

THE NEW RELIGIOUS CONSCIOUSNESS

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Synanon is the name of a string of communities located primarily in California. These house approximately eighteen hundred individuals who lead an alternative life-style in environments virtually free of crime, violence, and the use of drugs and alcohol. Synanon is also two analytically distinct social entities that occupy the same physical space. It is first a corporate entity that has no owner or stockholders in the usual sense and has grown from a capital worth of little more than the cost of the incorporation to an institution that controls assets in excess of 15 million dollars, has yearly cash receipts of more than 3.5 million dollars, and receives yearly donations of goods estimated to be worth between three and four times the amount of its cash receipts.¹ The second entity is the community—the aggregate of people who reside at Synanon, together with the unusual pattern of social organization that has evolved during the transition from a self-help therapeutic community for the rehabilitation of narcotic and alcohol addicts, from which rehabilitated addicts “graduated” (returned to the larger society), into a social movement that is intended to provide an alternative way of life for former drug abusers or anyone else who wishes to live the style of life developing within Synanon.

The analytic distinction between the corporate entity and the community is important, because the two entities, although certain-

1. Data on Synanon's economics came from a lecture by Ron Cook (a regent of Synanon and financial director) entitled “Synanon Economics” in a Synanon Research University lecture series, 1972. Estimates of the value of goods donated to Synanon are based on figures given to me independently by several Synanon residents.

ly affecting each other, have a good deal of independence. The corporate entity has a continuity through time that the population of the community lacks because of the exceedingly high rate of population turnover. The founder, Charles Dederich, is probably the only remaining member of the original community; he was a member of the Alcoholics Anonymous offshoot group from which Synanon evolved and of the club that preceded the incorporation of the Synanon Foundation. It is estimated that from the time of incorporation to the present over fifteen thousand persons have resided in Synanon.² In one study it was found that even now, with an organized program leading to permanent residence in Synanon, 50 percent of a group admitted during a four-month period departed within the first month of residence and only a third were still present after six months. Even for those who survive the early period of high attrition, Synanon's history has always been one of rapid population change. Of the population in 1972, 61 percent had been in residence for longer than one year, 44 percent had survived two years, and only 11 percent had been Synanon residents for longer than five years.³

A second reason for making this distinction is that all wealth generated by the population of the community accrues to the corporate entity rather than to the members, and the members do not own Synanon, the corporate entity. Synanon Foundation, Incorporated, is a nonprofit corporation which, if it were dissolved, would be required to donate its assets to some other nonprofit corporation rather than divide them among Synanon residents. With two qualifications,⁴ all profit (here defined as the difference between the value of labor and the cost of maintaining a worker) from the labor of residents of the Synanon community accrues to the corporate entity. Everyone, except for children and the infirm, works at a full-time job either within Synanon or in the larger society. All Synanon residents receive from the corporation their food, clothing, shelter, medical care, education, occupational training, and access to recreational activities. Residents who work for the Synanon corporate entity also receive cash for “walking-around money,” which begins at

2. From *An Instant Guide to Synanon*, Synanon News Bureau, Oakland, California.

3. See Edward L. Maillet, *Report on Research Visit to Synanon Foundation*. (For publishing data on titles in the footnotes, see the references at the end of the chapter.)

4. The qualifications are the salaries paid to residents who work for Synanon (maximum \$50 per month) and monies earned by those who work outside that are not contributed to Synanon.

\$1.50 per week and increases in small amounts as their period in residence lengthens. Residents of five years or more may be designated employees and receive a salary of \$50 per month. Residents of the community who are not former drug abusers and who work on the outside are known as life-stylers. For the goods and services enumerated above, they pay a monthly fee to the corporation—for a single person a minimum of \$300 per month, the estimated amount required to meet the costs of maintaining a person in Synanon. Fees for families are adjusted according to family size. Life-stylers are encouraged to donate to the corporation the remainder of their incomes so that they leave themselves the equivalent of the \$50 monthly employee salary plus special expenses such as those connected with travel to and from work. Life-stylers who are hired by the corporation (doctors, lawyers, teachers, draftsmen, accountants) assume employee status, work within Synanon, and receive the \$50 monthly salary.

Finally, all power exercised in the various Synanon facilities rests with the corporate entity; privilege is unequally distributed within the community. The degree of inequality is determined by the corporation, and the personal prestige of community members is determined by position in the corporate structure. Corporate affairs are managed by the appointed officials and executives of the corporation. The general membership of the community has no formal power over the appointments to corporation positions. Naturally, the corporate management is sensitive to community reaction to new policy decisions, and decisions or programs that meet with widespread disapproval can be reversed. But if the corporation management decides that a policy or a new rule is significant and beneficial for both corporation and community, a great deal of dissatisfaction from the community can be withstood.

