

I.

Let us take two series of models for the process of communication:

(1) the flow of water from one container to an other; the branding of cattle; the painting of a picture; the making of a lecture. (2) the crystallisation of salt; making love; dancing; discussing a law in parliament. The first series was chosen to exemplify four types of discursive communication, and the second one to do the same for four types of dialogical communication. In the first series communication appears as a process in which one can distinguish a sender that emits information, (first water container, cowboy; painter and lecturer), from a receiver that is being informed, (second water container, cattle, canvass and students). But the way information is transmitted differs from example to example. In the first example it is transmitted immediately in the form of water; in the second the mediation is a branding iron; in the third the obvious mediation is paint and a brush, but there is the mind of the painter behind this obvious medium, and the canvass itself is a medium between painter and a possible contemplator of the painting; and in the fourth example through the enormously complex medium called "language". In other words: the first series of models tries to exemplify discursive communication with increasing complexity of mediation. The second series shows communication as a process through which various elements combine to bring forth information. The elements are, in the first example, sodium and chlorine atoms, in the second two lovers, in the third various dancers, and in the fourth members of parliament. The information is, in the first example, the structure of the crystal; in the second a fertilized egg that may result in a baby; in the third it is a dance pattern that may have been proposed to the dancers by someone who does not participate in the dancing and may aim at informing a public that watches the dancing; and in the fourth example the information is a law that is meant to inform a society in the form of a behavior pattern in such a way that those who are informed by it ignore the method and the details through which the information has been elaborated. In other words: the second series of examples tries to exemplify dialogical communication, and, like the first one, tries to show increasing complexity of mediation. (The models in the two series given are meant to be models, and should not be taken by the reader in any other way than as models.)

If we consider those models, the first thing that is obvious is the fact that they have been taken out of context. The water model was taken out of the context of the circulation of water, which may, in itself, serve as a model for dialogical communication. The same is true of the other three models in this series, the contexts being, for example, cattle breeding, the history of painting, and that great conversation called "culture". As for the second series, the first example was taken out of the context of physical processes governed by the second principle of thermodynamics, which can

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in itself serve as a model for discursive communication. The same is true of the other three models in this series, the contexts being, for example, biological evolution; the development of the dance; and the progressive process of political administration. This consideration points at the fact that any discourse may be considered a phase of a wider dialogical communication, and any dialogue a phase of a wider discursive communication. But this fact cannot deny the other fact that, given a more or less well defined communication process, it does make sense to verify whether it obeys to a more or less discursive or to a more or less dialogical structure.

The second thing that becomes obvious if we consider those models is the entirely different position of information in the discursive communication from what it is in the dialogical communication. In discursive communication information is somehow contained in the sender and transmitted to the receiver. We may speak, if we like, of "memories" in a wide sense of the term, and we may say that in discursive communication information is transmitted from the memory of the sender, (where it was stored), to the memory of the receiver, (where it can now be stored). In dialogical communication information somehow results from the communication process. Elements for that information are, to be sure, contained in the memories of those who participate in the process, but it is the process itself that synthesizes these elements into information. We may thus advance a hypothesis concerning the relationship between discursive and dialogical communication, Thus: discursive communication transmits information elaborated by previous dialogical communication, and aims at further elaboration by subsequent dialogical communication. The communication process as a whole may thus appear as a discourse composed of dialogical and discursive phases, and may be interpreted both entropically, (in agreement with the natural sciences), or negentropically, (in agreement with the cultural sciences). But it is, of course, equally possible to take an even wider view of this hypothesis and see communication as a discursive process, composed of dialogical and discursive phases, but inserted in the vast context of processes "tout court", of which it makes not much sense to say whether they are dialogical or discursive. Anyhow, the hypothesis may be, but needs not be, read in a dialectical spirit.

II.

