

A Paradigm for the Image

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For several years I worked with a group of community development consultants who passed their training strategies on Boulding's theorizing about the Image. I witnessed people changing vocational pursuits and making radical shifts in life style after participating in the training programs, but I never took the time to think through the theoretical basis. As a community educator, as one who is looking for ways of freeing citizens to use their critical intelligence to grapple creatively with the many problems of community deterioration and individual alienation, I'm concerned about thinking through what works and why.

I've sensed throughout my study of Brown and Keller's theorizing about interpersonal communication, ^(From Monologue to Dialogue) that their integration of data from a variety of sources could help me clarify Boulding's notions. This brief paper describes a paradigm of Boulding's theorizing that I think will be useful to me in designing community education activities. I began with a paradigm based just on a reading of Boulding's The Image, then I revised it as I tried to relate Brown and Keller's work to it. The paradigm described here is the most recent of several attempts.

I start with Boulding's theorizing because that's how I've been viewing things for several years. I may abandon the view; I'm not sure it will ever be very productive in terms of empirical research. In any event, writing this paper has been valuable for me. It is an incomplete effort, but the fruits of my labors are worth examining.

-Open Systems-

The concept of system is the model for Boulding's theorizing about images. He describes seven organizational levels of systems, from closed systems of static structures (e.g. statues) and mechanical dynamics (e.g. clock) through open systems (thermostats, biological cells, plants, animals and humans). Boulding highlights three essential features of an open system (p.33):

- Something is continually being taken in from the environment (INPUT);

- Something is continually being put back into the environment (OUTPUT);

- The structure of the system is maintained (not preserved necessarily, but held together in some relationship to its prior state).

Visualizing this concept of an open system is tricky. Begin with a blank piece of paper representing the environment. Draw an enclosed figure of any geometrical shape on the paper. The space inside the figure represents the system; for the moment disregard the complexities of defining the boundary, the essential elements inside the figure, the functions of those elements, and the interrelationships among them. An open system is something discernable from its environment that is in continual interaction with it; something from the environment enters it, something comes out of it back into the environment, and through it all the