In 1968 Synanon formally ceased to be a stopping and rebuilding point in an addict's life and became the point of entry into a new life-style for both addicts and "squares" (nonaddicts). Corporate management had decided that Synanon was to become an alternative society and the formerly transient community was to be conceived and planned for as a permanent population. Certain programs would be abandoned, planning for expansion of those functions necessary to handle support of a cradle-to-grave population (schooling, occupational training, child care and rearing) would be undertaken or expanded, and the understanding of the legitimate relationship between the corporation and the community would be changed. Planning for one's life outside of Synanon became no longer acceptable.

When Synanon was a therapeutic community, most new arrivals left before completion of the program (it took from two-and-a-half to four years) and most Synanon residents left within a few years. The corporation has decided however, to move in a certain direction, presumably with the expectation that individual attitudes toward the corporate decision will be brought into line through the mechanisms of social pressure for conformity to community standards, selective loss of individuals with discrepant attitudes, and selective recruitment of individuals willing to accept at least the idea of a lifetime commitment. At present, however, Synanon is characterized by the high turnover rate noted above.

The range of privilege distribution within the Synanon community is narrow in comparison with the outside community. At the lower end of the scale a person receives a dormitory room, basic clothing necessities, adequate food, walking-around money, and limited recreational activities. The upper end of the scale provides an individual with an apartment or small house, a vehicle for personal transportation, higher quality clothing, better food, higher salary, and expanded recreational activities. The material differences between the most and the least advantaged within the Synanon communities are not great, however. The power to determine how great the differences will be, as well as to determine the absolute level of affluence, rests with the corporate power structure.

In Synanon, as in all societies, personal prestige is determined by occupational position. Because of unusual characteristics of Synanon society, the specifics of the system are different from the system in the larger society. Most Synanon residents work for the Synanon Foundation, and prestige in the community is therefore primarily a function of position in the corporate power structure rather than of evaluation of an individual's particular occupation.

To obtain a significant position in the corporate structure, an individual must demonstrate sufficient commitment to the corporate enterprise to suggest that he will remain with Synanon. Length of residence in Synanon is therefore an important qualification if for no other reason than that it demonstrates willingness to accept the values of the society, to live under the highly authoritarian social system that prevails, and to accept the demands for conformity to corporate rules that define life in the community. An individual might demonstrate commitment by donating his capital to the foundation, by transferring all of his occupational activities to Synanon, or by bringing to Synanon skills that permit the corporation to undertake new activities that are expected to be profitable.

Residents who begin their careers in Synanon as drug addicts or

abusers, alcoholics, juvenile delinquents, or criminals are distributed across the entire range of power positions in Synanon society. Unless they possessed occupational skills when they enter and can therefore direct some special activity (for example, construction, accounting, auto repair), the opportunity for upward mobility within the Synanon corporate structure and therefore within the Synanon community is through a management position (for example, director of food service or transportation, director of a facility, or regent of the corporation).

Life-stylers as a group are well treated in Synanon with respect to privilege, since they are substantial contributors to the Synanon economy. They are somewhat compromised with respect to prestige within the system, since they work on the outside and therefore are not totally involved with Synanon society. Life-stylers who become employees of the foundation are usually professionals or offer some skill to the corporation and therefore typically occupy positions that are respected within the community. By being "employees," they solve the problem of outward orientation that tends to compromise the status of life-stylers who work on the outside.

Upward mobility within the corporate structure results in increased formal privilege within the society as well as increased personal prestige within the community. Since formal position within the corporation is given by appointment, the corporation power structure effectively controls an individual's social position within the community. In a very real sense, Synanon is a company town without even the rudiments of a government independent of the company.

I have made this distinction between the entity Synanon Foundation, Incorporated, and the aggregate of individuals and social patterns that comprise the Synanon community because it permits analysis of Synanon's history, which is the history of the development of the corporation, and analysis of Synanon's function, which can be understood in terms of the reasons for and consequences of involvement with the Synanon community by those individuals who cycle through the various Synanon facilities.

THE CORPORATION

Synanon sometimes describes itself as "the people business." This is, I believe, a quite appropriate, if somewhat cryptic, description of the activities of Synanon Foundation, which was chartered in 1958 for the purpose of doing good things for people. Although this is not

the language of the organization's formal charter as a nonprofit corporation, a charter that defines an organization's legitimate purpose as rehabilitating drug- and alcohol-dependent individuals, helping character-disordered individuals, and educating people would allow all sorts of good works and activities necessary for the performance of these good works. Synanon emerged initially as a business that was going to rebuild the character of heroin addicts, or at least forcefully assist heroin addicts in their own rehabilitation.

Considered strictly as a business enterprise, Synanon's history might be described as follows: Synanon Foundation, Incorporated, began operating in 1958. It entered the marketplace by providing a service, a program that was advertised as leading to a "cure" for heroin addiction. At the time Synanon began operation, there existed a variety of federal, state, and private programs for the treatment of drug addicts. These programs all had extremely low success rates, and they were too much alike to permit any judgment concerning which type of approach appeared to have potential success.

Synanon's program had characteristics that were different from its competitors in a number of ways. Since the program was completely voluntary, it was possible to define and treat an addict as desiring and willing to work for his own rehabilitation. Addicts were made to work for their rehabilitation in two ways: they were put to work around the Synanon house to keep it running, and each participated in everyone else's therapy.

