

"Multiple Roles Of An Engineer In A Business Society
And The Concept of 'Identity Closures'."

by

Joaquin E. Murrieta*

Recently a mechanical engineer who has been studying the problems of maintaining individual integrity in a society where there are increasing pressures for conformity proposed a way of looking at the problem by use of the concept of "identity closure." (1) First it is necessary to find some definition of this concept of "identity", before we go into the further concept of "identity closure." Dr. Joseph J. Michaels in American Handbook of Psychiatry (Basic books, N.Y., 1959) in a chapter on Character Structure and Character Disorders (esp. pp. 370-1) on Sociological Aspects of Character Structure says:

"The specific concept which bridges the gap between the inner development of the individual and the impinging forces of culture is his #meaningful construct of the idea "identity"."

(Note # his refers to E. H. Erikson, Childhood and Society, N.Y.: Norton, 1950)

By inner development of character one traditionally refers to Freud's classification into oral, anal, and genital character traits related to stages of development of personality.

I think that Nisenbaum by "identity closure" refers to a

1. Private communication from Philip Nisenbaum, San Jose, Calif.

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the more sociologically oriented late stages of development of character and hence completing of "identity" after one has completed college and special vocational training and is assuming responsibility in his profession or business.

Dr. Michaels calls attention of the Marketing Orientation defined by Erich Fromm in Man for Himself, N.Y. :Rinehart, 1947 (Premier paperback, 1965)

Next we should make a quick search for some of the major bibliographic references on the concept "identity" so that we can in due course relate our deliberations to the studies already extant. Books in Print 1963An author-title-series index to the Publishers' Trade List Annual, edited by Sarah L. Prakken (N.Y.: R.R. Bowker Co.) lists the following:

- (1955) Identity and anxiety: Survival of the person in mass society. Stein, Maurice R., and others. 7.95. Free Press
- (1955) Identity and interpersonal competence: A new direction in family research. Foote, Nelson N., and Leonard S. Cottrell, Jr. 5.00. U. of Chicago
- Identity and reality. Meyerson, Emile. pap. 2.25. Dover also 4.25. Peter Smith, Publisher, 20 Railroad Ave., Gloucester, Mass.
- (1959) Identity and the life cycle. Erikson, Erik H. 3.00. Int.Univs.
- (1962) Identity: Mental health and value systems. ed. by Kenneth Soddy. 6.75. Quadrangle

Author references:

- Stein, Maurice R. Eclipse of community: An interpretation of American studies. 1960. 6.00. Princeton
- Foote, Nelson N. Housing choices and housing constraints. 1960. 12.50. McGraw
- Clark, Lincoln H. and Nelson N. Foote, eds. Consumer behavior, vol. 1. Dynamics of consumer reaction. il. 1954. 4.00; vol. 2. Life cycle and consumer behavior. 1955 5.00; vol. 4. Household decision making. 1961. 6.50. N.Y.U.
- Erikson, Erik H., ed., Youth: Change and challenge. 1963. 6.50. Basic Books
- Erikson, Erik H. Young man Luther. 1958. 5.00; pap. 1.75. Norton
- Soddy, Kenneth. Clinical child psychiatry. 1961. 8.50. Williams and Wilkins

Erich Fromm (Man for Himself, p.248) says:

"If freedom, the ability to preserve one's integrity against power, is the basic condition for morality, has man in the Western world not solved his moral problem? Is it not only a problem of people living under authoritarian dictatorships which deprive them of their personal and political freedom? Indeed, the freedom attained in modern democracy implies a promise for the development of man which is absent in any kind of dictatorship, regardless of their proclamations that they act in man's interest. But it is a promise only, and not yet a fulfillment. We mask our own moral problem from ourselves if we focus our attention on comparing our culture with modes of life which are the negation of the best achievements of humanity, and thus we ignore the fact that we too bow down to power, not to that of a dictator and a political bureaucracy allied with him, but to the anonymous power of the market, of success, of public opinion, of "common sense"--or rather, of common nonsense--and of the machine whose servants we have become.

