significant. It is this interpretation which I propose to consider in this chapter by (1) providing a general outline of a "social theory of communication," and (2) discussing the elements of Hoffer's writing which fit within such a theory.

A SOCIAL THEORY OF COMMUNICATION

In general, a social theory of communication is organized around the premise stated by Hugh Duncan:

> A social theory of communication must describe how communicative forms determine social order, and, in turn, how problems in achieving social order determine communicative forms.[3]

The argument of those who propose such a theory is that symbols constitute social order; thus man creates the nature of his society through the use of symbolic forms. Duncan's criticism of traditional sociological theory is that it posits the existence of certain social structures and forces such as power, class, and so forth, and then maintains that symbols and communicative acts are determined by and develop

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[3]Hugh Duncan, "The Search for a Social Theory of Communication," Human Communication Theory, ed. Frank E. X. Dance (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), p. 251.

out of these forces. This perspective negates the assumption that social structures and relationships can be <u>determined</u> <u>by</u> methods of symbolization and communicative acts.

The social theory of communication is largely an out-growth of the theories of early symbolic interactionists such as C. H. Cooley, John Dewey, George Herbert Mead, Georg Simmel, and E. Durkheim. The work of Ogden and Richards, as well as that of Kenneth Burke has also been instrumental. The significant aspects of a social theory of communication are usually related to these propositions:

(1) Man is a social, symbol-using animal.

The social nature of man has been acknowledged by a number of theorists including Cooley who commented that:

> That is, we see that the individual is not separable from the human whole, but a living member of it, deriving his life from the whole through social and hereditary transmission as truly as if men were literally one body. He cannot cut himself off.[4]

This is to say that the individual derives the very essence of his "self-hood" from the social and physical environment. Man is a social animal. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann accept this position in <u>The</u> <u>Social</u> <u>Construction</u> <u>of</u> <u>Reality</u> when they argue that the individual is born with a "pre-disposition toward sociality."[5]

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[4]Charles Horton Cooley, <u>Human</u> <u>Nature</u> <u>and</u> <u>the</u> <u>Social</u> <u>Order</u> (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), p. 35.

[5]Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, <u>The</u> <u>Social</u> <u>Con-</u><u>struction</u> <u>of</u> <u>Reality</u> (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1966), p. 119.

At the same time, man must be viewed as a symbol-using creature. Kenneth Burke operates from this assumption. He frequently maintains that man's ability to use symbols is one of the significant distinctions which separates him from the rest of the animal world. In the prologue to Permanence and Change Burke says that, "for whatever the race of human beings may be in their particularity, they are all members of a symbol-using species."[6] The delineation of these two inherent characteristics of man, sociality and symbol-usage, provides the basis for the next step in a social theory of communication.

(2) Man communicates through symbolic forms.

Men establish relationships between one another and to the physical environment through symbolic expression. The social function of symbolism is that it maintains and transmits social bonds through generations. It also creates and sustains emotional dispositions upon which the existence of society depends. Ideas and emotions must be given form if they are to be transmitted. The transmission of culture can only take place through form.[7] In human cultures, symbolic expression gives form to the ideas and emotions of men.

(3) Identification is a key concept in communication.

The concept of identification is very important to the

[6]Kenneth Burke, Permanence and Change (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1965), p. lvi.

[7]Hugh Duncan, Communication and Social Order (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 431.

social theorist's approach to communication. The term
refers to the means whereby the individual places himself
with reference to himself and to others. Burke says that
two things are "identified" with each other if their
interests are joined, it is assumed that their interests
are joined, or they are persuaded to believe that their
interests are joined.[8] To him identification is compens-
atory to division. It brings inherently divided men together
and makes communication possible.[9] Duncan points out that
identification is expressed in symbols. Men surround them-
selves with property, status, rank, and so forth, to create
their own identities. Identification makes a specialized
activity or thing a recognizable part of the larger whole.[10]

Identification, a significant part of the communicative
process, is essential to man because the individual's con-
cept of self can come into being only in terms of the en-
vironment. "The individual exists to focus his powers and
act in the surrounding world."[11] It is necessary for man
to strive for identification with other men and things in
order to develop a self-concept. Thus communication between

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[8]Kenneth Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives (New York:
Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1950), p. 20.

[9]Ibid., p. 22.

[10]Duncan, Communication and Social Order, pp. 160-161.

[11]Ernest Becker, The Birth and Death of Meaning (New
York: The Free Press of Glencoe, a division of the Mac-
millan Company, 1962), p. 29.

men is the struggle for identification.

> To converse with another, through words, looks, or
> other symbols, means to have more or less under-
> standing or communion with him, to get on common
> ground and partake of his ideas and sentiments.[12]

As men search for identification and make choices about that
with which they desire to be identified, communication is
the expression of their searching. Identification must be
promoted and made realistic through communication.[13]

(4) Man's symbol-usage creates the social order.