The arena for therapy is the Synanon game, an aggressive encounter group in which people are told in no uncertain terms what is wrong with their behavior and how to correct it. The game itself focuses on concrete behavior rather than on hypothetical constructs and internal dynamics. More than anything, Synanon demanded from individuals the continual efforts to live up to the rules under which they had freely agreed to live. The experience itself of living in Synanon, under its military-like authority system and in its family-like atmosphere of concern, must be recognized as part of Synanon's therapeutic program. The demand for personal discipline was made in settings other than just the game. For example, individuals who violated Synanon rules were given "haircuts," verbal beatings delivered by administrators and those further along in the process of their own rehabilitation. Finally, Synanon had no paid or professional staff. Everyone present shared an important status characteristic: they were all "outsiders." If participation in Synanon did not do an individual any good, whether by providing a place to go when there was nowhere else or by actually helping to

end drug dependence, then there was no reason for anyone to be there and no reason for Synanon to exist.

Rehabilitation was a full-time job for everyone residing in the Synanon community. Although an addict was put to work as soon as he was detoxified, work was primarily maintenance activity around the Synanon house. Since Synanon was not a government- or foundation-supported enterprise and the addicts had no significant personal resources or jobs to generate income, the corporation had serious financial problems from the beginning. Because Synanon was performing a public service, it sought support from the public—in its early days through donations of food from storekeepers, used furniture from individuals, and so forth. Essentially, Synanon began selling its services to the general public in a manner similar to that used by most nonprofit organizations. It was attempting to perform a service that was recognized as valuable by a significant segment of the general public and it solicited philanthropic support for that activity.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s Synanon began receiving a great deal of publicity because it was *appearing* to have some success at producing drug-independent former addicts and was also provoking a hostile reaction from some segments of the public. This was newsworthy, and Synanon received attention from Los Angeles television, newspapers, *Life* and *Time* magazines, state and federal government committees concerned with drug addiction, and professionals concerned with drug rehabilitation. The image of Synanon that reached the public was of a poverty-stricken, courageous group of individuals who were freeing themselves from the horror of drug addiction through new therapeutic techniques and self-help.

In 1959 Synanon moved its socially disreputable and racially integrated population from a slum in Ocean Park, California, to a three-story former National Guard Armory in Santa Monica. This set off a furor in this middle-class, conservative city; and the fight that ensued involved hysterical attacks on Synanon by ultraconservative elements, the use of minor violations of the building code in an attempt to drive Synanon from Santa Monica, and an attempt to define Synanon as a *hospital* and therefore in violation of zoning law. *Dederich was sent to jail for twenty-five days for a zoning violation*, and Synanon's visibility increased. To the neutral or positively inclined elements of the general public, these attacks cast Synanon into the position of a target of the forces of unreasoning prejudice. Synanon was a group of outcasts in the process of re-

forming themselves, who were being attacked by rich and powerful opponents capable of bending local government to their wills.

In its early days, Synanon established a public image that allowed it to solicit support successfully from the general public. It developed a practice called "hustling," which was the solicitation of donations from private individuals and corporations. Since Synanon was a nonprofit corporation, donations of cash were tax deductible at full dollar value; and until the tax laws were changed in 1969 companies that donated goods to Synanon could deduct the selling price of an item rather than the cost. In Synanon, hustling has become a well-developed speciality. From the practice of getting day-old sandwiches, bread, aging fruit and vegetables, and other discards from local merchants and the general public, it has developed into a full-time operation for a segment of Synanon's population. Hustlers are usually former addicts with long histories of heavy drug use, living proof of Synanon's good works. Goods from hustling have been estimated to have a value of about three to four times the corporation's cash income. Given a cash income of 3.5 million dollars in 1972, hustling would have produced goods having a value of between 10.5 and 13.5 million dollars. Hustling means more now than making the rounds of local merchants. Hustlers produce nearly all of the goods that are consumed by the community in its day-to-day operation and seek to supply whatever is needed for special projects (for example, construction materials, computers, heavy equipment of different sorts, and cattle for Synanon's ranching operations). Hustlers routinely travel around the country in search of special commodities as well as to increase their territory.

Synanon Industries was inaugurated in 1965. This is the division of corporate Synanon that conducts its various business ventures. Synanon Industries has operated gasoline stations in California and developed the second largest distributing business in the country of volume-advertising gift items (imprinted pens, key rings, and so forth). Since at present Synanon Industries operates only one gasoline station, nearly all of its revenue is generated through the advertising speciality business. In 1972 Synanon Industries had gross sales of approximately 4 million dollars, and net income from its operations amounted to approximately 1.3 million dollars.

The products and services of Synanon Industries are sold to the general public in the normal fashion and are clearly identified as being a part of Synanon, the drug-addict, self-help, rehabilitation program. Industry salesmen, like those in the hustling operations,

are usually former addicts, who can point out to a potential customer the benefits they have received from Synanon and how doing business with Synanon supports these sorts of activities.

