

From a tiny Canadian island

A VOICE FOR THE SILENT MAN

Everybody's talkin' at me
Don't hear a word they're sayin',
Only the echoes of my mind.

These lines are taken from the theme song of the film *Midnight Cowboy*. They tell of the desperate loneliness of a young man from a small town in the big city, surrounded by the din of voices but denied the true communication with his fellow humans that he needs to stay spiritually alive.

More and more people are feeling such alienation. The search for solutions, like the problem itself, is not confined to the United States.

Two gifted young Canadians with a large capacity for social involvement have pioneered a unique method of using film and videotape recording to teach people to communicate with their neighbors and leaders in a new way. It is an approach that, apart from helping to solve pressing problems, leaves participating communities with a renewed sense of confidence in their ability to survive strains and pressures that might otherwise tear them apart.

It is called the Fogo technique, after an island off the east coast of Newfoundland where it was first used. Its originators are Colin Low, a film maker with Canada's National Film Board who among his other credits helped create the landmark multi-media presentation *Labyrinth* at Expo '67, and Donald Snowden, director of the Extension Department of Memorial University of Newfoundland, who was previously a federal government field representative working with Eskimos and Indians in the Canadian Arctic.

Because it bears so directly and constructively on one of the central issues of our time—the communications crisis among people—and because it illustrates once again the uniquely unpretentious and flexible way Americans and Canadians work together, we are publishing this article on the Fogo technique at greater length than will ordinarily be our practice.

The Fogo technique was imported into the United States in July 1968 by the Office of Economic Opportunity (O.E.O.) to see if it could be expanded to work in the more complex circumstances of urban and rural America with its racial and other community tensions.

"Fogo" says Colin Low, "is not a process, but an attitude or a method based on an attitude. It essentially regards silent people—the silent man, the silent majority, or the silent minorities for that matter—as worthy of the privilege of a voice—expression.

"This attitude understands that all people or peoples have something of

stitutions will realize that they actually do have a voice in their local and national affairs."

Reduced to its simplest essentials, the Fogo technique consists of having all the elements of a community express themselves on film either in groups, or (more often) as individuals.

They speak of their hopes, fears, pride and achievements. The films show events and traditions important to *that* community. The films, usually with minimal editing, are then shown throughout the community both in private and public showings. The films are totally bereft of conscious artistic merit. They are simply records of a community talking.

All elements of the community are able to see each other mirrored on film and thereby gain fresh insight and understanding of their fellow citizens, their problems and strengths, and to



In Hartford, Conn: "records of a community talking."

value and importance to say if they are listened to in the right way and responded to in the right way.

"It is also a curiosity about the reasons for silence—the lack of participation or involvement—the detachment from community, or institution, that often accompanies silence. It involves the understanding that the exercise of expression creates an energy in the individual who develops a facility of speech, music, art or sport, and the expectation that the community or in-

recognize priorities. In addition, when it is over, a community has a remarkably full documentary of itself.

O.E.O. has tried this experiment in three American communities: Farmersville, in Tulare county, Calif., Hartford, Conn., and a newer, still incomplete project in Alaska.

More recently, O.E.O. undertook an adaptation of the Fogo technique in six rural communities in Georgia, Maine, Mississippi, New Mexico, Texas and Tennessee.