The crux of the social theory of communication resides
in the fact that human forms of symbolic expression deter-
mine action and, thus, create the nature of the social
order. Through symbols man establishes and maintains
attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge; and he strives to attain
social order by the creation of hierarchies. Hierarchal
structuring abounds in society in every conceivable realm
and is exemplified by distinctions in class, status, age,
sex, religion, income, and so on. Dr. George Boas indicates
that if this were not the case, man would live a life of
constant improvisation which could not be carried on for
more than a few hours at most.[14] In the words of Berger
and Luckmann, world-openness is always pre-empted by social

[12]Cooley, Human Nature and the Social Order, p. 136.

[13]Duncan, Communication and Social Order, p. 112.

[14]George Boas, "The Fixation of Symbols," Symbols and
Values: An Initial Study, Thirteenth Symposium of the Con-
ference on Science, Philosophy, and Religion, ed. L. Bryson,
L. Finkelstein, R. M. MacIver, and R. McKeon (New York:
Harper and Brothers, 1954), p. 226.

order.[15] Social order arises only out of human activity.
Thus man's efforts to establish an identity for himself take
the form of striving for a social order in which relation-
ships between objects can be objectified.

Just as we have social hierarchal structuring, we have
hierarchal structuring in language as well. According to
Burke, man creates an "ultimate" vocabulary which serves to
endow competing forces with design, sequence, or arrange-
ment. This vocabulary exists on a higher plane than that of
positive or dialectical terms. Man resorts to the use of
"ultimate" vocabulary in order to resolve or compromise dif-
ferences.[16] This "ultimate" vocabulary is composed of "god-
terms"--operational words which have been elevated by man
until they transcend time and space and become the final,
ultimate abstraction. In this way, the ideal of "science"
exists as a god-term for many people as "money" does for
others.

Thus, man's tendency to establish hierarchal social
order pervades every aspect of his existence. It is his
capacity as a symbol-user which enables him to constitute
society through the means of symbolic expression.

Taking into account the significant aspects of a social
theory of communication discussed above, Hugh Duncan has

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[15]Berger and Luckmann, The Social Construction of
Reality, p. 49.

[16]Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives, pp. 186-188.

described the elements of the communicative act in this way:

> There are, then, five elements in the social act of communication: the communicator is expressing himself in certain forms to perform certain acts or roles, and he is doing so to achieve certain ends. The specific social end of all communication is the consensus that is reached through the establishment and maintenance of attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge, as these are expressed in roles whose successful performance guarantees social order.[17]

COMMUNICATIVE ASPECTS OF HOFFER'S WORK

As I have indicated, the social theory of communication essentially concerns the use of symbolic forms by men to establish identification and, thus, to formulate a social order. When developed, identification among men (and between men and things) and the structure of the social order provide a framework through which men, as social animals, can relate to each other and to their environment. These functions are embodied in the process of communication. This approach to the concept, communication, is a very generalized one. It is similar in this respect to Edward T. Hall's remark in The Silent Language that "culture is communication." To Hall, a major aspect of communication is "the ways in which man reads meaning into what other men do."[18]

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[17]Duncan, "The Search for a Social Theory of Communication," p. 240.

[18]Edward T. Hall, The Silent Language (Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, 1969), p. 38.

The "culture is communication" approach utilizes a very broad-based view of communication. Writers in the field have repeatedly warned against an over-generalized definition of the communicative process which renders the term meaningless.[19] However, the base of a social theory is deliberately generalized so as to offer a more complete account of the means whereby man adjusts to his surroundings--means which may be both verbal and non-verbal. The total range of thought and behavior which man uses to place himself in his world can conceivably provide the material for a social theory. The remainder of this chapter will consider Hoffer's writing in terms of the four major aspects of a social theory of communication.

(1) Man is a social, symbol-using animal.

On the basis of material provided in Chapter II and Chapter III, I think it is fair to say that Hoffer represents man as a social creature. He describes man as a being who derives his essence from his social and physical environment--a being to whom strict autonomy is disastrous. In The Passionate State of Mind, Hoffer speaks of man's "dependence" on his fellows. He claims that the individual convinces himself of his own worth through his efforts to persuade others of it.[20] This is to say that the individual

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[19]Both Dell Hymes, "The Anthropology of Communication," Human Communication Theory, ed. Frank E. X. Dance, and George Gerbner, "On Defining Communication: Still Another View," Journal of Communication, 16 (June, 1966), pp. 99-103, have discussed this problem.

[20]Hoffer, The Passionate State of Mind (New York: Harper and Row, 1955), p. 83.

is bound to society because he obtains his concept of self
through social contact. A position such as this does not
necessitate the conclusion that there is no uniqueness among
individuals. To the contrary, Hoffer idealizes the unique,
creative spirit which characterizes men. However, in the
last analysis all men define themselves out of the matrix
of society. This universal phenomenon increases the human
tendency to imitate:

> We cannot derive a sense of absolute certitude from
> anything which has its roots in us. The most poignant
> sense of insecurity comes from standing alone; we are
> not alone when we imitate.[21]

The True Believer is based entirely on Hoffer's analysis of
human behavior when the foundation of man's perceived world
is disrupted: men strive for rebirth and redefinition
through social contact. As long as the individual does not
lack self-esteem and self-confidence, as long as he feels
that his role is sufficiently well-defined, he can survive
in a state of greater independence; but when these con-
ditions are not present, man flees from the burdens of
individualism.

