

## **Action Anthropology**

Action anthropology is significant in the history of applied anthropology because it was the first of the value-explicit approaches. Comparison with the other approaches reveals a consistent concern with culture and with strategies that would have effects on it. Action anthropologists attempt both to understand communities and to influence the rate and direction of change within these communities.

Action anthropology is a value-explicit activity focused on two general goals of essentially equal priority. These are the goals of science and the goals of a specific, culturally defined community. Working in conjunction with community members, the action anthropologist works to discover community problems and to identify potential solutions, with continual feedback between its scientific and community subprocesses. The duality of the process can be seen in the two key base values in action anthropology, which are community self-determination and scientific truth.

### **DEVELOPMENT OF THE APPROACH**

Although Sol Tax is credited with the development of action anthropology, the approach was developed by a group of student-anthropologists largely from the University of Chicago under "the non-directive direction" of Tax (Gearing, Netting, and Peattie 1960:1) The group changed through time as students went on to other activities and as new students replaced them.

The approach was developed in the Fox Project, which was initiated to give University of Chicago anthropology students an opportunity to gain field experience. Tax, having done his research with the Fox people in the mid-1930s, attempted to develop an opportunity for his students among a group of Fox Indians who lived near Tama, Iowa. The original group of students who arrived

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in Fox country in mid-summer of 1948 intended to engage in traditional social anthropology research.

Very quickly the goals of the research group changed to include development. It has been suggested that the field team turned toward development because of three factors. The first was the changes in the Fox community itself since Tax had engaged in field work some fifteen years earlier. Second, Tax had made a commitment to a Bureau of Indian Affairs official, John Provinse, also an anthropologist, to provide Provinse with whatever information might be useful to the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The third influencing factor was that the project was not committed to any specific research problem. According to program participants, "that relative absence of structure permitted the field party to focus their interests wherever they wanted but, at least as importantly, it created a greater freedom for the Fox, in conversations with the field party, to guide the subject matter as they would" (Gearing, Netting, and Peattie 1960:26). This served as a germ for the role relationship characteristic of action anthropology.

The transition from vague scientific goals to the complex goals of action anthropology was not without difficulty. The field party had doubts about the legitimacy of the emerging approach. Tax himself had to reverse his earlier position on applied anthropology, which called for a separation of the role of scientist and the role of the practitioner. As he notes in an article published only three years before the initiation of the Fox Project:

A scientific observer or reasoner, merely as such, is not an advisor for practice. His part is only to show that certain consequences follow from certain causes, and that to obtain certain ends, certain means are the most effectual. Whether the ends themselves are such as ought to be pursued, and if so, in what cases and to what great length, it is no part of his business as a cultivator of science to decide, and science alone will never qualify him for the decision. (Tax 1945, in Gearing, Netting, and Peattie 1960:16).

It should be made clear that Tax was not saying that the scientist should not become directly involved in the affairs of life, it is just that in doing so he was no longer acting in the role of scientist. As will be seen, the Fox Project and its resultant formulation, action anthropology, represented a major transformation in his conception of the scientist's role. He even went so far as to suggest that anthropology can have only one goal, namely, that of advancing knowledge. Anything else, however valuable, was not science.

In spite of inconsistency with Tax's earlier position, the commitment to a program of intervention emerged quickly. Though rooted in the humane values of the student field staff, the tendency to get involved was encouraged by Tax, who was quick to argue that an action research approach might not only be practically useful, but in fact might represent superior science. A few months after the beginnings of the project it became quite clear that the field party was going to become involved in development as well as research. From this decision action anthropology emerged as an alternative model for applied anthropology.

## KEY CONCEPTS

Self-determination is a key concept in action anthropology, which is expressed as a principle of action and a goal. The action anthropologist works to achieve self-determining communities. This goal consistently determines or influences the behavior of the action anthropologist in the field. Self-determination implies the opportunity to be right or wrong. As Tax has put it, the *freedom to make mistakes*. That is, a truly self-determining community has the responsibility for both success and failure. As Gearing notes, "Any other freedom is false. And any less freedom will destroy a human community" (1960c:414).

The action anthropologist works to achieve self-determination. In logical terms that is something of a paradox; that is, one attempts to generate self-determination by influencing the behavior of the group. Tax admits to the paradox, yet is within reason when he suggests that the concept is practically workable:

Tax expresses the complex meanings associated with self-determination:

All we want in our action programs is to provide, if we can, genuine alternatives from which the people involved can freely choose—and to be ourselves as little restrictive as is humanly possible. It follows, however, that we must try to remove restrictions imposed by others on the alternatives open to Indians and on their freedom to choose among them. We avoid imposing our values upon the Indians, but we do not mean to leave a vacuum for other outsiders to fill. Our program is positive, not negative; it is a program of action, not inaction; but it is also a program of probing, listening, learning, giving in. (Tax 1958, in Gearing, Netting, and Peattie 1960:416)

Action anthropologists have a special relationship with power—that is, they must avoid assuming power. Action anthropology is not based on authority, but on persuasion and education. The process can therefore only go as "far as the community would voluntarily follow" (Gearing 1960d:216). Even when the action anthropologist is not linked to a power-providing agency and has personally disavowed power and authority, he or she must actively resist the accumulation of power. If the anthropologist is placed in an administrative role defined as power-holding, the approach becomes virtually impossible to use. In other words, the view of the client or target community as a passive entity to be manipulated is rejected.