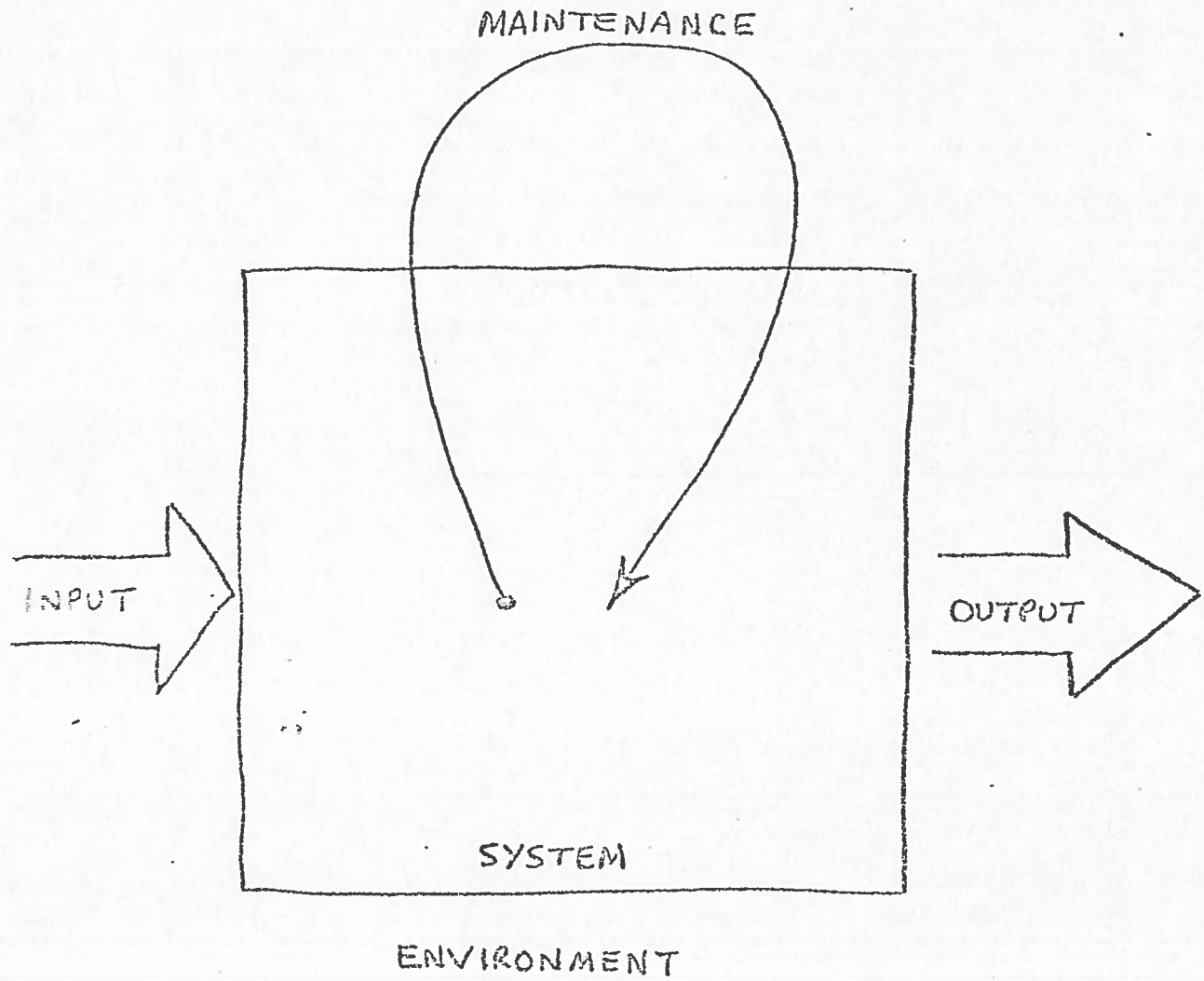


FIGURE 1.
PARADIGM OF AN OPEN SYSTEM.

discernable something retains its discernability. Let this interaction be represented by three arrows as shown in Figure 1.

Insert Figure 1.

Paradigm of an Open System.

According to Boulding, the maintenance property of an open system has two essential features (p.33):

● The substance of the system is differentiated into complex parts with each part having specific functions that it performs; i.e., the system's substance is organized;

● There is an end form toward which the organization proceeds. This end form is the discernability of the system.

Thus an open system has two forms of output; that which goes into the environment, and that which goes back into itself to keep itself organized according to some pattern.

-Communication Acts-

A paradigm of an interpersonal communication act from Brown and Keller's theorizing about dialogue is shown in Figure 2. In this paradigm one person, S, sends information to another, R, in a context of relatedness. (Brown and Keller use "relationship" instead of "relatedness." "Relationship" will be given a more technical definition

later in this paper.)

Insert Figure 2.

Dialogue Paradigm of Interpersonal Communication.

This paradigm is incomplete, however. They define communication as symbolic interaction, meaning there must be a response to an initiation that is somehow related to the initiation (mimeo, ch. 1. p.6). This can be diagrammed as shown in Figure 3.

Insert Figure 3.

Revised Dialogue Paradigm of Interpersonal Communication.

Comparison of Figures 1 and 3 suggests that the receiver in a communication act can be viewed as an open system. The input into the system is the verbal and nonverbal information coming from the sender. The output from the system is the overt response (verbal and nonverbal). The maintenance function is represented by the internal response made to the information input, or the process of listening. If, as the systems view suggests, the listening process maintains a complex organization of parts that is evolving toward some end form, listening is the key to communication.

The aspects of the environment that are important for understanding the communication act are those which influence relatedness. The internal responses, or outcomes of

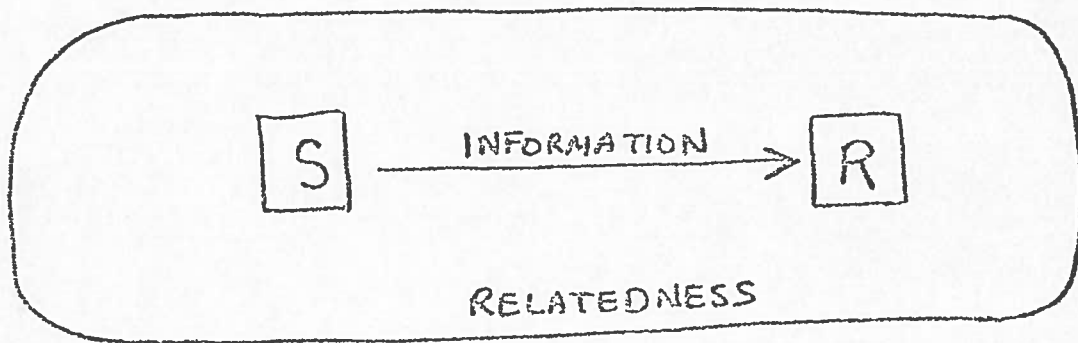


FIGURE 2.
DIALOGUE PARADIGM OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION
(FROM BROWN AND KELLER, P. 186)