It must be remembered that Hoffer generalizes about
men operating in the "mass," in society. Therefore, I think
that his work can be interpreted from Hiller's perspective
which posits that "sociality is natural to man."[22]

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[21]Hoffer, The Passionate State of Mind, p. 84.

[22]E. T. Hiller, The Nature and Basis of Social Order
(New Haven, Connecticut: College and University Press, 1966),
p. 125.

Secondly, I contend that one finds support in Hoffer's writing for the view that a human ability to use symbols separates man from the rest of the social order. In my discussion of Hoffer's concept of man, I cited his reference in The Ordeal of Change to the instant of hesitation (reflective thought) which differentiates man from other animals. In Hoffer's treatment of this matter, it is the nature of human thought processes—man's ability to use the past and project into the future—which allows man to function as a symbol-user. In this respect, human beings are distinct from other animals. Burke talks about this same division in The Rhetoric of Motives when he comments that man differs from animals in his capacity to use tools for making tools, to speak about speech, and to think about thought.[23]

I think there is justification for an interpretation of Hoffer's approach to the nature of man which argues that he is describing man as a social, symbol-using creature. Therefore, up to this point his comments can be placed within the boundaries of the social theory of communication.

(2) Man communicates through symbolic forms.

The method of human communication through symbolic expression is the second major concern of this discussion. The social theory of communication does not restrict analysis to either the verbal or to the non-verbal level alone. Rather

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[23]Burke, The Rhetoric of Motives, p. 178.

it operates on both planes. In Communication and Social
Order, Duncan observes that man searches for social order
and identification through a number of devices, including
non-verbal symbols such as dress, material possessions, and
so forth. It seems apparent that Hoffer operates on both
of these levels as well.

The role of verbal symbolization is a significant
factor in much of Hoffer's writing, particularly in The
True Believer. When Hoffer talks about the function of
"words" and "men of words," he is usually dealing with a
phenomenon in which men use verbal or written communication
to develop their own self-concepts and to order their exist-
ence. He is particularly emphatic about the importance of
the role of so-called "men of words" in the inception stage
of a mass movement. In The True Believer, Hoffer focuses
attention on the way in which the man of words reorders the
environment for his listeners:

> To sum up, the militant man of words prepares the
> ground for the rise of the mass movement: 1) by
> discrediting prevailing creeds and institutions and
> detaching from them the allegiance of the people;
> 2) by indirectly creating a hunger for faith in the
> hearts of those who cannot live without it, so that
> when the new faith is preached it finds an eager
> response among the disillusioned masses; 3) by furn-
> ishing the doctrine and the slogans of the new faith;
> 4) by undermining the convictions of the "better
> people" . . .[24]

By discrediting the existing order and instilling faith in
a new regime in the hearts and minds of True Believers, the

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[24]Hoffer, The True Believer (New York: Harper and Row,
1951), p. 128.

man of words creates a fresh identity for his listeners as well as rebirth for himself. According to Hoffer, the individual who serves as a man of words for the typical mass movement usually suffers from deep-rooted feelings of inferiority and desire for recognition.[25] His efforts as a spokesman during the inception stage of the movement cause him to gain self-esteem. They also lead to the creation of a new outlet for the potential True Believer.

Verbal symbols contribute to the development of human identification and social order in that they allow people to detach themselves from their former lives and possessions. Because this is true, Hoffer argues that words are "farthest removed from our flesh-and-blood selves."[26] They allow man to become that which he was not in the past. Human symbolic expression provides for the establishment of identification, social order, and progress because through it man can (1) create self-identity, (2) formulate social structure, and (3) communicate to others the hopes and dreams which must be realized.[27]

The non-verbal aspect of communication is also treated in Hoffer's theorizing. When he deals with instances in which non-verbal forms are used to influence the attitudes, beliefs, and thoughts of men, Hoffer calls this process

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[25]Hoffer, The True Believer, p. 121.

[26]Hoffer, The Passionate State of Mind, p. 64.

[27]Hoffer, The Ordeal of Change (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 133.

"make-believe." He is referring to ceremonies, rituals, uniforms, and so on. Within our analysis, these devices must be regarded from the standpoint of their communicative value--how they lead to the creation of identification and social order.

Through the use of man-made symbols, the individual can seemingly disassociate himself from his flesh-and-blood being. The realities of life can be made to seem remote to him as he becomes involved in the "make-believe." Hoffer claims that in this manner even dying can be made to seem easy.[28] Thus armies use flags, emblems, parades, music, etiquette, and elaborate ritual to detach the soldier from the reality of death.

> Make-Believe partakes of the nature of a magic ritual. We not only pretend to be what we are not, but by staging our pretense we strive to conjure and bring into existence a new genuineness. The strange thing is that often this conjuring act succeeds, and we become what we pretend to be.[29]

Through non-verbal symbols such as dress, ritual, and emblems, the individual forms relationships to the rest of the environment. He can develop a sense of order, a hierarchal structure. Such symbols provide a clear definition of a person's place in the world and a distinct statement of the nature of his relationships to other people and things.