Synanon's primary "people business" was and still is the rebuilding of drug addicts and abusers. In its earliest days Synanon's addict population was made up almost entirely of adults with long histories of heroin addiction. Over the years, the population has changed in composition to the point where its "dope fiend" (Synanon's classification for *anyone* who enters for a drug-related reason) population is on the average young and has a relatively short (compared with the early days) history of drug use with a variety of drugs, including heroin. The average age of a Synanon resident is between twenty-two and twenty-three; the average age of entering dope fiends may be somewhat lower.

Synanon, as a corporate entity, derives little income directly from its work with dope fiends. In 1972 it received from newcomers a total of \$30,000 and took in over a thousand new residents. Synanon also receives payments from county and state funds (largely from the state of Michigan) in the amount of \$13 per day for juvenile residents of Synanon. This amounted to \$71,000 in 1972. The total cash coming to Synanon as a direct consequence of its rehabilitation work with drug abusers was \$101,000, or about 3 percent of its cash income in 1972.

Synanon, as a corporate entity, is able to generate a great deal of income in the form of cash and goods received as an indirect consequence of its dope fiend business. This fact together with its historical starting point accounts for Synanon's choice of a public image. Like every corporate entity, Synanon manages its public image. Since Synanon depends so heavily on its image for survival (maintaining its tax-exempt status, solicitation of donations, and appeals to concerns about social welfare as an element in its sales activities), it is especially concerned about its public self. The public self that corporate Synanon most frequently presents of the Synanon community is based on those activities that present it as a rehabilitation business.

The dope fiend business serves as the foundation on which Synanon has built and from which it has expanded. Synanon's expansion in its fifteen years of existence has taken it from a single storefront operation in southern California to a complex of five substantial facilities in California, including ranches, apartment buildings, a former beachfront club in Santa Monica, an eleven-story

former athletic club in Oakland, and a large former paint factory in San Francisco. Synanon also operates a facility in Detroit and one in New York City. Using standard notions of corporate growth, Synanon has demonstrated steady development in terms of its net worth, assets controlled, and volume of business in its basic support activities of hustling and specialty-item sales. This corporate expansion is matched by an expansion of the activity that originally justified Synanon's existence. There is a steady stream of drug abusers initiating contact with Synanon and experiencing its variety of therapy for differing lengths of time.

In the middle 1960s Synanon diversified the services it offered to the public and created what are called game clubs in each of Synanon's urban facilities. By joining one of Synanon's game clubs a nonresident could play Synanon games and participate in many of the other activities that define life in a Synanon house. In these game clubs Synanon offered its services to that segment of the general public that was not drug dependent. The service was similar in intent to services offered by individuals or organizations that conducted encounter or sensitivity training groups. Synanon's first basic diversification engaged it in what has come to be known as the human-growth or human-potential movement.

Synanon was able to use its visibility (based on its involvement with drug abusers) as the basis for starting its new business. In addition to seeking donations from the general public Synanon has always attempted to involve members of the public in its activities, in the form of open houses every Saturday evening, where those who were curious about Synanon's activities could see for themselves something of life in a Synanon house and meet its residents. The open houses served as a point of contact between "dope fiends" and "squares" and between corporate Synanon and the public that supported it. During its early years Synanon received considerable publicity, the Synanon game was known to be a form of encounter group to a substantial segment of the public, and Synanon had a large number of residents with considerable experience at playing the Synanon game. To enter the human-potential-movement business, Synanon had only to advertise the fact that the general public could play Synanon games by joining a Synanon game club. During the mid-sixties when Synanon entered the encounter business, California was a hothouse for new varieties of encounter groups. Unlike orthodox psychotherapy, which was still fashionable but which carried the stigma of illness or of an inability to cope,

encounter-group ideology focused on the idea of movement toward perfection. Encounter groups provided growth experiences rather than treatment for problems.

Prior to launching its human-potential business, Synanon had served a clientele that was outside the mainstream of acceptable middle-class existence in America, since the most significant social characteristic of those who arrived at Synanon's door was their drug addiction. The human-potential movement appealed to a basically middle-class market.

Synanon's version of an encounter-group business was markedly different from its competition. Synanon's therapeutic ideology focuses on behavior rather than underlying cognitive structure and demands change in behavior from the very beginning. Therefore, participation in Synanon's game club meant participation in Synanon life. I would characterize Synanon's therapeutic or growth ideology as one which postulates that an individual is highly responsive to his social environment and that in a controlled (that is, designed) environment the habits that define a life pattern can be changed by careful reinforcement and structured experiences. In this sense, Synanon's techniques are highly behavioristic in that attention is paid to overt behavior, and it is overt behavior that is modified. Synanon therapeutic ideology also includes the postulate that cognitive structures consistent with the facts of behavior eventually develop.⁵ Therefore, it is possible to change self-image and value preferences if an individual can be induced to behave in a manner consistent with the desired values. Individuals who joined Synanon game clubs, therefore, found themselves participating in a therapeutic experience significantly different from that offered by other human-growth businesses, since they were encouraged to identify with and become involved in the Synanon life-style. From Synanon's perspective this identification and involvement was essential in order to benefit from contact with Synanon.