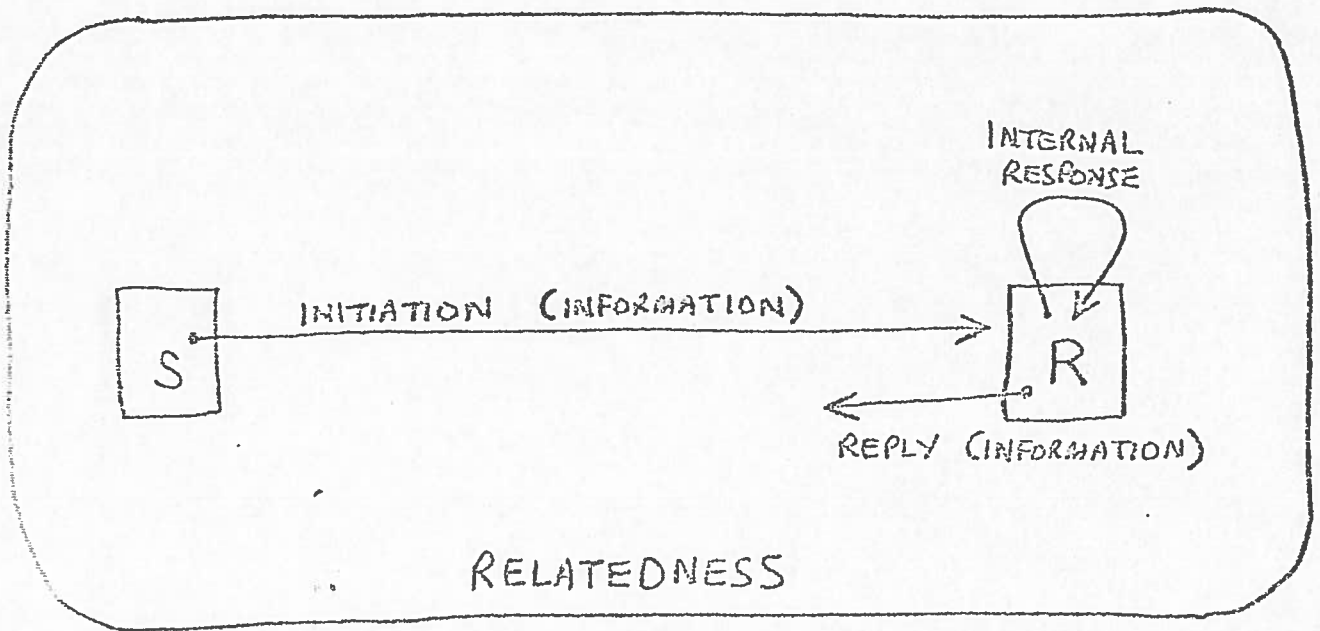


FIGURE 3.
REVISED DIALOGUE PARADIGM OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION.

listening, of the communicants are the primary determinants of relatedness. But there are external elements that are influential, as discussed by Keller and Brown (ch. 7) including:

- Imagined responses of significant others to one's reply (reference groups);

- Electronic technology which alters normal rates of shifts in attention, insulates the receiver from the vitality of personal experience, enhances a sense of helplessness in the face of complexity and unpredictability;

- Nuclear capability which increases a sense of urgency for fulfillment now in the face of an uncertain future.

-The Image-

Boulding theorizes about the organic growth of knowledge from the proposition that individual behavior depends on what the individual believes to be true; i.e., behavior depends upon the Image. He suggests that one's Image, an open system of beliefs, has ten dimensions or components. Reviewing the components, they appear to be classifiable into four structural components and six regulatory components.

Structural components. Individuals organize their beliefs of "fact" about space, time, if-then relations

in the world and personal relations. Although Boulding refers to these organizations as images (with lower case "i"), "component" will be used in this paper. "Image" with upper case "I" shall be used to refer to the individual's total open system of beliefs.

The spatiality component is the organization of beliefs about location in space from immediate locale to galactic universe (pp.3-4, 48).

The temporality component is the organization of beliefs about events and their interrelationships in the past, present and future, or the stream of time (pp.4, 49).

The relations component is the organization of beliefs about reasonably stable relationships or regularities among things in the world, or "if-then" statements (pp.5, 49-50). Boulding discusses power and wealth as two key sets of relations for man.

The personality component is the organization of beliefs about the self in relation to others, roles and organizations (pp.4-5, 47). Although Boulding suggests this component may be a part of the relations component, it is of sufficient importance to warrant being identified as a separate component.

Regulatory components. In addition to the four structures of beliefs about space, time, regularities and the self, there are dimensions of the Image which appear

to regulate or influence which elements of the structures actually determine behavior, and how incoming information affects the composition and organization of the structures. The value component orders the various elements and components on some set of better-worse scales (pp.11-16, 50-51). This component is perhaps the most important single element determining the effect of incoming information on the Image. All information enters the Image through the value system. Information rated as worse for the Image is ignored or resisted, unless some critical event occurs which catalyzes a reorganization of the Image. Information rated as better will be ignored, ^{or} used to elaborate the Image or ~~used~~ to reinforce resistance to worse information. All behavioral instructions from the Image to the action system of the organism pass through the value system, which orders potential acts and their consequences.

Expectations are formed early in life, and they screen incoming messages throughout the life span. Perhaps the expectations can be viewed as a set of normal states for each component of the Image. Suppose each component sends continual messages to the central message processor, which compares and contrasts the content of external information against this set of expectations. That which compares is processed, that which contrasts is ignored or transformed to become consistent or placed "on hold."

If a critical point is reached in the holding category the processer responds with any of a variety of defense mechanisms or it reorganizes the Image.

Brown and Keller's discussion of reception and perception (pp.97-99) is helpful here. Reception, hearing, functions to detect change first. If the organism is in a safe climate, reception of a different message may signal danger. If in a dangerous climate, reception of a different message may signal safety.

Perception, the pattern of meaning, functions to associate internalized expectations with received information. It detects similarities first.

The affect component consists of the emotions, which are themselves influenced by the value component (pp.5, 51-52). This component regulates the arousal state of the message processer. The arousal state fluctuates as the processer alternates its focus between the information coming into the system from outside and the maintenance information coming from within; i.e., as the processer alternates between hearing and listening (Brown and Keller, pp.16, 77-79). The emotions aroused in each other by communicants, or the relationship between them, determines the level of communication along a continuum from indifference to deep concern (Brown and Keller, p.187).