Thus, from the position of a social theory of communication, we can say that Hoffer deals with both forms of

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[28]Hoffer, The True Believer, pp. 64-65.

[29]Hoffer, The Passionate State of Mind, p. 38.

human symbolic expression--the verbal and the non-verbal use of symbols.

(3) Man strives for identification, to place himself in relation to other people and things.

This aspect of the social theory of communication should have been fairly well documented from Hoffer's writing by my discussion of his approach to the nature of man and man and change. I indicated in the two preceding chapters that a central theme in Hoffer's philosophy is man's struggle to achieve a sense of identification through social order. I pointed out in Chapter III that this struggle is particularly crucial when undergone by the individual who lacks self-esteem in the first place. In The Passionate State of Mind, Hoffer speaks of the great "search for pride" (or identity) which characterizes individuals who suffer so-called "crises in self-esteem."[30] A good case in point is Hoffer's example of the intellectual:

> Being without an unequivocal sense of usefulness and worth, the intellectual has a vital need for pride, which he usually derives from an identification with some compact group, be it a nation, a church, or a party.[31]

In Hoffer's thinking, the "intellectual" (as Hoffer defines the term) is characterized by a lack of security and sense of clear-cut identity in his environment; therefore the

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[30]Hoffer, The Passionate State of Mind, p. 18.

[31]Hoffer, Working and Thinking on the Waterfront (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), p. 30-31.

intellectual is always involved in a struggle to define himself. His efforts include behavior and verbalization which are designed to place him in clear relationship to other people and things. Thus intellectuals frequently assume the role of a "man of words" at the inception stage of a mass movement.

The True Believer is Hoffer's most compact treatment of the manner in which people strive to create identification for themselves. The mass movement is the form of human behavior which he analyzes most carefully. However, the True Believer as an individual is a most extreme example of the matter under discussion. Hoffer does not claim that everyone acts like the True Believer. Nor should we, if we are to view Hoffer's writing from the standpoint of communication, assume that all people are driven to seek a sense of identity as does the True Believer. The point is, however, that we can look at Hoffer's work to find consideration of the manner in which certain types of individuals strive for social significance.

The social origin of the human self-concept is indicated frequently in Hoffer's books. For instance, in The Passionate State of Mind Hoffer argues that the individual knows himself by virtue of the way that he is defined by others:

> It is thus with most of us: we are what other
> people say we are. We know ourselves chiefly
> by hearsay. . . The people we meet are the

playwrights and stage managers of our lives: they
cast us in a role, and we play it whether we will
or not.[32]

Because man's self-concept is constructed out of the fabric
of society, he is driven to society in order to establish
his identity and his role in the social order. The com-
municative implications of the concept of identification
are contained implicitly in the nature of Hoffer's approach
to man.

(4) Man creates social order through symbol-usage.

The final major tenet of the social theory of commun-
ication is also a matter which can be found implicitly con-
sidered in Hoffer's theories about the nature of man and
man's behavior in society. When I discussed Hoffer's views
of man and change, I referred to his comments about man's
never-ending search for a pattern in his life and his
efforts to establish social order. For instance, Chapter
II dealt with Hoffer's belief that man had to envision God
as a scientist and technician before he could develop a
society based upon these ideas. Hoffer's writings show
that he describes man attempting to establish social order
through both verbal and non-verbal means. For example, in
The True Believer he discusses the importance of "doctrine"
in the mass movement as a mechanism which allows men to
order the lives of others. If doctrine is set forth as the
embodiment of absolute truth, then this "is to have a net

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[32]Hoffer, The Passionate State of Mind, pp. 80-81.

of familiarity spread over the whole of eternity."[33] Doc-
trine uses language to order the environment for those who
will accept it. On the non-verbal level, all kinds of
devices--rank, uniform, ritual, etiquette, and so forth--
can be utilized to place objects and things in strict rela-
tion to one another. When approached in this manner, Hoffer
does contribute to the development of a social theory of
communication, although unwittingly. He also is dealing
with the fact of hierarchal structuring; in language spec-
ifically, and in all human existence generally.

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[33]Hoffer, The True Believer, p. 77.

CHAPTER V: SUMMARY AND CRITICAL APPRAISAL

In preceding chapters I have dealt with Hoffer's
theories of the nature of man and human response to change.
I have tried to show how his ideas can be viewed within the
framework of a social theory of communication. I should
point out that the approach of the symbolic interactionists
is only one means through which the work of Eric Hoffer can
be analyzed. I chose this analytical perspective because
my primary purpose in this study is to explain, in some
fashion, how Eric Hoffer's theorizing can be considered
to have communicative significance. My initial challenge
was to choose a mode of analysis appropriate to the material
under study, and it is my feeling that the social theory of
communication provides the most fitting frame of reference
for this purpose.