Our moral problem is man's indifference to himself. It lies in the fact that we have lost the sense of the significance and uniqueness of the individual, that we have made ourselves into instruments for purposes outside ourselves, that we experience and treat ourselves as commodities, and that our own powers have become alienated from ourselves. We have become things and our neighbors have become things. The result is that we feel powerless and despise ourselves for our impotence. Since we do not trust our own power, we have no faith in man, no faith in ourselves or in what our own powers can create. We have no conscience in the humanistic sense, since we do not dare to trust our own judgement. We are a herd believing that the road we follow must lead to a goal since we see everybody else on the same road. We are in the dark and keep up our courage because we hear everybody else whistle as we do.

Dostoyevsky once said, "If God is dead, everything is allowed." This is, indeed, what most people believe; they differ only in that some draw the conclusion that God and the church must remain alive in order to uphold the moral order, while others accept the idea that everything is allowed, that there is no valid moral principle, that expediency is the only regulative principle in life.

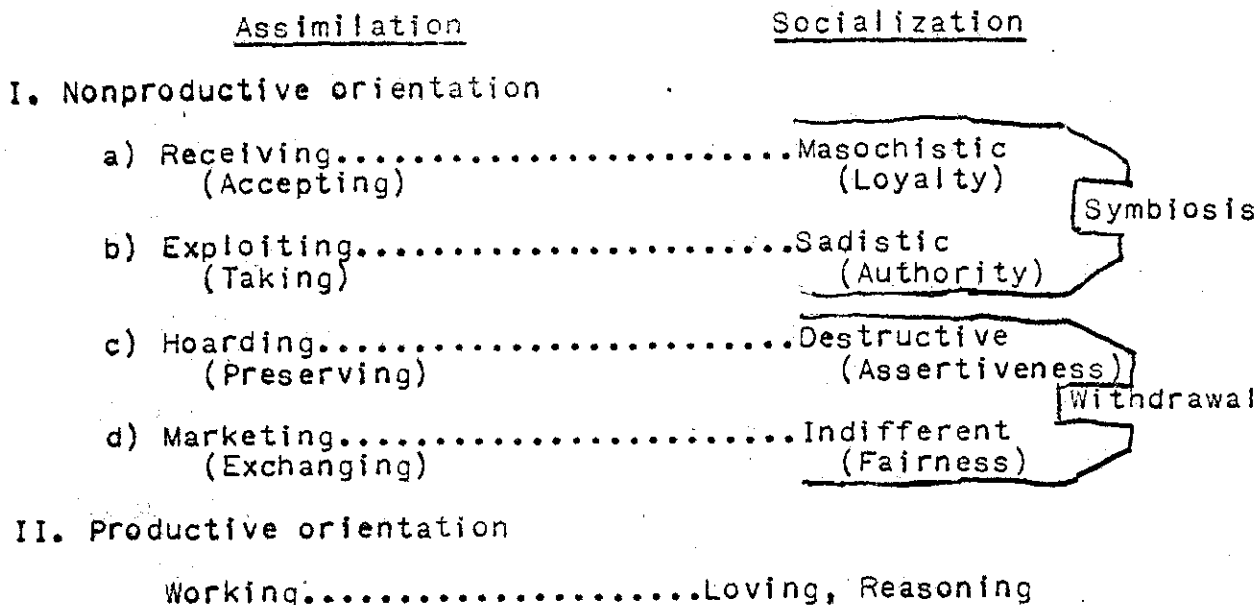
In contrast, humanistic ethics takes the position that if man is alive he knows what is allowed; and to be alive means to be productive, to use one's powers not for any purpose transcending man, but for oneself, to make sense of one's existence, to be human."

To get on to our main subject of this note, namely a trial review of an application of Nisenbaum's "identity closure" concept, we have to retain some contact with the character development proceeding through childhood before we reach the

stage where Nisenbaum's concepts are applicable. For this perhaps [Erich Fromm's listing of character types may be useful:

(Man for Himself, p. 216)

CHARACTER TYPES



The usefulness of the above classification in this study will come when different reactions of different people are observed in respect to "identity closure." At that stage it may be necessary to examine the character types of the people involved. That stage probably will require the work of professional psychiatrists and psychologists, because it requires more technical background and skill than an engineer can easily acquire as a hobby.