We may, if we like, try and apply this hypothesis to the history of Western civilisation, with the double aim to see whether the hypothesis works and to see whether we can look at that history from a somewhat new viewpoint. We might then discover, (but this will certainly need further investigation), that there are periods in that history in which dialogue predominates, and others which seem to be dominated by discourse. We might, for instance, say that the event called variously "French", or "American", or "Industrial revolution". is a point in that history which substitutes

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the dominance of dialogue with the dominance of discourse. Such a view might be illustrated on various levels. Compare for instance the dialogical, ("contractual"), character of Rousseau's philosophy with the discursive, ("dialectical"), character of Hegel's. Or the dialogical, (reversible), character of Newton's science with the discursive, (evolutionary), character of Darwin's. Or the dialogical, (exchange), character of mercantilism with the discursive, (imperialistic), character of industrial capitalism. Or, to come nearer to the level of language, the round table dialogues of the Ancien régime with discourses of Danton's at the National Assembly. Or the predominance of the theatre in the 18th century with the predominance of the novel in the 19th. (It is easily possible to deepen and widen these examples.)

If we go on from there and ask ourselves how the present situation could be interpreted, we might say that it is characterized by a totalitarian predominance of discourse, and by the fact that dialogical communication is being pushed toward the horizon. That it is, in fact, an extreme result of the tendencies initiated by the revolutions mentioned. Such an interpretation could be illustrated on various levels. On the level of the sciences, the arts, philosophy and politics, for example. Everywhere, (and not the least on the level of technology), the furiously dynamic and progressive climate could be pointed to, which is characteristic of discourse. And everywhere it could be shown that the dialogical phases of communication, (the elaboration of information), are being restricted to ever smaller and ever more subdivided circles, (the "specialists"), which are becoming inaccessible to the participants in discursive communication and tend to disappear on their horizon. But the present paper will restrict its consideration to the communication aspect proper of the present situation, where the predominance of discourse is even clearer.

It is dominated by what is called "mass media", and these are sustained by what may be called "media of the élite", and both have, at present, a typically discursive structure. The mass media, like the TV, films, magazines, posters, newspapers and so forth, are nets that transmit information from relatively few senders toward an ever increasing very great number of receivers. The media of the élite, like scientific publications, computer cards, art exhibitions and so forth, are channels that transmit information from a very small number of senders toward receivers who, for participating in this type of communication, may become senders in the mass media networks. In reality, therefore, the mass media senders are transmitters of information, (and manipulators of information), which they received themselves from the élite media channels. In the back ground of the élite media senders are those dialogical groups of specialists which elaborate information, which is again the result of their "memories", name-

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ly the result of their various objective knowledge and subjective ideologies. And the reception of information through the mass media may result in dialogue between the receivers, which is however unproductive of new information, because allow for no true feed-back on the part of their receivers.

The structure of the present situation, if seen from an communicological viewpoint, may thus be resumed this way: There are very small groups of specialists who elaborate information dialogically in accordance with their knowledge and ideologies. This information is transmitted through a complex system of élite and mass channels, and manipulated in that system, to an increasingly enormous number of receivers who have no access to the elaboration and controll of information, (let alone to an influence on it), and who cannot dialogue over the information in any meaningful sense of the term. Apparently dialogical islands in this ocean of discourse, (like elections, parliamentary debates, public discussions and so forth), are archaeological remains of a remote past, (the Ancien régime), and have no true effect in the present situation. It is what might be called a progressively totalitarian, a typically discursive structure.

But it is necessary to point out that there are tendencies in the present situation, (almost exclusively within the élite communication), that seem to aim at a re-structuring of the situation. These tendencies may be called variously "formalistic", "analythical" or "structuralistic", they are at work mostly in the fields of the sciences, the arts and in politics, and they seem to aim at the abandon of discourse and at a dialogue on a somewhat new level. He who observes these tendencies may have the feeling that the hey-day of progressive, dynamic discourse is over. (Although he will have to admit that it was never before so progressive, dynamic and efficient as it is at present.)

What Fred Forest is trying to do, however, is of a different order. To understand his aim it is necessary to look a bit closer at the way mass media function in the present situation. Because his is in effect a commitment against discourse, not on the élite level, but on the level of the mass media themselves.

III.