As the action anthropologist avoids the accumulation and use of power, he or she also attempts to foster its growth and accumulation in the community. This implies the creation of social organization and the fostering of community leadership. Among the Fox, this represented a serious challenge. Power was diffusely distributed in the Fox community. Further, power was often used to express factionalism rather than purposive action toward the achievement of community goals.

Action anthropology rejects a linear view of planning. The approach used might be best termed interactive planning, because of the tendency to stress

ambiguous means and ends distinctions and the continual consideration of the interaction of goals and action.

Interactive planning is characterized by a number of attributes. The primary proposition is that means and ends are interdependent. Ends are appropriate to means, and means are appropriate to ends. Action can be initiated in terms of means or ends. Ends and means are determined through an interactive process that is motivated by both the problem inherent in a situation and the apparent opportunities. The problem is defined as "everything that is wrong or missing about the situation. Problems and possibilities also interact. As Diesing notes,

The area of the problem to be investigated is continually being limited by reference to what changes are possible, and vice versa. Supposedly wrong things that cannot be changed are excluded from the problem, since they cannot be made right, and a study of them would be a waste of time. Likewise, possible changes which are not changes of something that is wrong are also excluded, since they are irrelevant to the problem. Instead, only those problems are investigated which could conceivably have some effect on a part of the problem. (Diesing 1960:185)

It is obvious that the key function of the anthropologist is to discover what is the problem and what are the possibilities for change. The problem represents a complex of problems complicated, by the limitations of the community and the external interventionist. Further, the capacity to solve problems is thought to increase through time. With these increases, the complexity of the problem-solutions engaged also increases. These increases may be attributed to decreasing community divisiveness and increasing community integration. According to Peattie, the goals of the action anthropologist "tend to be open-ended objectives like growths in understanding, clarification of values and the like" (Peattie 1960b:301). The desired end-states are really expressions of a value stance, or as Peattie refers to them, "modes of valuing," used to analyze the continuous process. This approach generates severe difficulties in terms of evaluation, though in a sense evaluation is inevitable. It tends to be nonempirical and intuitive.

## BASE VALUES

It is in the realm of values that the essence of action anthropology can be discovered. The value system that characterizes action anthropology is in part relativistic and situational. That is, the realities of the situation affect value judgments up to certain limits. The relevant values of a situation are those that are indigenous to it. This means that the action anthropologist must discover the value orientation of the community within which she works. She does not derive the plan from her own values. These values are important guides to action. In addition to the relativistic core, there are values that are regarded as universal and are accepted absolutely by action anthropologists. The absolute component of the action anthropology value system consists of two elements.

The first value is truth. The primacy of truth is rooted in the continued identification of the action anthropologist as an anthropologist. It is from this value that action anthropology is legitimized as anthropology. This value is expressed strongly.

We are anthropologists in the tradition of science and scholarship. Nothing would embarrass us more than to see that we have been blinded to verifiable fact by any other values or emotions. We believe that truth and knowledge are more constructive in the long run than falsehood and superstition. We want to remain anthropologists and not become propagandists; we would rather be right according to canons of evidence than win a practical point. But also we feel impelled to trumpet our truth against whatever falsehoods we find, whether they are deliberate or psychological or mythological. This would be a duty to science and truth, even if the fate of communities of men were not involved. (Tax 1958, in Gearing, Netting, and Peattie 1960:415)

The second prime value is freedom—freedom for individuals, and communities, to be self-determining. The action anthropologist does not, therefore, advocate specific value choices. The process does involve the presentation of alternatives of choice to the community. This also implies working to free the client community from restrictions placed on their freedom by forces external to the community.

These values are consistent with the two general goals of action anthropology. These goals, expressed simply, are "to help people and to learn something in the process." These goals are explicitly described as equal in importance by Tax (Tax 1960a, in Gearing, Netting, and Peattie 1960:379). Tax attempts to show that these two goals are not in conflict. In fact, they are mutually supportive. Through truth more beneficial change can be caused, and through action more can be learned. Action anthropologists argue that the emotional intensity associated with action-involvement can increase the perceptivity of the field observer. Participation in the action increases the extent to which the anthropologist comes to understand the nature of the situation that he or she is investigating. The critical events in the action process teach because they determine activities in the future.