Synanon's human-potential business was organized in a fashion different from its dope fiend business, where treatment costs were paid by the general public largely through donation and patronage of Synanon's commercial operations. Here, the clients themselves paid the corporation for its services. The exchange relation, like the

therapy itself, was different from the typical fee-for-service arrangement in other human-potential businesses. For example, dues for membership in a Synanon game club have varied over the years from a high of ten to twenty dollars a month to a low of a penny a month. Synanon's game clubs have always been a bargain in the human-growth market.

The encounter-group business benefits the corporation in at least four ways: cash, services, public relations, and recruitment of game players into life-styler status. Since Synanon's therapeutic experience necessitates involvement with Synanon's good works mission and its problems, game players are induced to make cash donations to Synanon commensurate with their ability to pay. Because the token formal fee for membership in a game club is low and the majority of middle-class game players can afford to make larger donations, and because Synanon is always in need of additional funds to expand in order to serve more people, the game players frequently find themselves vulnerable to suggestions that they increase their donations. In 1972 Synanon received approximately 7 percent of its cash income from game players. This amounted to approximately \$237,000.

Corporate Synanon benefits from its involvement with game players through the donation of the game players' services. The middle-class game-player population provides a talent pool that includes doctors, lawyers, dentists, and architects, for example, all of whom are able to donate valuable necessary services. Synanon's physical-plant expansion program frequently involves the donation or purchase of a run-down property that can be dramatically improved with a substantial investment of skilled labor, a demand that can be partially satisfied through labor donations by game players.

The admission of nonresidents into closer involvement with Synanon's life-style has resulted in a large number of people with first-hand experience with the organization, hence a more realistic picture of its goals and activities than they are likely to obtain through media exposure to Synanon's activities. Anyone who had had contact with Synanon for even a few months could not fail to recognize the humanitarian content of Synanon's value system and the manifest good works performed by the organization, even if they did not find it beneficial for themselves or were repelled by other aspects of the organization.

Finally, the game clubs serve as a filter through which potential life-stylers pass before they decide to move into Synanon's alternative society. In 1968 the program leading to the graduation of

5. A more complete discussion of Synanon ideology may be found later in this chapter. For a discussion of the techniques used to produce change, see Ofshe et al., "Social Structure and Commitment to Synanon." For a somewhat different perspective on Synanon's therapeutic ideology, see Steven Simon, "The Synanon Game."

former drug addicts from Synanon was abandoned, and Synanon embarked on the task of establishing an alternative society that was to be capable of housing a person from the cradle to the grave. The alternative society was to be open to anyone who wished to adopt the Synanon life-style. The corporation undertook to create a model society that was to experiment with new forms of social and interpersonal organization as an extension of the therapeutic activities it had engaged in throughout its history. For those who chose residence, the benefits were participation in this social experiment and complete involvement in Synanon's therapeutic human-growth-oriented social structure.

"Squares" who are personally attracted to Synanon and its experiment in communal living constitute an important segment of Synanon's population. As relatively successful members of the larger society who see Synanon's life-style as preferable to those in the outside society, they confirm the validity of insiders' commitments. They also provide a talent pool that enables Synanon to develop those services that a socially independent society must be able to provide for its members. Any community that seeks to provide for its population a relatively complete range of essential social services must be able to operate schools, provide health care, conduct its internal economic operations, and oversee economic and legal relations with the outside world. Life-stylers bring to Synanon training and experience which Synanon as a separate society is not presently able to provide. For example, of approximately eighteen hundred residents in the various Synanon communities, eight are physicians, who can easily provide basic medical care for Synanon's population; and since those who are "employees" of Synanon are paid only the \$50 per month maximum salary, it is economically feasible to attempt innovations in the organization of medical care.

Life-stylers who do not bring to the organization scarce talents or training continue to work in the larger society and pay Synanon a fee judged equal to the amount necessary to maintain an individual in the community. In this way Synanon's nonprofit corporate status is not endangered. Most life-stylers contribute to Synanon a substantial proportion of their incomes in addition to the fee they pay for residence. In 1972 it was estimated that approximately 17 percent of Synanon's population consisted of adult squares. In 1972 Synanon derived approximately 37 percent of its cash income from residents who worked on the outside. This amounted to about \$1,300,000.

THE COMMUNITY

The residents of the various Synanon facilities at any point in time, together with the patterns of social organization that structure their lives, constitute the Synanon community. The style of life in Synanon is noticeably different from the pattern of life lived by Americans of any social class. The most obvious formal differences between the Synanon life-style and that of the society from which it emerged involve rules regulating the use of stimulants and norms governing interpersonal hostility and cooperation. Alcohol and all recreational drugs are prohibited, as is all physical violence and threats of violence—hostile exchanges between residents are banned with special exceptions. Although traditional forms of politeness are carefully observed, traditional norms of privacy do not hold, and inquiry is permitted into any aspect of one's life. Social life is organized around the collective use of facilities: meals are served in dining halls; social intercourse is conducted in public rooms; many residents live in dormitories or share apartments, though married couples usually have private sleeping quarters and unmarried couples seeking privacy are given temporary use of guest rooms; even children live in dormitories, rather than with their parents.