The mass media are, to a great extend, the result of technological discursive progress, and their true impact is recent. It may be said that they began to really work only after the second war, and that they have, as yet, not achieved by far the efficiency which they potentially possess. (It is easy to give one's imagination free course and predict how the mass media may transform humanity into an amorphous, but perfectly manageable mass in the near future.) But the fact that they are the result of a discursive progress does not grant, in itself, that they must be automatically channels for discursive communication. They may have openings for dialogue, although

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such openings may rest closed in an overall discursive climate. In fact, a commitment toward the dialogue, and therefore against the totalitarian dominance of discourse, needs not necessarily be a commitment against the mass media, (that would be a truly reactionary commitment), but it can be instead an attempt to discover those openings within the mass media and use them. And this is, in short, what Forest is doing.

It is however necessary, before considering these openings and what Forest is doing with them, to try and distinguish them from the apparently dialogical islands that seem to exist within the mass media, (and some of which have been mentioned before "in passim"). To do this, let us give a few examples. Many newspapers, mostly in the Anglo-saxon world, but also elsewhere, have what is called a "letters to the Editor - column", which are apparently spaces within the medium itself that are destined to communicate a feed-back which the paper has received from its receivers. Some newspapers conduct what is called "opinion -polls", the result of which are published within the paper and represent, apparently, a spontaneous effort of the medium to open itself to feed-back. Some TV programs seem to provide for feed-back by inviting their spectators to call the sender over the phone, (or to contact it some other way), and thus collaborate in the program. Some TV programs invite receivers, (following in this to various criteria of choice), to participate in what is known as "round tables". Some cinemas furnish ^{their} public forms to be filled in with the opinion of the public concerning the film shown. And there are many more of such examples for apparently dialogical islands within the various mass networks.

What is common to all of these examples is the fact that the feed-back thus provoked by the medium itself provides information, (if it is valid information, and not just mechanical reaction to the information transmitted by the medium), for the senders of the mass media, (and for the senders that stand behind those senders), whilst giving the receivers a false sensation of participation. It is therefore an opening, not for the receivers, but for the senders to send more efficiently in the future. (The same may be said of the market research conducted by manufacturers, apparently aiming ~~and~~ finding out what the consumers want, but in reality ~~to~~ at conditioning the demand before production. And, of course, the same may be said of pre-election polling, which, by the way, shows the problematicity of voting in the present context, highly determined by discourse.) This is so, because the feed-back the media get that way cannot be true dialogical responses made by the receivers. In order to be dialogical, a communication process must be composed of partners that are comparable among themselves as to their level of information. And this is not the case where a mass medium and its receivers are partners. Any communication within such a constellation is necessarily a discourse of the medium, be it masked dialogically or not, and Forest cannot take recourse to such false openings in his com-

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mitment against discourse.

The true openings are of a different character altogether. They consist, in essence, in the fact that mass media can be true "networks", and not excentrical and centrifugal wheels that they are at present. The openings are those places along the excentrical spikes where cross-connections may be established. But since the media are used exclusively for discursive purposes, and since those who own and manipulate them have no interest whatsoever to change this, to wish to activate these openings means not only to have to discover them within the media, but also to have to force them. Therefore the impression one gets while doing this is not that of discovery, but the feeling that one is drilling holes into the media structure. And this is in fact the feeling Forest is having.

Let us take one example of what he is doing. He buys a space on the page of a newspaper, (which is perfectly in agreement with the medium, and is, in fact, the true purpose of the medium: selling space to advertisers). But then, instead of filling this space with his message, he leaves it almost open. Now, although this is perfectly legitimate within the media structure, it poses a big problem for those who want them discursive. Because what has happened is this: Normally, a newspaper is a medium for messages that aim at conditioning the readers to a certain behavior pattern namely the behavior of consuming the goods, (material or ideal), in which the senders are interested. These messages have two forms: (a) imperatives (advertising or ideological propaganda), and (b) indicatives that imply imperatives, (news, reports, comments and so forth that imply an ideology or the interest in some product). Normally, therefore, he who buys space in a newspaper becomes automatically one of the group of its senders. But in Forest's case, this is not so. He refuses to be a sender, and thus shows that the structure of newspapers is not necessarily discursive. The space he buys thus appears as a hole within the newspaper discourse.