I have indicated that Hoffer is concerned with broad
patterns of human behavior and emotion. He develops a
theoretical foundation to explain how man's inherent nature
is manifested in his behavior. Hoffer's characteristic form
of statement is the generalization. In the preface of The
True Believer he remarks that he is trying to "explain."
His explanations are theories "in the nature of suggestions
and arguments," often stated as sweeping categorizations of

human behavior. In other words, he is not dealing with the specifics, but with the generalities, of human existence. His comments are the product of Hoffer's own "assumptive world."

Hoffer does not deal directly with a process which he calls communication; nor does he describe in detail the nature of human relationships on a one-to-one basis. He does not consider explicitly, as do some communication theorists, the bonds between the source, message, and receiver as elements of the communicative act; nor is he particularly concerned with the nature of the communication channel. Rather, Eric Hoffer talks in general terms about how men function in the world through both verbal and non-verbal symbols. He deals with the physical and psychological nature of men--particularly with those men whom he would brand "fanatics," or "True Believers." The social theory of communication provides an appropriate framework for analysis of Hoffer's work because it too, initially, is concerned with the general foundations of human behavior. The social theory does not define out of existence much of the value of Hoffer's conceptualization by over-specificity. This is not to say that analyses from the viewpoint of symbolic interactionists can not be extended to levels of greater detail. However, when utilizing the broad frame-work of the social theory, the analyst is not as likely to distort Hoffer's theorizing. He is not encouraged to force

Hoffer's generalizations into the preconceived mold of a model which enumerates, with great attention to detail, the components of the so-called "communication act."

It has occurred to me as I consider this subject that there is another approach which might be especially useful in considering aspects of Hoffer's work--the approach taken by Franklin Fearing.[1] Fearing comments that his purpose is to develop a broad conceptual framework through which the "how and the why" of human communication can be analyzed.[2] His emphasis is on the psychological fields of individuals who are involved in communication because such fields are related to the subjects' need-value systems. According to Fearing, individuals respond to tensional states induced by their surroundings. They attempt to achieve more stable organizational patterns, this task is accomplished by a cognitive restructuring of their psychological fields which is brought about by the content of the message communicated. Fearing's model appears, at first glance, to be an appropriate one for analysis of Hoffer's work because: (1) Fearing is concerned with the broad "how and why" of communication just as Hoffer is concerned with broad patterns of human behavior, and (2) his emphasis is on the psychological state of men as is the case in much of Hoffer's

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[1]Fearing's approach is developed in the article "Toward a Psychological Theory of Human Communication," _Journal of Personality_, 22 (September, 1953), pp. 71-86.

[2]_Ibid._

theory (especially in The True Believer and The Ordeal of Change). However, there are some aspects of Fearing's approach which make it less suitable. For instance, while Fearing emphasizes how perceived psychological fields promote human behavior and Hoffer deals extensively with the same process, use of Fearing's model tends to neglect the relevance of important factors in Hoffer's conceptualization. It ignores the role played in Hoffer's theory by inherent physical and social qualities in human nature. Hoffer's ideas about the effects of man's weakness (incompletion) and his subsequent dependence on the strength of society (sociality) are integral to the body of his theorizing. They must be considered along with his ideas on man's reactions to his perceived environment. Also, Fearing's insistence that communication be defined as an "intentional" process places limitations on the scope of his theory. The Fearing model, while applicable to Hoffer's work in certain respects, would thus be limited so as to be less useful in embracing the totality of Hoffer's ideas.

The social theory of communication, in my thinking, provides the most suitable approach to the communicative aspects of Hoffer's theory because it alone considers the entire picture. When viewed from this standpoint, the psychological, physical, and sociological implications of Hoffer's theorizing can be brought together and organized into a meaningful whole.

COMMUNICATIVE SIGNIFICANCE

I indicated in the last chapter that the analyst working
with a social theory of communication can interpret Hoffer's
work as being inherently concerned with the process of human
communication. The basis upon which I make such a statement
involves the following:

At the beginning of Chapter II, when discussing Hof-
fer's ideas about the nature of man, I pointed out that
Hoffer sees a separation between man and nature which typ-
ifies traditional patterns of western thought. He locates
the origin of humanity in this division. To Hoffer, man
is a weak animal because he is unfinished and incomplete.
As a result of his incompletion, man is forced to depend
upon other men; and his strength arises out of a social
relationship in which men band together to combat nature.
Physically and mentally, it is essential to man's existence
for him to live as a social animal. Because man is phys-
ically weak, he is drawn to society where his self-concept
originates in the social environment. Man not only depends
upon others for his survival, but he relies upon others for
his identity. In society, man reacts against change created
by outside forces which seek to disrupt his environment and
disturb his feeling of identity. He naturally tends to
strive for a social order in which his relationships to
other people and things are clearly defined. Thus, it seems
as if Hoffer's entire view of the nature of man is based on

a foundation which ultimately necessitates communication.
Because man is weak and unfinished, he must live in a social
environment. The factor which creates society, in the
theories of symbolic interactionists, is communication. Com-
munication is the means through which men are brought to-
gether. Hoffer's "man" lives in society where his contact
with others is established by communication.