Life in a Synanon house is characterized by a pleasant feeling of comfort and ease, with a variety of activities in the public rooms, with people moving from one group to another and appearing to know and to have something to say to members of virtually any group that has formed for the moment. The norms of life in a Synanon house are structured to produce an atmosphere in which anyone is welcome to join almost any group. Outside visitors and visitors from another Synanon house are made to feel welcome, and efforts are made to include them in the activities. "Family-like atmosphere" fairly describes the feeling one gets from observing and participating in life in a Synanon house.

The social structure that produces this atmosphere is consciously designed, and considerable effort is made to maintain this exceedingly pleasant ambience of Synanon facilities. For example, Synanon facilities are small (the largest houses about five hundred), most people both live and work within the facility, and individuals periodically rotate from one facility to another. Most, therefore, have friends spread throughout the various facilities. The unique factor in Synanon is that all participants interact with one another in Synanon games and therefore come to know about one another's lives in an intimate way.

In general, life is oriented inward. There is a recognized norm (the rule of containment) that energy is to be invested within the community rather than directed outward. The tendency is to invite outsiders to come to visit a resident in Synanon rather than for the resident to visit on the outside; friendships with persons who are not in some way involved with Synanon are discouraged, as are activities that cannot be conducted within Synanon and with other Synanon residents. The policy is to invest one's energy in Synanon activities and in Synanon people.

Synanon facilities support a variety of internal community activities and forms of entertainment for residents: a public library system, television, collections of phonograph and tape recordings of music available in public rooms, and periodic new film releases shown at the various facilities. Most of the facilities host Saturday night parties and other activities open to the public. As one might expect in a small socially isolated community, interest groups form to pursue various crafts, and study groups form around issues of common interest. There is always some building project under way or some special project for which there is insufficient labor available from the occupational labor pool of the community; hence, there are calls for volunteer labor to help transform some part of the environment and make some aspect of life more pleasant. This gives a Synanon house something of a pioneer feeling.

The major behavioral dividing line in Synanon is between what is called "in the game" and "out of the game." Outside of the game, "on the floor" in Synanon argot, one is expected to be the model of a relaxed, friendly, pleasant, helpful person who is happy in his work, on the best of terms with everyone, and satisfied with the way others are conducting themselves. One is to act as if life is exactly as pleasant as it appears to the casual visitor. This is the ideal to which members of the community aspire. In the game, however, one can reveal whatever feelings and attitudes are being suppressed "on the floor." In the game it is not only acceptable to criticize the mistakes and stupidities of others or to reveal one's negative reactions to someone else's behavior, it is the purpose of the game. The game is the arena in which strong emotions are displayed, individuals learn how others react to their behavior, and demands are made to correct errors.

The subject matter that can be brought up in a game is in no way restricted, and games are used to address any interpersonal or organizational problems within the community. This includes such diverse matters as conflicts among members of departments and work groups within the organization, marital problems, developing

a consensus about the norms of Synanon society, and leading individuals to reject undesirable aspects of their past behavior and to accept the values consistent with their new behavior patterns.

The basic Synanon game is an encounter group with from ten to fifteen participants. Games have an aggressive tone, since they usually proceed on the basis of indictments in which one participant points out the defect, transgression, or error of another. The norms of the game call for the group to support the indictment, and unless the indicted individual can quickly fend off the attack, he finds himself opposed by the entire group with various members adding their observations in support of the original charge. One class of indictment involves some problem between two or more individuals in which difficulties in their interaction are surfaced and solutions are sought. Since the subject matter of an indictment is overt behavior, the two contending parties talk about those aspects of each other's behavior that are causing problems, and the group acts as judge, with various members offering evidence in support of charges and offering possible solutions. Solutions usually involve argument by one or both of the parties to modify the problematic behaviors.

The second class of indictment involves violation of Synanon norms. This sort of indictment has the status of offense against the community and produces strong emotional reactions. Violations of Synanon norms are especially significant for two reasons. First, Synanon is attempting to construct a social system different from the one residents left and from which they bring habits that are in discrepancy with the habits Synanon seeks to establish within its boundaries. The differences between life within Synanon and life on the outside are not regarded as arbitrary differences in Synanon's value system. The differences are strongly preferred to the norms of behavior on the outside. Second, from Synanon's point of view, changing a character-disordered or drug-addicted or neurotic individual's behavior means changing his basic pattern of life. Synanon seeks to rebuild persons, and acceptance of the normative system under which Synanon residents live is essential in producing the changes that are sought.⁶

The Synanon game, together with its variants,⁷ and the way in

6. For extensive discussions of the Synanon game and its relation to behavior change, see Simon, "The Synanon Game"; Ofshe et al., "Social Structure and Commitment to Synanon."