The opening is discovered. But it must now be made to work for dialogical communication. Therefore Forest does not leave the space entirely open, but uses a small part of it for the following message: This is your space. Fill it with your own message, and send that message to a place that will be a pool of returned filled-in blank spaces. Now this is a curious sort of communication that Forest is making. It seems to be an imperative just like those with which the rest of the newspaper is filled, and is therefore perfectly adapted to its structure. But it is different from the other newspaper imperatives in two aspects: it aims at provoking a behavior that is not one of consumption; and, (what is even more important), it invites the readers to take possession of the medium, to use the newspaper for purposes for which it is not intended by its senders. In fact, and speaking formally: Forest's message, although it is within the medium, is about the medium; it is a "meta-message".

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Theoretically, (without considering the human aspects of the process), a space for dialôgue has now be opened, and it should work according to the following pattern: messages should flow toward the pool, should there result in information, this information should be published in the newspaper with the corresponding empty space, which should result in messages, which should result in further information. The newspaper should thus have been transform ed into a mass medium for dialogical communication. And the newspaper reader should have been transformed from consumer of imperatives into a participant in the information process. The totalitarian dominance of discourse should have been perfurated.

What has happened in reality is of course far less satisfactory, because reality is far more complex than communication theory would have it. Only a few hundred answers to Forest's invitation came in, (out of hundreds of thousands of newspaper readers). The reason is probably twofold: one is that most of the readers do not believe that they have any message to send, having been conditioned by mass media to a passive consuming behavior pattern. The other reason is that many of those who have messages to send nonetheless have distrusted Forest's invitation, taking it for one more trick to have them consume something, (for instance Forest himself, or some product for which he may be working).

These reglätively few messages were documented, registered and exhibited, and an attempt was made to synthesize them into information. (This attempt was not very successful, although the messages were in part interesting. They consisted of texts and drawings of an existential character, with a surprisingly small amount of pornography and demagoguery among them. And some had considerable aesthetic dimensions. The percentage of obviously pathological messages was equally surprisingly small. Nonetheless, the attempt at information was not very successful, probably due to lack of know-how.) However the newspaper, reluctant as it was in the first place, did not follow up with a publication of results and further space at the disposal of its readers. It very probably discovered the subversive character of this kind of communication. (Subversive, that is, to its discursive structure.) Forest, therefore, took recourse to a make-shift. He invited those who sent messages to meet in person and continue the dialogue verbally, (that means outside the medium which he had aimed to transform).

The result of Forest's experiment is thus rather disappointing, if one had expected it to succeed in breaking through the discursive barrier that involves us. But it is highly satisfactory, if one had a different and less utopical expectation. It did discover and disclose hidden openings in the mass media system, and it did show some aspects of our situation. This is success, and it means that Forest's attitude is correct and should be followed by further attempts, although his strategy and his method may be doubtful. In other words: the "how" is in ques

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IV.

The example given for Forest's endeavors concerned a rather traditional medium: the newspaper, and was therefore possibly not very convincing. The more sophisticated media, especially TV, probably provide a field for more radical experimentation. It is however significant that Forest started his work with what he "calls" "press animation", because it shows that he is aware of the experimental character of what he is doing. Let us now give, in a sketchy way, two examples of his attempts to re-structure television.

The first one takes his newspaper experience as a model. It consists of interrupting the flow of TV programs by showing for a certain period, (a minute or so), an empty screen to the spectators. A voice accompanies the first seconds, saying: This is no transmission defect, but is a space-time left open for your intervention. It was made in the French television and had a result very similar to the one with the newspapers already mentioned. Its theoretical critique is very similar to the one already offered, but one should add here that in it Forest did not really seize the dialogical virtualities inherent in television.

What characterizes television is the fact that like the telephone, and unlike the cinema, it permits a true cross communication, a true net of dialogical communications. It permits, in fact, the transformation of society into a veritable village in a far more radical sense than the one McLuhan gives it. One can imagine, if one wants, a situation, in which television would be the medium not only for world-wide gossip, but also for world-wide exchange of information resulting in world-wide authentic information. The world would become an universal market place, which means a polis. It would become a true political space, a true Republic. That this is not so now, that, on the contrary, television is a potent factor in alienating the masse from public reality, is due not to its technical structure, but to the fact that it is owned and manipulated by those who impress on it a discursive, ("broadcasting") character. But if it were manipulated differently, it could not only broadcast, but also widecast and deepcast.