The arousal state, on the other hand, is influenced by the maintenance information being generated within the

value component (Brown and Keller, pp.79-85). If the self talk about the message is positive, then the arousal state operates to allow more messages to be heard. If it is negative, it reduces the number of messages heard. Negative self talk results in an impoverished personality component, for the development of personal identity comes from seeing the difference between one's own Image and another's Image.

The certainty component regulates the degree of certainty or uncertainty associated with each element and component of the Image, particularly the relations component (p.52).

The reality component regulates the degree of reality or unreality associated with each part of the Image (p.52).

The consciousness component is a sort of scanning mechanism that regulates the intensity of perceptability of each part of the Image (p.53). This is the memory function.

The publicness dimension of the Image represents those elements which are shared among individuals in a group (pp.64-81).

The components can be diagrammed as shown in Figure 4. The value component surrounds all other components, serving as a screen which orders inputs and outputs on a set of goodness-badness scales. The four structural components are the heart of organized knowledge, while the affect, certainty, reality and consciousness components regulate

which elements are being actively processed. Publicness is represented by the darkened portion of each component. (The degree of publicness could be represented by the amount of darkened area, but this has not been done in this paper.)

Insert Figure 4.

Paradigm of the Components of the Image.

-Information Processing in the Image-

In the communication act input to the receiver is information about some event or thing in the world, which is received or heard by the sensory system. The external information is converted into received information that can be processed by the organism. In Boulding's theorizing this received information impacts the Image through the value system, where it is processed (listened to, made meaningful) into behavioral instructions for the action system of the organism. This output is prioritized by the value system before it activates the action system, or before the receiver responds to the initial information. Some sort of processor receives messages from each component of the Image, sends instructions back to the components for maintaining or altering their structure or regulatory function, sends instructions to the action system, and sends

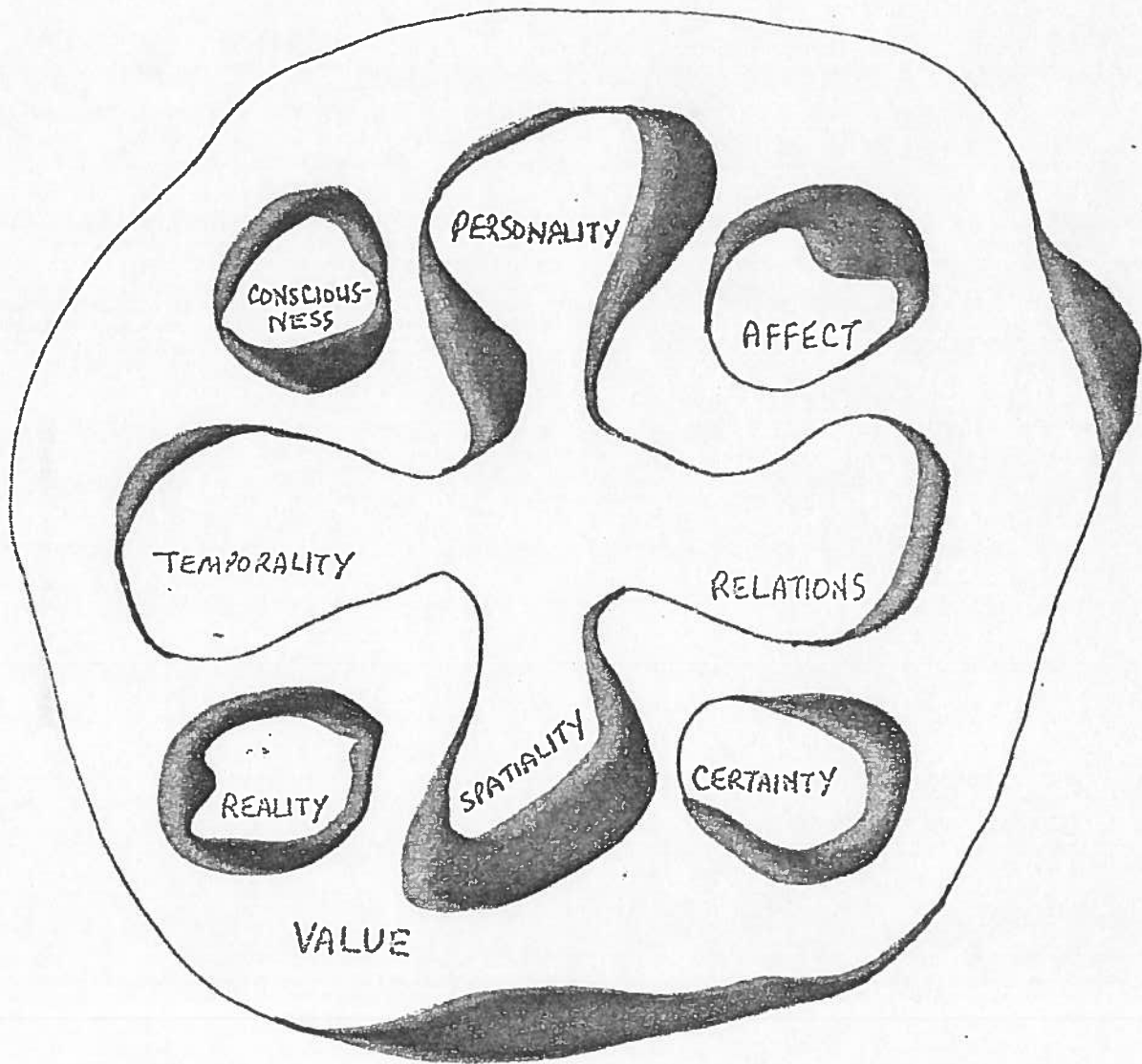


FIGURE 4.