Being an action anthropologist forces one to be a maker of value judgments. This can be stressful and burdensome. Tax and the other action anthropologists sought to limit this stress in three ways. Allusions to the first two limiting factors have already been made. The most basic is the assumption of a value-explicit position, which allows the anthropologist to escape the potential hypocrisy of the value-implicit approaches, and "places" values where they can be more closely watched. The second limiting factor is the recognition of paramount values. The self-determination value, for example, forces most value judgments into the hands of the community. The third stress-reducing mechanism used in action anthropology is the "principle of parsimony," which suggests that the action anthropologist need not resolve value-questions that do not concern him or her. Tax illustrates the principle:

In the beginning of our Fox program, having decided to interfere for some good purpose, we were beset with value problems. Some of us were for and some of us were against the assimilation of the Indians; what a marvelously happy moment it was when we realized that this was not a judgement or decision we needed to make. It was a decision for the people concerned, not for us. Bluntly, it was none of our business. (Tax 1958, in Gearing, Netting, and Peattie 1960:416)

This means that many value-questions are never resolved because it is not necessary or appropriate for the action anthropologists to resolve them. Many value-problems are illusory.

### ACTION ANTHROPOLOGY PROCESS

The process is goal-oriented, gradual, self-directed, and self-limiting based on education and persuasion. Action anthropologists proceed step by step, basing the rate of intervention on the community's capacity to assimilate change. The process can be thought of as a complex of concrete actions that are interrelated through feedback and are consistent with community values.

The process starts with the determination of the facts relevant to action and means-ends determination. This component of action anthropology includes the determination of relevant ethnographic facts about the community in its cultural setting and the value-stances of the participating anthropologists. The process necessitates the mutual participation of both the anthropologists and the community members in the determination of goals. Based on this, action is carried out to achieve the defined goals.

Action anthropologists express goals as open-ended objectives rather than quotas. Growth in understanding or clarification of values may be stated as an objective. As Peattie notes, "They are not properly speaking 'ends' at all, for they can never be said to have been reached. They are more properly modes of valuing—modes of valuing all stages in a continuous and infinite process" (Peattie 1960b:301).

The action anthropologist does not initiate projects but instead points out alternatives. The alternative selection process is a key concrete activity. It requires that the social and physical environment be known, and thereby draws upon community research activities. Let us consider the process by which action alternatives are designed.

The process requires that the nature of the problems inherent in the situation are very clearly identified. This is complex and difficult. As Diesing notes, "Almost any serious social problem turns, upon investigation, into an endlessly ramified network of conflicts and maladjustments. It has no beginning and no end" (Diesing 1960:186). It is from this complex situation that the anthropologist must select a problem to engage. Focus has to be maintained so as to avoid dissipating one's efforts.

Problems should be selected only if they are significant and can be solved.

The action anthropologist must determine the possibilities for change in the specific problem areas as these relate to her personal inclinations and capabilities. With this in mind, it may be useful to consider what changes have been successfully made in the past.

Diesing poses two rules for problem selection:

One rule is: determine the relative possibilities of change of each problem area, and select the areas of greatest possible change as the areas within which the solutions can start. The reason for this rule is evident, since the easier the changes are, the greater is the likelihood that the changes will actually occur and persist. (Diesing 1960:190)

This suggests that the problems engaged initially should be small, so that sufficient resources can be directed toward them.

The second rule is that one should begin the solution in areas from which an expansion of the solution is possible. Ideally, one should try to discover a starting point from which a solution can expand to cover the major problem areas in the whole community and beyond. This rule is the natural complement to the first rule, since a solution to a circumscribed problem is insignificant unless it leads to solutions of broader problems. (Diesing 1960:191)

The selected problem areas may be characterized by high levels of stress and conflict. This conflict may preclude effective action by the focusing of community energies on contentiousness. Because of this, a prime responsibility of the action anthropologist may be the quelling of community factionalism and contentiousness. It is presumed that success in dealing with a single problem area that is limited in scope may result in increased capacity to deal with problems. This is an important kind of growth in action anthropology. It really represents an expression of the hope that significant transformations will emerge from modest if not trivial beginnings.

### CASE STUDY: THE FOX PROJECT

The project involved the development of a special kind of relationship between a changing community of Fox Indians and a changing group of anthropologists.

The Fox community is located on a thirty-three-hundred-acre reservation in central Iowa, about two miles west of Tama. The five hundred Fox farm their river valley lands, but earn the bulk of their living by being employed as skilled and unskilled workers in the nearby towns of Tama, Montour, and Waterloo.

The persistence of the Fox through time represents a remarkable story. They were originally from Wisconsin, and have only resided in Iowa for about 120 years. The period of Fox history following the appearance of the French in Wisconsin was marked by tenacious resistance to change. They were described as the most independent of the Wisconsin tribes and were the last to submit to

the influences of the French. They were determined to maintain their cultural system in the old way, unmodified by the influences of white men.

Their skill and tenacity, however, only delayed their inevitable displacement from their Wisconsin lands. The conflict was temporarily quelled by moving to Kansas. Finally in 1854, the Fox purchased eighty acres of white farm lands, an act rare in American Indian history. They continued to invest money in expanding their land base whenever they had the opportunity. By the early 1950s they had accumulated over three thousand acres.