7. Variants on Synanon games include stews, dissipations, hi-frequency games, and various games that take more than three hours. Each variant has some distinguishing characteristic, such as the setting (with or without a gallery) or a

which the game is integrated into the routine of Synanon life make up the distinguishing characteristic of Synanon social organization. Game interaction consumes a considerable number of hours of each resident's time per month. Steven Simon estimates that a typical Synanon resident participates in three or four three-hour games per week to fulfill a mandatory game requirement. Synanon residents will also play in a variety of noncompulsory games, which serve as a common form of entertainment and social activity in Synanon.⁸ Social games differ from compulsory games only with respect to the duration of the game and the composition of the group of players. Games may be organized within friendship groups, for married couples, for parents and children, and so forth. Insofar as the Synanon game is considered a therapeutic experience, it is clear that Synanon residents participate in a social system in which one of the major sanctioned activities is the promotion of therapy and growth. According to Simon, the residents of the various Synanon communities fall into three classes with respect to expected consequences of involvement with Synanon and reasons for being in residence. He distinguishes among these three types of residents as follows: "(1) the character disordered or anomic personality; (2) the antinomian or hippie-character type; and (3) the square or normally deficiency-motivated personality" (p. 290).

Simon's three categories correspond to (1) adults with long histories of drug addiction and criminal activities; (2) young adults, dropouts with a history of drug use including psychedelics, speed, and heroin; and (3) "squares" who have no serious histories of drug use but can be termed "the 'average person,' the 'basic neurotic,' or the 'adjusted American'" (p. 294).

Given the typology of character disorders and personality deficiencies into which Simon categorizes Synanon's population, it is reasonable to infer that the main motivation for coming to Synanon for all segments of the community's population is egocentric in that they seek personal change which they view as desirable. However, many current Synanon residents were initially motivated partly by pressure from parents, or by a choice between Synanon and commitment to some other drug-treatment program or a jail sentence, by a desire to live in an environment that offers the family atmosphere found in Synanon houses, by a desire to become involved in an alternative life-style intended to be a prototype for finding

solutions to major social problems, or by a desire to raise children in the sort of environment Synanon offers.

One of the reasons for distinguishing between corporate Synanon and community Synanon is that the corporation has had a continuous existence, while the community is characterized by a high rate of population turnover. Despite the fact that in 1968 Synanon ended its formal program of ex-addict graduation and presently operates no programs that lead directly to reintegration with the larger society, data collected in 1972 reveals that only 44 percent of Synanon's population had been in residence for longer than two years and only 11 percent had residence histories of five years or longer. However, these figures are only for residents and do not report mean length of involvement for "square" game players. The undisputable point about Synanon's demography is that nearly all the individuals who initiate contact with the organization spend relatively short (as measured against an expectation of a lifetime commitment) periods of time involved with it, and a small number of individuals appear to become psychologically committed enough to the organizations and its good-works program to integrate their occupational and social lives with it and become committed to the corporate enterprise. The division between the apparently permanent and transient populations of Synanon corresponds to the division between that segment of the community which manages the corporation and directs Synanon's activities and that segment of the population which is simultaneously the staff of the corporation and the clientele for its good-works activities.

To understand further the nature of the relationship between corporate Synanon and the community, it is useful to focus on the difference between those Synanon residents who can be conceptualized as having a relatively short-term, instrumental relation with the organization and those residents who identify strongly with its mission and fill the executive and decision-making positions within the corporate structure. The vast majority of those who have had contact with Synanon would fall into the former category. Of those who have ever had contact with Synanon, relatively few have chosen to remain in residence on a semipermanent basis. Of the community's eighteen hundred residents in 1972, less than two hundred had residence histories of longer than five years. The picture is of a proportionally small core of persons who have careers tied to the conduct of Synanon's people business and good works, and a proportionally large segment of the population that eventually chooses to terminate its relationship with the Synanon corporation and the community.

device to bring together from distant Synanon communities people who coordinate the activities of the corporation. The basic interactive techniques are similar, however, to the standard Synanon game.

8. Simon, "The Synanon Game," pp. 73, 74.

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There is no available scientific evidence about the consequences of temporary participation in Synanon's social and therapeutic environment. There are no data available, so far as I know, concerning the proportion of former Synanon residents who return to drug use or return to their former patterns of "neurotic, deficiency motivated" behavior. It is clear that individuals do undergo substantial change in their behavior while in residence in Synanon or while a game-club member with substantial involvement with the Synanon community. Drug users stop using drugs, and difficult people are likely to become more pleasant to get along with. If someone stays in residence or in contact with Synanon, he has no choice but to make changes of these sorts. To what extent these modifications in behavior are sustained outside of the Synanon environment cannot be answered without objective evidence.