PARADIGM OF THE COMPONENTS OF THE IMASE.

feedback to the reception system on how to receive new information.

Thus listening is the act of maintaining or transforming one's Image. It is the internal responding to what is heard, which in Boulding's theorizing has five modes:

- The message may have no effect on the Image. The person hears but does not listen. There is no internal verbal response to the message.

- The value component of the Image may be clarified.

- The image may be elaborated ~~in~~ on one or more components, using the information in the message. This is the acquisition of information function discussed by Brown and Keller (p.23).

- The Image may be defended by repelling the message.

- The Image may be totally reorganized.

Insert Figure 5.

Information Processing in the Image.

-Dynamic Process of Communication-

Brown and Keller propose that the nature and flow of interpersonal communication are primarily determined by the interaction of six factors: feelings of affiliation for ~~and~~ others, task energy, values adopted from the community, unique values appreciated in the other, need to control others, and need to assert one's own unique values (mimeo, Ch. 4).

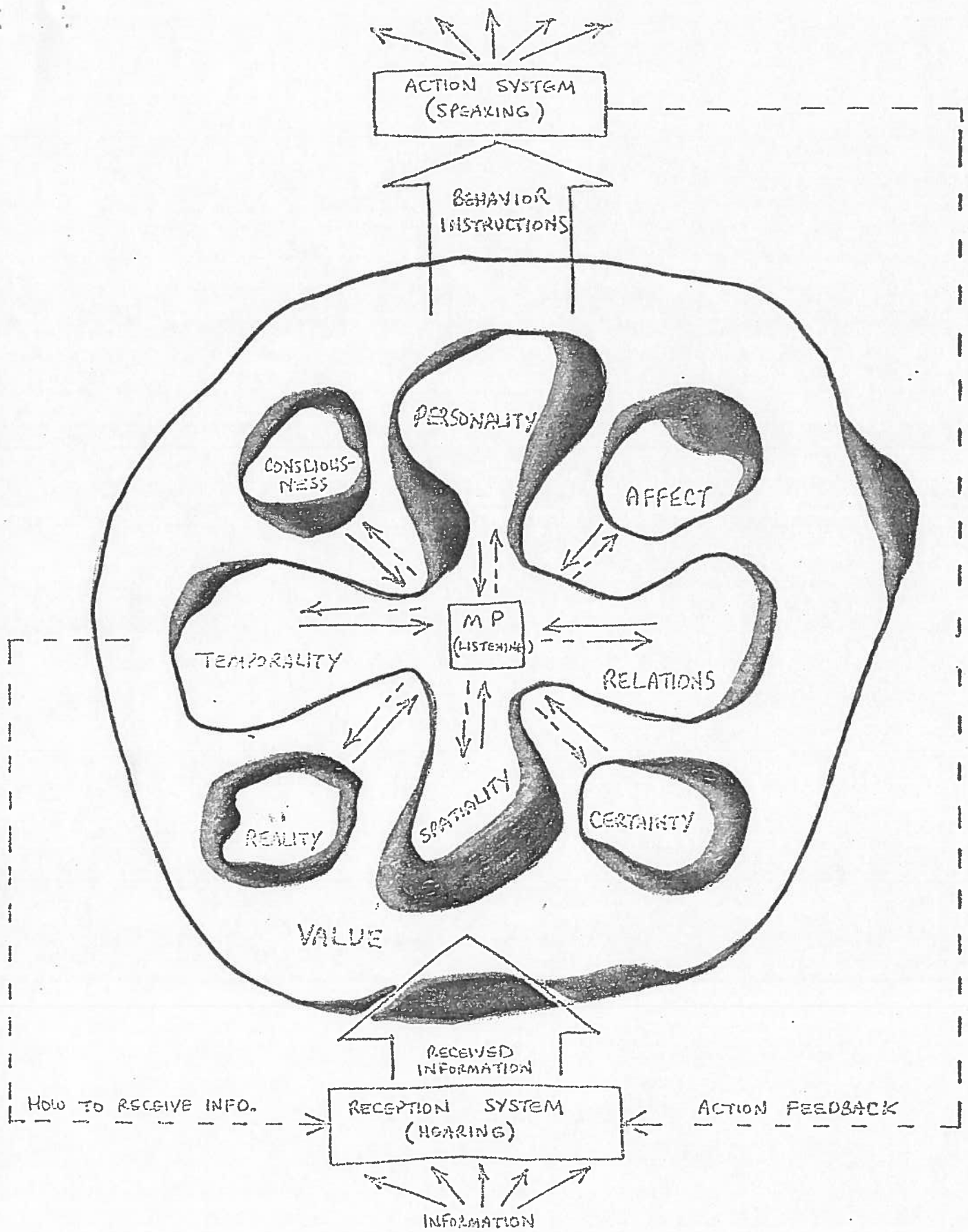


FIGURE 5.