The land itself is an important component of Fox society in that it provides a permanent framework for social interaction, and physical evidence for the contrast between the Fox and the surrounding white population. It "expresses visually the invisible barriers between Fox society and the white society" (Peattie 1960a:41). The Iowa farmer dominates the land with the geometric precision of rationalized agriculture. On the encapsulated Fox land the precise regularities of large soybean and corn fields of the Iowans gives way to the organic irregularities of the Fox woodlots, gardens, and fields.

The land's importance is more than economic. This is expressed by Peattie:

The Fox were never wholly agricultural people, and used to live in settled villages only during the summer, dispersing to hunt during the winter months. During the historical period, we know that under white pressure they moved about over a wide territory. Even today, only a few Fox families are supported primarily by agriculture, and much of the tribal land stands idle. Why, then, the feeling for the land? The land, to the Fox, is the symbol, not of life and livelihood as to the peasant, but of refuge from oppression. It is a place of safety. (Peattie 1960a: 43).

The three thousand acres of Iowa river bottoms is a self-made shelter for the Fox. It is from this enclave that the Fox encounter the white world, working at local factories and construction sites, and shopping at stores as far away as Des Moines, Marshalltown, Waterloo, and Cedar Rapids (Gearing 1970:10).

The Fox lands are also a framework for Fox social organization. The community is sufficiently small so that everyone knows everyone else. The community exists as a system of familiar actors. Fox social organizations are characterized by exceptionally loose organizational structure. Power and authority are widely distributed. The most important organizing principle is kinship, including fictive ties, as well as the ties of marriage and descent.

Kinship networks are a primary component of the Fox social fabric. These networks are expressed in the minutiae of day-to-day life, and perhaps most clearly in the context of the clan ceremonies. The clan ceremonies are described by Gearing:

Each year during the summer months there was a round of ceremonial feasts in which each of the several Fox clans took its turn being the host to the remaining clans; the host clan sang while the others danced, and the host prepared a feast for others to enjoy. This was the traditional Fox religion. (Gearing 1970:80)

All but a few families participated in the clan ceremonies. Therefore it was an important manifestation of the community's organization while it expressed certain Fox conceptions of the supernatural.

To the observing anthropologist, the ceremonies were clear manifestations of the operating importance of the kinship system. The kinship system is a system of mutual obligations. Gearing suggests that these obligations were "more clear and more imperative" than what one would expect in the American setting (1970:82). The kinship system has endured, structurally, but has become significantly less potent. The logic of the system still exists, but its spectrum of uses has declined to those areas of human concern that are least related to the practical considerations of everyday life. In addition to the kinship system, Fox society is characterized by clanlike groups, a tribal council, and various factions.

Many Fox are organized in terms of a nuclear family pattern. There are a significant number of "large, bilaterally extended family groups" (Peattie 1960a:44). These groups form the basis for extensive community factionalism. The factions consist of alignments of both large and small family groups. While these families serve as the basis for conflicting factions, they are also linked through various other social institutions, such as marriage and clanship.

The traditional tribal political system of the Fox was displaced in 1937 by an elected council organized under the provisions of the Indian Reorganization Act. This movement was associated with the efforts of a "group of young progressives" who worked very closely with the Indian Service (Peattie 1960a:47). This council was established in conflict and was legitimized narrowly in a well-contested election. As Peattie notes: "The council came into existence, thus, under a shadow, and it has not tended to fulfill the hopes of its founders as time has gone on. In fact, the council, officially the government of the tribe, does not govern" (Peattie 1960a:47).

The functions of government have been carried out by organizations outside the community, such as the Indian Service, as well as special-purpose organizations within the Fox community, such as the Powwow Committee, which oversees the preparation for the annual powwow, with its public dance performances and food sales. The success of this committee is largely based on its narrowly defined purpose and the fact that the committee does not have to compete with any organization like the Indian Service. The Powwow Committee serves a number of uses in Fox society in addition to the obvious one of planning and executing the powwow. The powwow itself is an important group-focused event. It provides a variety of opportunities to participate. In spite of its commercial overtones, it is an important community activity, a situation where "Foxness" can be acted out and expressed with both individual and group benefits.

Fox social activities are further channelled by various other types of organizations. In the realm of religion there can be found a number of organizational types. For a community of such small scale there is a surprising diversity in the organizational expressions of religious life. In addition to the clan-focused cer-

emonial activities that can be characterized as traditional, there are a number of new cultural forms that have become part of the religion of the Fox community. The new religions include two Christian forms, the Presbyterians and the Open Bible Mission. In addition, two American Indian forms have come to be part of the Fox religious life. These are the Oklahoma-derived Peyote Cult, and the Drum Society, derived from the Potawatomi of Wisconsin.

The organizational inventory of the community is also augmented by various secular organizations, such as a veterans' group and a women's club.

The original conception of the University of Chicago-Fox encounter did not include the idea that the group would engage in purposive attempts to change the Fox. The project began more or less as a loosely structured field school, more likely to change a handful of would-be anthropologists than the Fox community. The collective focus of the group turned to Fox problems rather than scientific problems; or more precisely, Fox problems became the scientific problems.