During the year that I was a participant-observer at Synanon, I met numerous individuals in the Bay Area who are either former Synanon residents or former game-club players. I found that those who had lengthy involvement with the organization felt that their relationship with Synanon was valuable to them. The reason for leaving usually revolved around a conflict between the demands of the organization for strict conformity to its rules and the desires of the individuals to conduct any aspects of their lives differently. Conflicts were usually not about major issues, but rather over norms which considered separately would have to be classified as minor, or matters such as the degree to which a game player had integrated his life into Synanon's structure. It seems to me that I was being told, "I came to Synanon to accomplish something and needed help. I was therefore willing to do as I was told. As I gained confidence in my ability to do what I had previously doubted I could accomplish, I saw less and less reason to continue to accept all aspects of Synanon's social system."

What I was hearing made sense given what I see to be the nature of Synanon's system for producing behavior change and resocialization. The philosophical principles on which Synanon's value system is based rest on traditional American notions of individual responsibility for action, the idea of finding within oneself the strength to control one's life, and the faith that one can, in some mystical way, look within oneself and know what is right. The two writers who express these ideas and are used as references for Synanon's ideology are Ralph Waldo Emerson and Abraham Maslow. Emerson formulates these ideas in a semimystical fashion, with reference to God-given knowledge and the need for individuals to find truth within themselves and to act on the basis of that truth. Maslow

writes of the self-actualized individual, who happens to possess the same general characteristics as the person Emerson sees. Although Maslow uses the vocabulary of modern psychology and Emerson the vocabulary and conceptual system of early American Puritanism, they both represent American traditions of individualism. To become more like the sort of inner-directed individual written about by Emerson and Maslow is the philosophical goal toward which Synanon residents are to direct themselves.

Synanon's operating system for producing this sort of individual is demanding and forces an individual into a position in which his actions are known to the public, and he must either successfully defend himself or change his behavior. Throughout Synanon's history the organization has been attacked for being authoritarian and demanding nearly absolute conformity from its residents. It seems to me that the core of Synanon's therapeutic system is precisely the fact that absolute demands are made on the individual. In considering Synanon's authoritarianism we must not lose sight of the substance of what is demanded. The demands are, in the main, for adherence to the highest principles of honesty, rejection of behavior regarded as undesirable by those undergoing change and by the society in general, and pursuit of perfection. Synanon offers a life-organization system intended to produce certain sorts of changes in individuals. Like most systems of resocialization, it demands conformity to the rules of the system. Unlike most therapeutic systems, Synanon offers a totally structured environment intended to support the change it demands. Resident-clients of Synanon are subject to demands for strict behavioral conformity to the rules of Synanon communities and for assent to philosophical arguments that strength comes from within them. Insofar as the system is successful, it results in persons who modify their observable behavior in socially acceptable ways and come to believe that they are in control of their actions and able to govern themselves.

That there is some essential contradiction between an authoritarian system of social control and a philosophical belief system that stresses individual responsibility is what I seem to hear from those who were at one point involved in Synanon. One might interpret their mixed feelings and decision to leave Synanon as the result of a growing belief in their abilities to control themselves, coupled with involvement in a system that does not readily provide opportunities to exercise that control. The only way to exercise control within Synanon is to become part of the core population that manages the community. If one has status in the community, one is able to participate in the decisions that organize life at Synanon. The only way

to attain status in the community is to demonstrate that one is committed to the good-works mission of the organization and is not part of the population with a short-term, instrumental relation with Synanon.

POSTSCRIPT

Although what I have written to this point may contain errors of fact and of interpretation, it represents a conscious effort to carry out the craft of sociological analysis. I was initially attracted to the idea of what a social experiment on the scale of Synanon might produce and to the fact that it was engaged in activities that benefited people in desperate need of help, and I met many people there that I liked very much. As I became more knowledgeable about the community and the corporation I came to see an endless conflict between the desires of individuals and the desires of the corporation, with the corporation being vastly more powerful.

While Synanon's authoritarian power structure might be functional for an organization dedicated to helping people gain control over some particular aspect of their lives, as the basic power structure around which to build a society in which people are to spend their entire lives it seems to me to leave much to be desired. I came to see Synanon as a prescriptive society in which peoples' possibilities for action were being steadily reduced in number, and where only those of their desires that could be shaped into something beneficial to the corporation would be permitted. I believe that the fundamental cause of this is that Synanon is modeled along business lines and therefore at its core measures its success in terms of growth, expansion, and organizational survival. A business cannot readily judge either the social value of what it is doing or the absolute quality of its product. It is too easy to use standards such as sales figures and capital worth as an index of meaningful success.

Synanon's purpose is supposed to be the curing of drug addicts, the creating of self-actualized people, and the creation of a model society, any one of which is a substantial task. In seventeen years Synanon came to define these as its aims. How well it has succeeded in any of these tasks is a matter for debate, since the organization seems little concerned with self-evaluation.

I came away from Synanon with the belief that it probably does

some good for the people who have a transient contact with it, and that it is a business that has created a core of "company" men and women who manage it and who therefore have a considerable personal stake in its continuation—a business, not a revolution.⁹

9. This paper was prepared during the author's tenure as a Guggenheim Foundation Fellow, 1973-74.

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