Secondly, in earlier chapters I have stated that men
are brought into relationships through symbolic expression
of their thoughts and feelings. For instance, the structure
of mass movements such as those described in The True Be-
liever, the nature of their form and organization, is the
symbolic expression of the needs and desires of those who
created the movements as well as those of their eventual
members.

Hoffer talks about the individual's striving to prove
his own worth through work.[3] In this manner the individual's
efforts and his productivity serve as the symbolic statement
of his identity. Only through society can symbolic forms
of human activity be interpreted by others which results in
the creation of human identity. Symbolic relationships
which are formed between men, as well as in the mind of the
single human being, compose the fabric of "self." In
Hoffer's eyes, however, the ideal human identity is con-

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[3]Hoffer, The Ordeal of Change (New York: Harper and
Row, 1963), p. 61.

structed out of definite forms of behavior. Nowhere is
this fact more clearly demonstrated than in Hoffer's dis-
cussion of "The Negro Revolution" in The Temper of Our Time.
In this essay Hoffer places the burden of "identity-building"
squarely on the shoulders of the Black American because:

> Surely, it should be the other way around: it is the
> American Negro who should demonstrate to the world
> what Negro energy, initiative, skill, and guts can
> do, and serve as an object of identification to
> Negroes everywhere.[4]

In other words, in order for the American Negro to create
for himself an identity which is accepted by the rest of
society, he must symbolically express his worth and char-
acter through deeds and action. To Hoffer, this process
is best conceived in terms of the American pioneer spirit.
The best human identity is created through work. Hoffer
stereotypes the type of behavior which, in his opinion, must
characterize the struggle of the American Black for identity.

Hoffer's treatment of the term "persuasion" also can be
approached as exemplary of the manner in which men relate
to each other through symbolic expression. When he uses
the word "persuasion," Hoffer implies that it is similar to
"coercion." It is one thing for man to attempt to influence
the thoughts and actions of others, but such attempts are
more effective if they coincide with efforts to symbolize
the strength of the cause through the use of coercion. As
Hoffer argues in The True Believer, propaganda (synonymous

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[4]Hoffer, The Temper of Our Time (New York: Harper and
Row, 1967), p. 54.

with persuasion in Hoffer's usage) is more useful when com-
bined with the utilization of force. Coercion is persuasive.[5]
Thus men define their relationships to one another using
symbolic means, both verbal "persuasion" and the non-verbal
show of strength.

These two human characteristics, sociality and symbol-
usage, bring about the concept of identification as a dis-
tinct human quality. Identification is the mechanism that
men utilize to create the nature of society. It is through
the development of identification that men are brought
together, relationships are defined, and social order is
determined. The "unifying agents" which Hoffer discusses
in The True Believer can be viewed as devices which create
identification among men. Take, for example, Hoffer's
ideas about hatred as a unifying agent:

> Common hatred unites the most heterogeneous elements.
> To share a common hatred, with an enemy even, is to
> infect him with a feeling of kinship, and thus sap
> his powers of resistance.[6]

The unifying agents bring divided men together; therefore
they act as "identifying agents" in the sense of the con-
cept as described earlier.

Finally, I have argued that the student of Hoffer's
theorizing can find communicative significance in the fact
that Hoffer places mankind in a constant struggle to obtain

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[5]Hoffer, The True Believer (New York: Harper and Row,
1951), pp. 97-100.

[6]Ibid., pp. 86-87.

social order. This is an important aspect of Hoffer's "assumptive world." Hoffer is extremely quick to categorize men, usually on the basis of racial or psychological distinctions. By "psychological distinctions," I am referring to his differentiation between men in terms of their mental outlook which makes them more or less active, more or less stable, more or less productive, and so on. This entire categorization is a facet of Hoffer's philosophical approach which emphasizes the value of aggressive, physical and mental labor. Implicitly, Hoffer is involved in an attempt to specify the nature of the social order, and the limitations that this attempt places upon the scope of his philosophy will be discussed later in this chapter.

The point is, however, that when the communication theorist approaches Hoffer's writings, he can isolate elements which are significant for his purposes if he considers the perspective of the symbolic interactionists and a social theory of communication. The processes which compose communication--sociality, symbol-usage, identification, and social ordering--can all be seen to operate within Hoffer's theories. In these respects, the statements which Hoffer makes about human nature and human behavior can be of value to the individual who is interested in communication.

There are some factors inherent in Hoffer's theorizing which tend to limit its scope of application, however.

Hoffer maintains that his purpose is to provide a theoretical foundation for analysis of human behavior. The product of his efforts is of a decidedly generalized nature. But the kind of explanation which he provides is also a result of the influence of his particular "assumptive world." I would argue that the combined effect of Hoffer's views on change, human response to change, and the nature of society (especially American society) contributes to his tendency to over-extend the prevalence of the True Believer psychology. The characteristics of the True Believer, as Hoffer describes him, arise naturally out of Hoffer's general conceptualization of the nature of man and man's response to change. The question is whether or not the True Believer characterizes, to a significant degree, society as it actually exists. It is my feeling that when Hoffer views contemporary society, he regards men in terms of the True Believer psychology. This is the outgrowth of his fundamental approach to the nature of man.