INFORMATION PROCESSING IN THE IMAGE.

Feelings and task energy interact to form a grid of behavior for a particular situation and person that has four categories:

① Relationship (positive feelings, low energy), where the objective is to preserve the relatedness between self and other. Thus the ~~self's~~ ^{self's} task participation is altered to maintain a high degree of relatedness with the other.

② Cooperation (positive feelings, high energy), where the objective is to work together to accomplish a task.

③ Competition (negative feelings, high energy), where the objective is to accomplish the task in spite of the presence of the other.

④ Withdrawal (negative feelings, low energy), where the objective is to protect the self from the other. The self's task participation is altered to dissolve relatedness with the other.

Specific behavior occurs within a context of values. Although in general one may prize affiliation with and loyalty to others, i.e., value community highly, he ^{or she} may or may not like working with Harry to build a garage. Thus the four possible categories of the behavioral grid for a particular situation interact with a set of four analogous general values, as shown in Figure 6.

Insert Figure 6.

Paradigm for the Dynamic Process of Communication

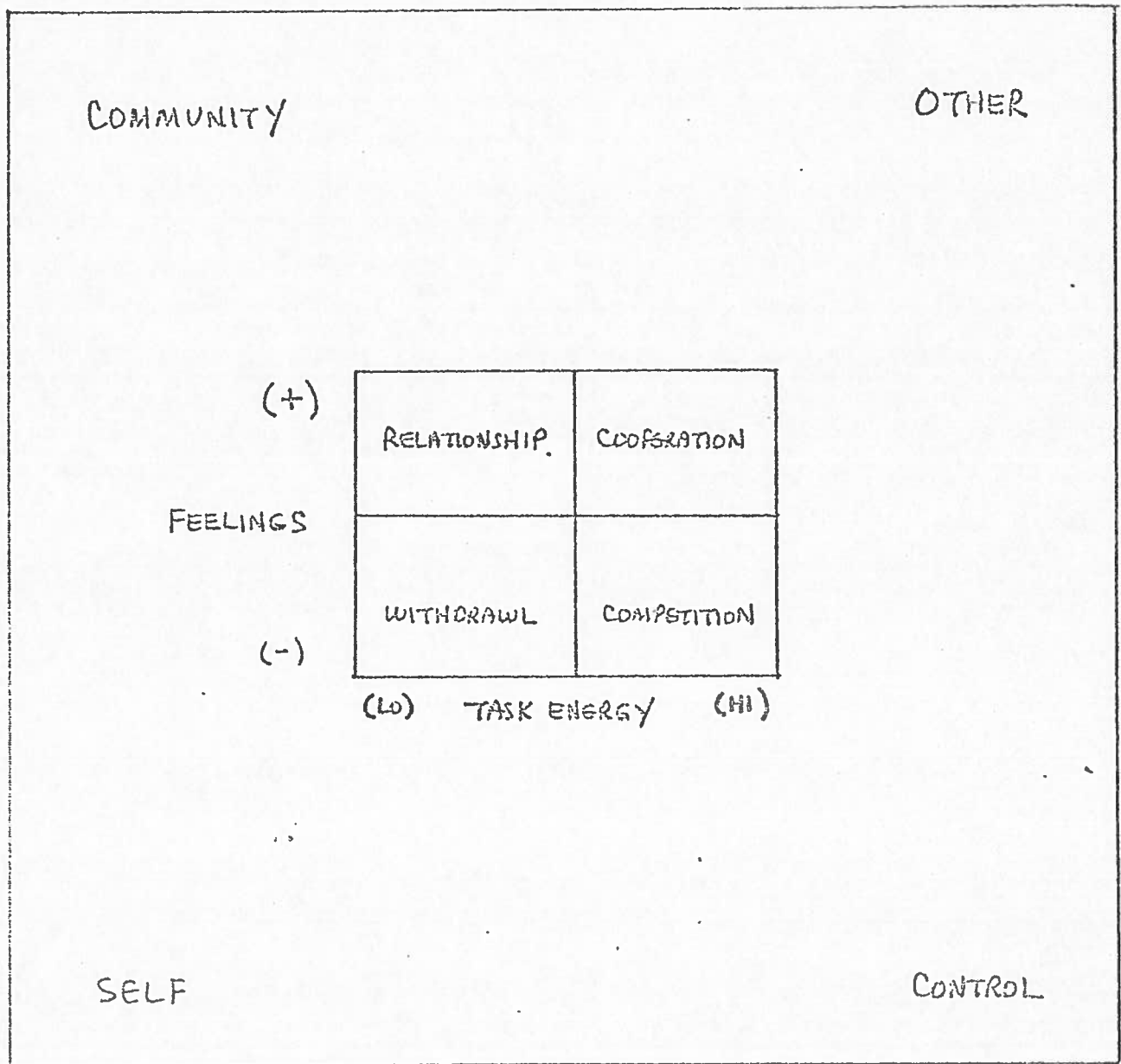


FIGURE 6.

PARADIGM FOR THE DYNAMIC PROCESS OF COMMUNICATION.

In terms of the Image, the feelings dynamic appears to be analogous to the affect component. Perhaps the task energy dynamic is analogous to the consciousness component, for creative energy appears to increase as the subconscious becomes more revealed. Experiencing competence is much influenced by the degree of openness one has in recalling and reliving his past experiences. There is consistency in associating two regulatory components of the Image with the behavioral dimensions of the dynamic process model.