This fact is seized by Forest in a further experiment which he is now planning. Since he cannot take the whole world as his laboratory, he must content himself with a small street in Paris. He plans to have that street lined with TV cameras that take pictures of what is happening there. These pictures may form an ordered series, or they may cross each other. In a court yard of that street the pictures are projected on a corresponding number of TV sets, but in an order that is different from the camera order. This courtyard is again being televisioned, and a magnetoscope of this is being registered. Those who happen to use that street are invited to the court yard, see themselves and others on the screens, and react to what they see dialogically, and have that reaction of theirs televisioned.

It is hoped that this will result in dialogical communication.

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Now, from a theoretical point of view, this experiment is very complex. It involves a series of communication levels, one being the object of all the others, and the hidden hierarchy of those levels cannot be shown without a graphic. But, such theoretical considerations aside, there can be no doubt that the experiment will show an aspect of television which is being carefully avoided by those who have vested interests in it. Namely the aspect which could make of television a competitor of spoken language. If it is used in a way more or less like Forest proposes, it could serve as a medium for individual and collective communication on every level, like speech, but unlike speech it would not be predominantly conceptual, being, as it is, a code composed of pictures. A new dimension for human thought would thus have been opened, a dimension of imaginative thought in the true sense of the term.

He who follows this argument with attention might feel that we are here at the threshold of a true revolution. That we are about to take possession of a medium that will radically change the mode of life of man, and may result, like every revolution, in a new type of man, in a new being-in-the-world. But he might be mistaken. Because, should Forest's experiment be successful and threaten to spread, should a number of streets in Paris and elsewhere follow this example, there can be no doubt of two things: one is a severe reaction on the part of those who rightly fear for the continuity of the dominance of discourse. The other, (and for more decisive one), will be the reaction of the users of streets, who will feel that their privacy is being encroached on. And they will be right, in a sense that makes of the whole experiment a problem. It is this: If one transforms the world into a public space, into a space for communication, there is no space left for the private, the uncommunicable, the concrete. This is a danger. It is the opposite of the present danger, posed by the mass media as they are presently being manipulated. Namely the danger to transform the world into a private place without possible meaningful communication. It is obvious that Forest himself does not take into account the danger of total communication. He is fighting that far more pressing danger of total incommunication. But it is the duty of the critic to point out to him, (and to all others), the other side of the problem. Therefore a revolution like the one Forest seems to imagine is probably unlikely to occur, (which might be a pity).

Forest does not limit his experiments to the three examples given. He is about to learn what may be done in the field of TV, (and allied fields), and is widening the scope of his endeavors. There can be no doubt that his is a very significant contribution to the solving of some of the problems our situation poses. But for the purposes of the present paper the three examples are sufficient. The question that now arises is this: what sort of work is it that Forest is doing. This is no idle question in search of a label. The answer to it may be pertinent to some basic problems.

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V.

The mass media are, for Forest, the material which is his challenge and which he wants to change according to a model he has elaborated. And he wants to make this change in such a way that it might be taken advantage of by others. Now this description of Forest's commitment is the exact description of artistic commitment. The artist is a man who is challenged by some material, (marble, or paint, or sounds, or words, or ideas). And he knows how that material ought to be: he possessed a model. He then tries to change his material in accordance with his model. The result of this more or less successful attempt is called a work of art, an "oeuvre". And that work in itself is a medium by which the artist communicates with others. Therefore what Forest is doing is art, by definition.

But, of course, if Forest is an artist, he is an artist of a sort which does not exist in our tradition. This is so, because the material Forest has chosen is in some ways entirely different from the materials of tradition.

And this fact has several consequences, some of which will be mentioned. Because although it might not be true that the means is the message, there is certainly a close relationship between means and message. What Forest is doing is, in a considerable part, result of the material, the mass media, he has chosen.