### Fox Problems

It was true that the Fox manifested a range of problems that are typical of conditions found in many American Indian communities. These included low income and low labor force participation. While these conditions were recognized, the action anthropologists of the Fox Project focused on problems in cultural rather than economic terms. They were particularly concerned with the problems that grew out of the relationship between the Fox and their white neighbors. They tended to see problems in abstract cognitive terms. The proposed solutions were of course concrete, but conceived as being linked to the abstract problems. Project participants also conceptualized problems internal to the Fox community.

The internal problems were of two interrelated types. These were the problem of factionalism and the problem of diffuse political authority. In a sense these two problems were both causes and effects of each other. That is, the division of a community into informal, contentious subgroups tends to limit a political leader's capacity to establish a power base in that he does not have equal access to the entire community. The diffuse nature of authority can create an atmosphere in which factions tend to develop, there being little power to mobilize the entire community across lines of contention. Further, it might be stated that in the absence of centralized political authority, factions may provide an important social control function, creating a kind of order generated out of the playing off of opposing forces. Both the issues of factionalism and diffuse authority were dealt with by Fox project participants.

### Fox Factionalism

It is apparent that factionalism among the Fox dates from the earliest periods of contact, during which it was possible to identify both pro- and anti-French

bands. The tribe existed as an expression of tribal identity, but not as a concrete planning and action group. There was a village council and a chief that seemed to rarely initiate action. "They could, through appeals to traditional values, adjudicate disputes, but had no authority to enforce commands through the exercise of coercive sanctions" (Fallers 1960:80). In this early period of Fox factionalism there were numerous attempts by whites to "bind the entire tribe to a course of action" (Fallers 1960:80). However, because of the powerlessness of leadership roles, these attempts failed. This pattern was encouraged because of the competition among the whites, as represented by various fur trading companies and various national interests.

As the fur trade matured and then declined, the purposive involvement of the American government increased. The economy of the Fox became more and more based on annuity payments derived from lands sold to the Americans. These annuity payments were channeled to the Fox through certain selected chiefs, and thus these chiefs developed a basis of authority and power. Government attempts at acculturation through these leaders caused conflict between the leaders and the rest of the Fox. This conflict was a cause of Fox separation and subsequent settlement in Iowa. In 1896, the Iowa Fox were again made the targets of concerted white attempts at acculturation. This took the form of educational activities that called for the enrollment of Fox children in schools. There developed in response to this movement an opposing faction.

The factions that existed during the Fox Project were historically derived from the factions that were operating in 1890s. In the intervening six decades a great deal of acculturation had occurred in the community that influenced both factions, yet the factions still existed and could be labeled pro-white and anti-white, or conservative and traditional. Both factions had allies among whites. It might be said that the balance of power among the factions of the Fox was maintained through affiliation with sympathetic whites.

It is clear that the presence of the dominant white cultural system in the Fox environment contributed to both the creation and the maintenance of Fox factionalism. As Fallers notes,

when a cultural group finds itself in an inferior power and status position to another cultural group, certain lines of tension appear in the society. Those members of the inferior group who find favor in the superordinate group tend to press for the acceptance by their fellows of the values of that group. The members of the subordinate society who have not found such favor tend to oppose such acceptance. (Fallers 1960:83)

Both groups perceive themselves as acting in the interests of the community and therefore become more and more persistent in their complementary contentiousness. In the face of a political system that is based on diffuse power relations, there are few ways of resolving the conflict internally. Among the Fox, the intransigent nature of the situation was further enhanced by the ready availability of white allies to support each faction. The result was conflict that was seemingly

unresolvable. Further, the conflict inhibited the establishment of institutionalized ways of achieving Fox group and individual goals.

### Authority and Leadership

Prior to white contact, the Fox manifested a pattern typical of societies at the tribal level of sociocultural integration (Service 1960). Tribal societies are egalitarian. There is little internal economic or political differentiation. Families are the basic units of production and consumption, and political power is diffusely distributed.

Traditionally, the Fox tribal council was an important source of authority. It consisted of the head men of the constituent clans of the Fox. The council was a representative body that was highly committed to deliberative, consensus-based decision making. The consensus principle was at times applied to mass meetings of the community. The political system had relatively few formal roles. These tendencies were complemented by the general-purpose nature of the basic kin groups, which inhibited the formation of special-purpose organizations that might have accumulated power. Special-purpose organizations, such as they were, were temporary and fleeting, playing a small role in the life of the Fox. Neither was there a high degree of stratification.

Authority or power was a scarce and diffuse resource in Fox society. Yet given the nature of traditional Fox life, this pattern of distribution seemed appropriate. Most activities were carried out among small family groups. Larger-scale activities were familiar and repetitive, and therefore did not require a great deal of coordination. Leadership usually consisted of merely signalling the next phase of a familiar routine.

As the leadership of the community acted, the citizens made judgments. If the people disagreed with the leadership they could choose not to follow. There was no unquestioning respect for authority or fear of repercussion for the unresponsive follower. The system provided sufficient leadership to deal with the familiar and simple, but was insufficient to deal with the changing white-dominated environment. In the face of the need for leadership, the Fox strongly resisted any tendencies to accrue power. Individuals who attempted to increase their authority were subject to severe sanctions. The constraints seemed also to increase the reluctance of individuals to participate in political leadership positions.