Since Boulding emphasized power relationships in his discussion of the relations component, the control dynamic appears to be analogous to the relations component. Since the personality component represents relations of ~~with~~^{self} to the other, it seems to be analogous to the dynamic of valuing the other.

In the dialogue theorizing about the communication act diagrammed in Figure 3, relatedness and information are the essential elements (Brown and Keller *mémo*, ch. 1, p.2). One's image of relatedness to another, or his relationship, can be defined as the subset of the Image containing the affect component (feelings), relations component (authority arrangement) and the personality component (self-image). This is analogous to the dynamic of the community.

The content of each of these components fluctuates constantly, meaning that the degree of congruence or conflict between one's relationship (image of relatedness with the other)

and the other's relationship (other's image of relatedness with the self) is in a state of flux. Let "relatedness" denote the degree of congruence between the two relationships. Then the paradigm using Boulding's notion of the Image can be represented as shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7 Insert.

Dialogue Paradigm of Interpersonal Communication Using the Image.

The affect component is the primary element of relationship in dialogue theorizing. The internal description of whatever arousal state is present when information comes to one constitutes one's feelings about whatever that information represents. Seven kinds of feelings are proposed by Brown and Keller (mimeo, ch. 1, pp.12-18) that characterize bondedness. Are these aspects of bondedness ordinally arranged? Suppose there is $X(1)$ amount of affection between John and Mary. Suppose there is also $X(2)$ amount of eros or kinship between Sam and Jill. Given everything else equal, and $X(1)=X(2)$, is the amount of bondedness the same between the two couples? Or does eros have more intensity than affection, so that there is more bondedness between Sam and Jill?

The dynamic of valuing the self, or individualism, can be viewed as the subset of the Image consisting of the personality component (self in relation to others), the

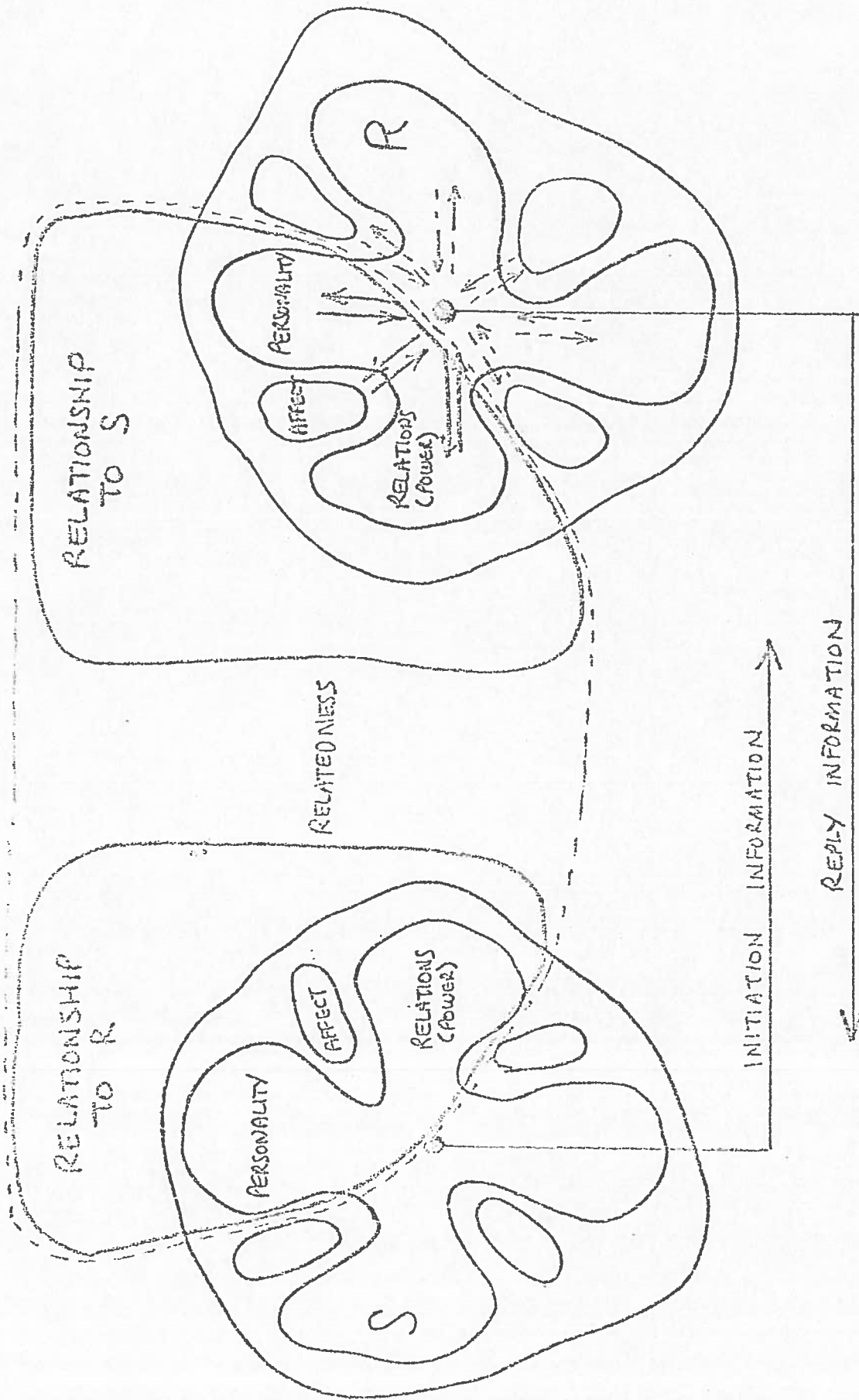


FIGURE 7.