While Hoffer labels the True Believer a "fanatic" and talks of him as a segment of society, he attributes to all men the same basic characteristics which distinguish the True Believer. This fact is made apparent in The Temper of Our Time. In one essay he calls the modern age "The Time of Juveniles" and argues that society is made up of the immature, individuals who feel disoriented in their environment and subsequently strive for pride and security.

The result is that:

> The adaptation to change has also produced the
> American hustler, a type as juvenile, primitive,
> and plastic as the True Believer, but functioning
> without ideology and the magic of communion.[7]

In other words, American society is composed of "hustlers"
who resemble True Believers except that they lack "ide-
ology and the magic of communion." I believe that Hoffer
is narrow in his approach to the structure of American
society and underrates its potential for promotion of mass
movements and True Believers. However, the point here is
that Hoffer approaches men, in general, in terms of the
True Believer. In his article "Some Thoughts on the
Present," he comments that "everywhere there is a greed
for pride."[8] In Hoffer's eyes, the world of today is the
world of the True Believer.

Hoffer's tendency to over-extend the pervasiveness of
the True Believer personality is largely an outgrowth of
his analysis of change. As I indicated in Chapter III,
there are a number of ways in which the idea of change can
be conceptualized. Hoffer sees change as drastic and
revolutionary, usually resulting from forces external to
the nature of society. This might have been an appropriate
mode of analysis in a time when the very existence of men
was totally dependent upon the vagaries of nature. However,

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[7]Hoffer, The Temper of Our Time, p. 15.

[8]Ibid., p. 100.

while man is still tied to nature's whim, he is much more independent than he once was. He now has learned to control, or at least to predict, some of the factors which were once totally unpredictable. In the present age, "social change is thus, to a great extent, a systematic product of the structure of society itself."[9] Wilbert Moore comments that as social systems have become increasingly independent from the non-human environment, the impact of shifts and crises is cushioned.[10] This is to say that the dependency of human beings upon the natural order has lessened in recent time (primarily in industrialized countries). While man still lives in the presence of change, the change which he faces today is largely a product of his own social system. Also in the age of rapid technological advancement, man has become more accustomed to ever-present change. Drastic change can still be a force which disorients mankind; however individuals today are more aware of the fact that theirs is a climate of constant change. Hoffer's inability to accurately come to grips with the nature of change which confronts modern society has implications which reflect upon the strength of his theory in other areas.

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[9]Robert Cole, "Structural-Functional Theory, the Dialectic, and Social Change," The Sociological Quarterly, 7:1 (Winter, 1966), p. 57.

[10]Wilbert E. Moore, "A Reconsideration of Theories of Social Change," American Sociological Review, 25:6 (December, 1960), p. 812.

For instance, the manner in which Hoffer conceptualizes change affects his analysis of human response--the form of response with which he deals most extensively is the mass movement. When discussing mass movements, Hoffer's frequently used examples are not drawn from American society. They are almost exclusively foreign in origin to America (the Nazi movement, Islam, Russian and French revolutions, and Christianity are the most frequently used examples). Hoffer maintains that America is simply not a favorable environment for the growth and endurance of true mass movements.[11] He supports his position by contending that American society has assimilated every potential mass movement that it has developed. Society in this country has absorbed mass movements and made them hand-maidens of an acquisitive American ideal:

> It has made of Puritanism a forcing house of successful capitalists; it turned Mormonism into a school for business tycoons; and even American Communism is becoming a preparatory school for successful real-estate dealers.[12]

In other words, mass movements have lost their "ideology and the magic of communion" so that "American hustlers" replace True Believers.

I would argue this point. I think that the fallacy in Hoffer's contention arises out of his conceptualization of change. Because Hoffer deals primarily with human response

[11]Hoffer, The Temper of Our Time, p. 52.

[12]Ibid.

to drastic, revolutionary, externally-imposed change, he
fails to consider adequately how men adjust to the type of
change they face in everyday life in America. His comments
on student riots before the Senate Subcommittee on Invest-
igations in 1969 are indicative of this failure. Hoffer
sees student dissenters as power-hungry, spoiled "children."
Because the majority of these students have not been exposed
to earth-shaking hardship or disaster in their lifetimes,
he can not understand the basis for their frustration with
society. He can not relate to frustration caused by prob-
lems from within the social system. He does not perceive
conditions within the system which he believes could gen-
erate a genuine mass movement, complete with ideology and
communion between adherents. Hoffer's concept of change
and human response to change makes him unable to effectively
cope with the realities of present-day life. The "American
hustler" and the True Believer are cut from the same cloth.
However, they do not necessarily characterize American
society as a whole.

