

LETTER TO PER: DEVELOPMENT IN NORWAY

10 April 1987

Dear Per

First of all, many thanks to Kirsten and yourself for having me as a house guest. I appreciated being amongst friends and not being stuck in a hotel. I just hope it did not muck up your routines too much.

I enclose a note on Oyvind's paper. Instead of spelling out my marginal comments on his paper I have set out what I think his introduction should have covered. I have re-read the comments and am prepared to let them stand. The conclusions reached in those comments seem valid in terms of what Oyvind has written. However, recalling my discussion with Bjorn about his obituary for Gardell (on the weekend after the LOM conference) I think I understood too little of the Scandinavian context. Bjorn was trying to prove that Bertil was breaking with the Swedish addiction to positivism in sociology but was having difficulty in finding published statements to support his view. In this context I can well imagine that there are very strong pressures on young social scientists who wish to work in our field to produce studies that meet traditional requirements for publication. To avoid this I suggested, at the LOM conference, that alternative channels of publication and thesis supervision be created. My concern with Oyvind's paper, and with some of Bjorn's earlier attraction to hermeneutics, was that the reaction to positivism was going too far. I think the appropriate reaction to the prevailing mechanistic and formalistic paradigms lies in Pepper's contextualism. This paradigm was first postulated by the older Plato (see Nehemiah Jordan), buried by Aristotle, partially resurrected by Leibnitz, buried again by Newton, the British empiricists (Locke, Berkely & Hume), fully resurrected by Peirce, and partially buried by the logical positivists. This paradigm accepts that all science arises from common sense, and must feed back into the development of commonsense (which I think Habermas is about) and also accepts that science extends the bounds of human knowledge and practice far beyond what can be achieved by common sense. In the physical sciences it is easy to forget the connection to common sense (although David Bohm, Einstein's student, has argued strongly against that) but in the social sciences no advances can be made without maintaining that connection, because our subject matter is an active agent in our scientific pursuit. At the same time social scientists have to accept a responsibility to reach out beyond the commonsense grasp of social dynamics. Freud, Jung, Marx, Weber and Adam Smith did, after all, add something to commonsense.

There is one other matter, of similar generality, on which I would like to comment, while I am at it. This is the matter of the interpretations that people keep placing on the history of our project and its intentions. The extreme case was Bolweg. After discussing matters with a lot of the young people around the Institute he decided that the whole exercise in the sixties was without any theoretical foundation or guidance! He missed the one element of truth which was that with each new site we had to face new theoretical challenges and devise new techniques of analysis. That is what I thought science was about. Other interpretations have been a little more generous but, to my mind, err in attributing too much to my Marxist background, our collusion with capitalist interest or our commitment to scientific paradigms of research.

There is a missing link here.

In 1959 I had to spell out a mission statement for the Tavistock because we were in constant fights with those who held a physical sciences concept of our work and those who held a medical model. In spelling out our mission in the so-called 'Swiss Cottage Document' (so-called because the triggering issue was whether we went up to Swiss Cottage to join Tavy Clinic in the fancy new building the National Health Service had provided for the former; I argued that we did not necessarily have to go with them and their concept of science). I made a bridge from my background in Marxism and social science to a relatively new concept of social science practice. It was this concept that we worked from in Norway, not from undiluted Marxism. That paper is still available from the Tavy, even though they appear not subscribe to its thoughts. However, the guts of it appear as an epilogue in *Futures We Are In* (Nijhoff, 1977).

In the early seventies I felt compelled to spell out a similar mission statement for the Centre for Continuing Education as, once again, I found that a confusion of goals was creating strife about allocation of resources. This statement, "Continuing Education under a Gum Tree", has been the basic philosophy of our 'participative' phase. That has not been widely circulated so I have enclosed a copy of it for you and your colleagues to peruse. An addendum to that paper has also been included because it indicates the incompatibility between this approach and the traditional university concepts of education. As the LOM program proceeds I think you and Bjorn will find similar reactions I have yet to write out a mission statement for myself for the eighties! My bibliography appeared in the Quality of Work Life issue about my work. Kirsten has a copy of Searching.

Fred