These patterns of leadership and authority were consistent with certain organizational patterns. The Fox had some success with native-derived organization, while white-derived organizations were often unsuccessful. Some white-derived organizations had developed, but tended to collapse with the withdrawal of white support. The more persistent native pattern was characterized by a number of key features, including consensus-based decision making and diffuse authority patterns.

The fallout of this problem was that the Fox were more or less unsuccessful

in using nonnative organizational models. This means that these organizations tended not to work effectively without significant white participation. This produced a sense of inadequacy in the Fox. This of course limited the range of possible effective Fox organizational alternatives, and thereby limited Fox developmental alternatives. These conditions were intimately related to the Fox problem, identified by Gearing as structural paralysis.

### Structural Paralysis

It was, of course, possible to identify a functioning Fox social structure; Gearing, however, raised certain questions about how well these structures worked. As Gearing suggested, these structures no longer seemed to work very well, and therefore participation in these structures was neither satisfying nor rewarding. This may be regarded as the most significant problem faced by the Fox. This condition, termed structural paralysis, was defined as "a state of chronic disarticulation in the community-wide webs of influence and authority which form a small community" (Gearing 1970:96). The condition was caused by the nature of the historical relations between the Fox and the federal government. Historically, these relationships generated conditions of dependency in which the federal government slowly preempted Fox responsibility for the day-to-day management of community affairs (Gearing 1970:96).

It is possible to class Fox activities into two categories: one category, including the clan ceremonials, the annual powwow, and various other activities, could be characterized by a certain competence and assertiveness; the second category, including "school affairs, matters of health, and law and order," was characterized by "mutual hostility, fear, ignorance, self-pity and a feeling of incompetence" (Gearing 1970:96). It was in this area that the term structural paralysis applied.

Gearing and the others consistently argued that Fox problems were generated in the conditions of culture contact. Structural paralysis was causally linked to the nature of the relationship between the whites and the Fox. Gearing also identified problems that grew out of the differences between the mutual conceptions of the Fox and the whites. Gearing viewed the Fox problem primarily in terms of white beliefs concerning the nature of the Fox, Fox self-conceptions, especially as these related to white action, and the dynamic interrelations between these elements.

The approach used by Gearing emphasized the differences between the Fox and whites. Whites, in contrast to the Fox, are in a "becoming" process, described as "a ceaseless effort to make the real self coincide with that ideal self" (Gearing 1960a:296). According to Gearing, the Fox do not have such tendencies. As Gearing notes, "The Fox individual does not seem to create such an ideal self; he does not see himself as becoming at all; he is" (1960a:296). This contrast expressed in terms of the day-to-day behavior of the Fox leads to a negative evaluation.



The Fox individual is committed through enculturation to harmonious relations with his fellow Fox. In contrast, the white is much more independent of group pressures. The problem arises in the perceptions of these behavior modes by representatives of the other culture. The harmonious relations of the Fox yield a behavior mode that is interpreted by the whites as laziness and unreliability. The Fox perceive the whites as selfish and aggressive. The laziness interpretation is carried further, and provides the whites with a basis for the belief that the Fox are a "burden on honest, hard working taxpayers." (Gearing 1960a:296).

Whites conceive of the Fox as temporary; that is to say, they are viewed as under an inevitable, unstoppable process of acculturation that will result in assimilation. The white imputation of impermanence has certain effects on the Fox. They tend to resist change. They view their life positively and want to continue living as Fox. And further, they are threatened by the changes proffered by the whites as they act out their view of the Fox as temporary. As Gearing notes,

They want their lands to remain in protected status. They are instantly opposed to any suggested changes—in their school system, in their trust status, in the jurisdiction of their law and order. They oppose the idea of change, irrespective of the substantive details which never really get discussed. They do this because they fear failure—generically. (Gearing 1960a:297)

The fear of failure is simple to understand, for in a white-dominated world the game is white, as are the rules. Success is more frequent when the Fox are in control. Yet in these situations there are limitations to the kinds of activities in which the Fox can successfully engage. The Fox have an especially difficult time with activities that require hierarchical organization of authority. The Fox, as discussed above, mistrust authority and invest much effort in social control to resist its accumulation in the organizations in which they take part.

Gearing depicted these conditions of beliefs and misperception in systemic terms; he referred to the system as "the vicious circle in Fox-white relations" (Gearing 1960a:295). It was a system of problems to be acted upon as a system of interlocking causes. We will consider some of the "treatments" prescribed by the project later in our discussion. In any case, the "treatments" were multi-phasic and were for the most part educational in nature.

### Project Objectives

Clearly, the project viewed Fox problems as being largely cultural. The treatment specified tended to be cultural in nature. The project did not place primary stress on the physical or economic development of the Fox community, except as such developments were regarded as treatments effective in the cultural realm.