DIALOGUE PARADIGM OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION USING THE IMAGE.

temporal~~ity~~ component (self's role or task in the stream of history) and consciousness (clarity regarding the sources of psychic energy). The dynamic process model superimposed on the Image can be diagrammed as shown in Figure 8.

Insert Figure 8.

Paradigm for the Dynamic Process of Communication Using the Image.

-Epilogue-

I'm satisfied that it may be productive for me as a community educator to interface Boulding's imaginative theorizing about images with Brown and Keller's systematic integrating of empirical findings on interpersonal communication. The next step will be to develop testable propositions.

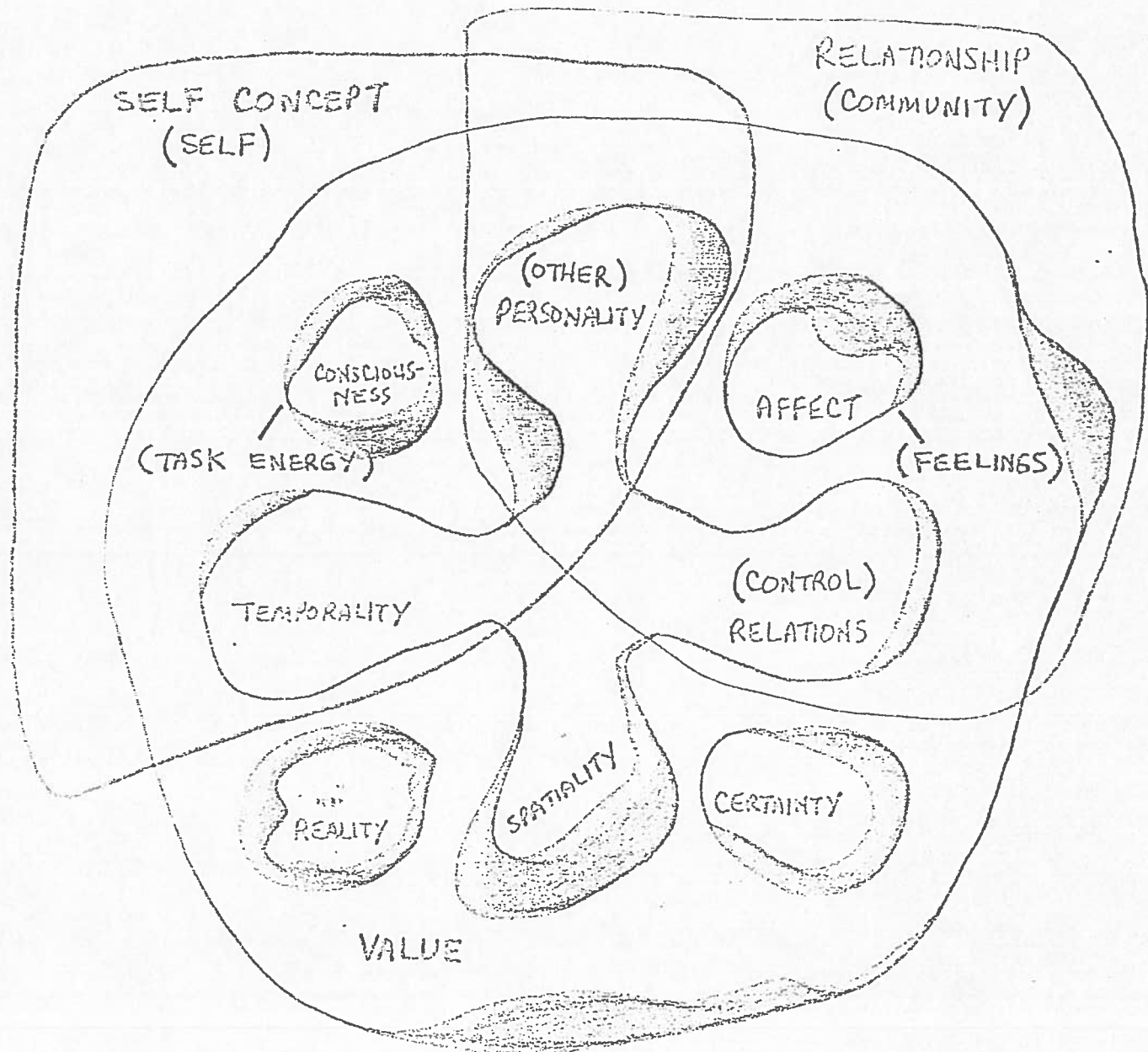


FIGURE 8.

PARADIGM FOR THE DYNAMIC PROCESS
OF COMMUNICATION USING THE IMAGE.