The third shortcoming in Hoffer's analysis is his view
of the nature of American society. The primary focus of
his theorizing, as I have pointed out, is the nature of
man and human response to change. Yet when he discusses
these areas, particularly human response to change, he
draws his examples from foreign cultures. He contends that
American society, which he perceives as historically favor-

ing the position of the common man, is too absorbent to be condusive to the growth of genuine mass movements. However, when Hoffer deals with contemporary American society, he operates on the basis of the same assumptions which characterize his treatment of the nature of man in general. He maintains that the value of American society is its ability to grant freedom to all, to give the weak and the poor an opportunity for advancement, and to liberate man's creative spirit. He posits that the strength of American society lies in the fact that opportunity is not the tool of an aristocratic social structure. But in Hoffer's eyes society in America is very definitely structured. The structure he assumes is the product, once again, of his own "assumptive world." To Hoffer, American social order may not be the function of royal lineage, but it is tied to work. The man who works, who carves an identity for himself out of sheer physical labor, is the man who will succeed. This simplistic point of view allows him to ignore much of the heterogeneity of American society. It allows him to overlook the roots of social stratification in America in terms of indices other than individual productivity. He is able to redefine the environment in terms of his own concept of social order. Wendell King remarks that "many of the confusions in modern society stem from its heterogeneity."[13] The question is, how do the many sub-

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[13]Wendell C. King, Social Movements in the United States (New York: Random House, 1956), p. 16.

cultures and groups in America structure their social order?
The answer is that they do so in many different ways through
a variety of means. Hoffer is unable to give much import-
ance to the so-called Black Revolution or to the Youth
Movement in American society because they do not fit into
his particular conceptualization of the way that men respond
to change. He claims that the Black Revolution is not really
a revolution at all because American Negroes are not solely
concerned with "community building." They are not willing
to devote themselves to full-time effort to achieve middle-
class American standards without the trappings of a full-
blown mass movement. To Hoffer, American Blacks must con-
struct their identities out of hard work. He doesn't con-
sider the other factors which may be involved in this sit-
uation such as lines of communication within the Black com-
munity and those between Blacks and the rest of society.
He does not perceive that pride and security for Blacks
might stem from a multiplicity of sources in addition to
physical labor. Hoffer does not provide us with much of a
basis for understanding how men relate to change produced
from within the social structure, nor does he give us much
basis for dealing with the heterogeneity of American society
in particular. Finally, he does not provide a "theoretical
foundation" for understanding the behavior of the major
part of American society--those individuals who do not

strip themselves of a former identity and become totally involved in the "rebirth" provided by a revolutionary mass movement. On what basis do we analyze the behavior of those who face the problems of day-to-day existence and gradual change?

There is certainly a danger inherent in over-emphasizing the presence of the True Believer psychology. The danger in this tendency arises out of its over-simplification. The study of human affairs which attempts to comprehend the broad spectrum of social behavior, or even a specialized segment of human activity, can not rely upon a general catch-all philosophy which lumps the behavior of varying kinds of actors, playing many roles, into one large category.

I have argued that Hoffer's particular concept of change influences many aspects of his theorizing. This influence can be detected through consideration of the manner in which Hoffer links "persuasion" and "coercion," as well. To Hoffer, the desire to persuade is founded in individuals' deep-rooted feelings of deficiency. He uses the terms "persuade," "proselytize," and "propagandize" in exactly the same manner. As I have indicated, he also links persuasion and coercion as two complementary processes. But here again Hoffer is thinking in terms of the True Believer. The individual who is motivated to proselytize suffers from an awareness of his deficiency. He

is a fanatic. His desire to proselytize, or to "persuade," coincides with his desire to command others through the use of sheer physical force. "Coercion," to Hoffer, conjures up visions of the concentration camp, terrorist activity, and forced labor. Once again, Hoffer's approach to an aspect of human interaction--persuasion--is colored by the nature of his view of change. Men are subject to _drastic_ change, they suffer _severe_ deficiencies, and attempt to enforce their will through _coercion_. His failure to take a realistic approach to the problems of human response to change, which occur as a necessary outgrowth of the social structure, thus contributes to Hoffer's inability to analyze the manner in which men interact to confront these problems.

In _Working and Thinking on the Waterfront_, Hoffer asks himself whether or not he has missed much in his lifetime by spending it with barely literate people. He answers his own question in this way:

> I need intellectual isolation to work out my ideas. I get my stimulation from both the world of books and the book of the world. I cannot see how living with educated, articulate people, skilled in argument, would have helped me to develop my ideas.[14]

Hoffer's philosophy of the nature of man and the world is based upon his observation of his surroundings during the course of his life. He considers it a strength that he has never been influenced to a great extent by the academic

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[14]Hoffer, _Working and Thinking on the Waterfront_ (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), p. 86.

world, but rather that he has formulated his ideas through
the means of his own experience. However, Hoffer's partic-
ular vantage-point, which has allowed him to develop his
philosophy relatively untouched by the academic environ-
ment, has also provided him with a rather narrow view of
the workings of the world. He evaluates human behavior
according to the requirements of his assumptive world and
records his observations on the basis of this influence.
Hoffer's vantage-point may provide him with an advantage;
however it also hinders him in his attempt to provide a
theoretical framework through which we can analyze human
nature and behavior. It hinders him in his efforts to dis-
cern the "temper of our time."

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