The first thing to be said is that Forest does not work within the mass media, (as so many artists do nowadays), but that he works from outside and upon them. The mass media are not his medium, but his object. Now that means that he tries to manipulate not some elements of the mass media, but the mass media themselves, namely not only their apparatus, but also, and mostly, those people who work for them, with them, and who own them. It is they who are his marble. Now this does not look like art at all, but more like social engineering. But it is art nonetheless, because it is not, like social engineering, an attempt to reify people, but on the contrary an attempt to dis-alienate people.

The second thing to be said is that, unlike other and traditional materials, mass media do not permit to be changed into an oeuvre. The result of Forest's work can never be a thing, be it spacio-temporal, temporal or spacial. It will always be a structure. What Forest wants to change is not the elements of his material, but its structure. Many artists may say at present that it is exactly this that they are doing. But nonetheless their efforts result in a thing that is there. Not so with Forest. Therefore his endeavor is so to speak an artistic endeavor of the second order, and may point, in this aspect too, to a future.

The third thing to be said is the fact that the newness of Forest's material poses a new problem. All the traditional materials, (including the cinema and the TV as media of expression), have evolved methods that are in

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some way appropriate to their handling. These methods can be learned in specialized schools and can be improved upon by the individual artist. But Forest is obliged to work out his own methods. He cannot rely on any tradition. In other words: he must simultaneously learn what he wants to do and how he wants to do it. Now this synchronisation of aim and method, of content and form, of means and message, that is forced upon Forest, is that aspect of Forest's work that makes it so attractive. Because it is this simultaneity that characterizes true artistic commitment. In a way it may be said that a radically artistic attitude is being forced upon Forest, and that this imposition is a counter-proof to the so-called "artistic crisis". If the arts are in a crisis, this is very possibly due to the fact that they stick to traditional materials, and ignore the revolution that is characteristic of the present: the mass media revolution. Once they take the mass media as their object, they are, of necessity, driven out of their crisis.

Many other things may be said concerning Forest's commitment. They are not very interesting, if they are taken to mean just Forest's situation. But they become very interesting if they are taken ^{to mean} a typical situation of which Forest is an example. Namely thus: man is an animal that tries to impose form on his sense-less surroundings and thus give it meaning. In trying to do this he is sometimes called an "artist". These senseless surrounding change historically, that is: they change due to previous human form giving. (This is an aspect of the irony of human condition.) Now if man tries to inform those aspects of his surroundings that are historically surpassed, he will be recognized by society as an artist, he will be exhibited and admired. But he will be no "true" artist. But if he tries to inform that aspects of the surroundings that are most significant in a given historical moment, (like for instance the mass media are today), he will have to face a whole series of problems not recognized as such by others. And it is these problems that will make him an artist. Seen in this light, the question concerning the sort of work Forest is trying to do are not idle question. They concern all of us, insofar as they concern the problem of leading a dignified life in the face of the forces that condition us almost desperately.

VI.

Let us try and resume the argument presented in this paper. A formal analysis may reveal two types of communication: dialogue and discourse. Dialogue is characterized by the fact that it creates information, and discourse by the fact that it transmits information. There is a rather complex relationship between the two, and one may be contained in the other. But a hypothesis was proposed, according to which there are periods during which one type of communication predominates, and periods that are predominated by the other. It was suggested that ours is a period of extreme predomination

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of discourse. The characteristics of such a predomination are a violently dynamic and progressive climate, and the lack of access to the origins of information, therefore the lack of any control over information. One of the methods by which discourse predominates at present are the mass media. But they are not, in themselves exclusively discursive. They are only used that way by those in power, but could be, theoretically, work also for dialogical communication. Forest is trying to find a way, (or several ways), to make them do so. His is an artistic commitment in a radical sense of this term, and in being it, may point to a possible attitude in the face of our determining surroundings.

There is no guarantee that he will be, to any meaningful extent, successful in his endeavors. Nor is there any guarantee that any one else will. It is quite possible that the future holds even more efficient and universal discourse. But we cannot accept such a sort of future. Because we cannot accept the transformation of man into a passive consumer of information. This is why we must try, quand-même, to change the structure of predominant communication. This paper wanted to show some aspects of the problems involved, if we try to do this.