A major problem in value-explicit applied anthropology is the difficulty of linking conceptions of problems and prescribed concrete activities as mediated

by the values that guide the project. Problems can be identified and actions can be specified. The problem of determining the extent of instrumental relationship between action and goal is difficult. This is complicated by the fact that some problems are not subject to control, and that other problems are caused by factors outside the community. The action anthropologist "has the problem of influencing not only the community but whatever forces impinge on the community" (Tax 1960b:171). In Fox society, the achievement of positive impact was further complicated by the general lack of ways for the Fox to achieve group goals.

The project considered a large number of projects during its history. Many of the projects were implemented. These projects were of three general types: economic development, white-stereotype modification projects, and Fox training projects. Each project was considered in terms of how it would impact the overall set of problems manifested by the Fox and identified by the project. It should be reemphasized that the project attempted to carry out these programs in terms of the encompassing goal of Fox self-determination.

### Economic Development

It was thought that economic development strategies should result in increased economic activity on the Fox reservation so as to allow increased material well-being in a context that did not necessitate increasing the rate of assimilation. The economic development projects that were proposed were all on the reservation. All projects were small in scale so as to allow groups to be formed of workable size.

The first economic development project was a small truck farm using land owned by the University of Chicago. It was not a success. The Fox seemed to have difficulty activating the required leadership roles.

The most successful of the economic development projects involved craft production and sales. The idea appeared very early in the history of the project. Although ostensibly an economic development project, planners thought that such a project could have a major impact on the relationships that existed between the Fox and the whites.

Though, as an economic institution, its primary function will be seen as economic, perhaps, its most important value for Fox and whites will be educative, assisting toward the clarification of certain major [Fox] goals, aiding in redefinition of the general Fox situation in terms more acceptable to both Fox and whites, and providing a new and important opportunity for citizenship education for the Fox through actual participation in local social and economic affairs. (University of Chicago 1960:335)

The response to the project was rapid and positive among both Fox and whites.

The objectives of the arts and crafts project grew out of the contact between the project staff and the Fox Indian artist Charles Pushetonequa. Pushetonequa had returned to the community, and while it afforded him an opportunity to



reactivate relationships with the Fox, it meant that his involvement in art had to decline. Pushetonequa was a major force in the development of the project.

Through these efforts a group emerged called Tama Indian Crafts. They produced a number of products for sale, drawing upon the designs of Pushetonequa and financed through the project. The products included home painting kits based on traditional Fox life. Later, the group sold lithographed greeting cards and ceramic tiles, all with Pushetonequa's designs. Other items were added later. The sales of such products were good, and the number of participating Fox increased.

The Tamacraft products were of good quality. The whites of Tama County seemed impressed, as they always are with new locally made products. They also valued the "Indian-ness" of the products, which seemed to be "visible evidence that Fox culture itself has something to offer" (University of Chicago 1960:338). Further, it should be noted that the Fox were perceived in a new role, namely, that of producer. This new perception was viewed as important in terms of changing the vicious circle of opinion and belief of the whites and Fox. Gearing suggested:

To some small, but important degree the Fox have been located squarely within the Iowan community as fellow producers, as it were, mitigating somewhat another negative white impression of the Fox as a dis-articulated passive group which needs to be integrated through assimilation; i.e., the fact of a settlement industry is a fact of integration. (University of Chicago 1960:338).

Gearing further argued that Tamacraft allowed the Fox to participate effectively in regional life without being made to give up their identity. The project was viewed as an opportunity for the Fox to act out their desire not to be assimilated, to demonstrate a future at variance from that expected by the whites, with its implied assimilation.

### Education Projects

One of the key Fox problems was the white conception of them as impermanent. White conceptions of the Fox as temporary were the first target of the project's educational activities. It was decided that the first treatment would consist of providing accurate information about the Fox through the mass media, directed at both the Fox and the white. The material was initially prepared by Frederick Gearing, and then commented upon by other anthropologists and Fox community members. The message was delivered in the form of articles prepared for local newspapers. The articles were based on a complex of assumptions. The core assumptions were that the Fox community and way of thinking were not likely to disappear, and that whites judged the Fox negatively.

The articles appeared in the *Tama News-Herald* and expressed a number of elements of the cognitive view of difficulties of the Fox. The action approach

used knowledge of cultural systems to modify the belief systems relevant to the problems of the Fox. This is a recurring theme in the action approach and is consciously cultural in nature. The project also carried out similar activities on broadcast media and other publication media.

The education needs of the Fox were dealt with more specifically by attempts of the Fox Project to develop funding for university fellowships for Fox students. After some conflict with certain Fox factions, the project was reexamined and placed on a somewhat firmer basis. Plans for a four-year project were developed. One of the key components of the newly reconstituted project was a major effort to increase the rate at which the Fox attended and graduated from college. The goal of this project was not to equip individual Fox with a means to escape their Foxness, but to increase the overall capability of the Fox by increasing their "education capital." Tax cites cultural data to support the contention that ties would be maintained between the Fox community and the newly educated Fox (1958). If the contention was not borne out in reality, it was felt that nothing would be lost because of the positive effect of education on the individuals of the community. The potential benefits were thought to be great, affecting both the Fox and the nearby white community. It was felt that this effort would make higher education an integral part of the community. The project entailed the acquisition of money from a foundation as well as certain tuition concessions from the State University of Iowa. The Fox responded to this project very well; by the second year, ten Fox students were attending various Iowa universities. The number of students assisted tended to run about twice the projected rate.

The major achievements of the Fox Project were Tamacraft and the scholarship program. The anthropologists assisted in a number of additional areas. These included engaging as a third party in negotiations with the Bureau of Indian Affairs concerning the future of the Fox government school. The Fox Project personnel, especially Tax, came to be identified clearly on the side of the Fox in these deliberations. In addition, others worked in conjunction with the American Legion organization in the Fox community, although these projects seemed to have little impact.

The project of course had a research output as part of the twofold goal of action anthropology—self-determination and scientific truth. The project resulted in a number of ethnographic studies. These studies included studies of ethnohistory, kinship and genealogy, Fox leadership and authority, and studies of Fox teenagers. These studies were viewed as an essential component of the action strategy. That is, program tactics were based on knowledge discovered through conscious and thoughtful anthropological inquiry. There was another motivation, however. Tax notes:

I have said that the corpus of knowledge that may be applied to a situation always falls far short of the needs of effective action. Application of what knowledge there is, one takes for granted. Not to turn about to replenish the common pot seems almost immoral. Every situation has its unique elements and should be reported. (Tax 1960b:169)

Research results are an inevitable product of the activity of action anthropology.

### Outcomes

The literature on action anthropology, though extensive, does not systematically review the effects of a program in a concrete sense. A review of the basic Fox Project documents does indicate, here and there, assessments of the individual treatments in terms of "how they came off." We are told that the truck farming venture was a failure. The scholarship program and Tamacraft project seemed to be quite successful. Yet the Fox Project was not systematically evaluated. This is consistent with both the action approach and the institutional context in which the Fox Project occurred. The low emphasis on evaluation of impact also seems to be consistent with the absence of an intervening agency. The project was not carried out for a third party and therefore it was presumably unnecessary to spell out explicitly the accomplishments of the project. It should also be clear that the general goals of the project were highly abstract. How does one measure goals clarification and self-determination? Reporting of success and failure is inhibited by the reluctance to engage in activities that might limit success of the total strategy.

Retrospective accounts of the project, such as *The Face of the Fox* by Frederick Gearing (1988) do not inventory success. Gearing's study is critical, yet suggests that the Fox Project can serve applied anthropologists as a prototype of a socially useful procedure. Gearing has his doubts about the impact of the project on the quality of Fox life. Given the identified causes, the solutions to problems proposed by the action team were probably appropriate as to form but insufficient as to scale. This raises an issue of concern for all applied anthropologists as problem solvers. Anthropologists may conceive of "treatments" to alleviate or solve problems, but what of the scale of the problems identified and the "dosage" of the treatment? This issue was particularly striking in two realms associated with the Fox Project. These were the vicious circle of Fox-white relations and structural paralysis. It is apparent that neither problem was easily correctable or even reversible given the time, techniques, and resources of the Fox team.

### SUMMARY

Action anthropology represents a useful set of ideas for dealing with research and development tasks in a number of different kinds of communities. Action anthropology is highly interactive. In this aspect, action anthropology represents a workable alternative to the more typical linear approaches to development planning often used. That is, in most development efforts there is significant investment in the specification of concrete, measurable goals early in the development process. Often development funding is contingent upon the capacity to document convincingly these kinds of goals.

In action anthropology goals unfold in the complex process of interaction

between community and researcher. The research process is in fact focused on the discovery of goals and means of achieving them. This approach works best in small-scale communities and organizations. It is a mechanism for maintaining community control and fostering the growth of community adaptability. The approach is limited in that it requires substantial investment in the process of discovery, and because the difficulties inherent in evaluating a development effort that has changing goals. For these reasons, it is most workable where the relationship between the anthropologist and the community is independent of agency restrictions. One might also say that the action anthropology approach is indicated where the community has experienced what might best be called a dependency-generating history. It is important to remember that action anthropology is also a means of doing research.

### FURTHER READING

Gearing, Frederick O., Robert McC. Netting, and Lisa R. Peattie, eds., 1960. *Documentary History of the Fox Project*. Chicago: University of Chicago, Department of Anthropology.

Anyone who is interested in using the action anthropology approach should carefully read this book. Most of the utility of the approach relates to the evolution of the relationship between the anthropologists and the community. This book, which is a collection of many different types of documents, shows this process quite clearly. One cannot just do action anthropology; the relationship with the community that makes it possible must evolve. In this volume, study the articles by Gearing ("The Strategy of the Fox Project") and Peattie ("The Failure of the Means-End Scheme in Action Anthropology") very carefully.

Gearing, Frederick O. 1970. *The Face of the Fox*. Chicago: Aldine, Publishing.

This elegant book takes a retrospective look at the results of the Fox Project from a critical perspective. Out of print for some time, the book has been reprinted by Waveland Press (Gearing 1988).