Nisenbaum's basic viewpoint is that compulsiveness and tensions result from situations where professional people have unclosed identities, i.e. they have not completed their search for identity. This results in some leaders or managers taking control by defining their followers identities, resulting in

* Note added 10/18/66: Nisenbaum reports that I have an incomplete view of his "identity closure" concept. His concept relates to a drive for identity starting in childhood, and continuing through life.

power being acquired by those who close other peoples identities. If the leaders of the social system can shape people's identities, so that the individuals have internal feedback patterns which close their identities in a way subject to manipulation by the leaders, the leaders can manipulate a docile society.

If a student learns something himself, he has his own self truly represented in his identity closure. If he has been trained what is a correct response by a teacher, the teacher is a part of the students indentity closure. I shall leave it to Mr. Nisenbaum to elaborate in more detail on his concept of "identity closure."

In the meantime I shall attempt to apply the concept to some of my experiences. In/^{August}1958 I participated in a panel discussion on the social responsibility of engineers and scientists at a meeting at a nearby college sponsored by the local chapter of the National Society of Professional Engineers. At about the same time I received a letter from a representative of RKV Corp(*), on a joint computer conference planning committee asking for possible papers for a March 1959 session on the social responsibility of engineers. I edited the notes from the local panel into a paper for the regional conference. I submitted a copy of the manuscript first to the manager of the laboratory of the industrial research organization for which I worked to see if they claimed any right to review the material. To my suprise I did not get any answer, but the manager stalled until after the deadline for submitting the paper, thus avoiding any definitive answer to my question.

*RKV is a fictitious name.

I discussed the problem with the engineering society committee chairman for the social responsibility session and he gave me an extension of 30 days in which to resolve the question. During the 30 day period I discovered that the management of RKV Corp. was generally hostile to the idea of an engineer presenting a paper on the subject of social responsibility. Their basic stand was that an engineer does not have an individual identity in the framework of the engineering societies. He is identified as a representative of the corporation for which he works.

When I came to the realization that this business public relations policy was interfering with my obligations as a citizen of my local community and the United States; interfering with the ethical principles I had assimilated from my religious education in the Congregational Church and the Unitarian Church; interfering with the concepts of ethics assumed in my activities in the Student-Y.M.C.A. activities; and interfering with the principles I had learned as a Boy Scout and Leader in the Boy Scouts. I was angry that I was being pressured to throw away my ethical principles, if I was to work as an engineer in the computer industry.

I discussed these problems with leaders in Unitarian, Congregational, Methodist, Roman Catholic, and Jewish organizations. The chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America wrote me that the material of the paper was important to be discussed in public. A Jesuit leader wrote me a note certifying there was nothing objectionable from a philosophic or theological point of view in my paper. I finally worked out a procedure to present the paper, by an introductory slide showing me changing hats in which I took off my "RKV Corp.-Engineer Hat" and put on

my "Citizen-Individual Hat."

I found that the tension of discussing the paper with RKV Corp. managers used up too much energy, so I retreated into my "RKV Engineer Hat" for a while in order to concentrate on my engineering work without interruption. However I did figure out that I was attempting to follow the pattern commended by Ligon in his book Psychology of Christian Personality (1937). However I learned that RKV Corp. managers preferred engineers to be irresponsible to their community and country by developing the "logic-tight compartments" deplored by Ligon and many religious leaders.

In 1960 I had abandoned dealing with the question of the social responsibility of engineers from a religious ethics viewpoint, so I organized a weekly discussion group for the summer to discuss the potential value of Information Theory to sociological problems such world peace, civil rights, etc. Although I didn't realize it at the time, I was doing something similar to Dr. R. B. Lindsay's development of the Thermodynamic Imperative in which an ethical principle was developed by analogy with Information Theory similar to Immanuel Kant's Categorical Imperative. This development in which I found the same equations I was using in analysing computer-communication systems could be used to evaluate the stage of evolution of a social system had the advantage of being derivative from my official work without appeal to external authorities. When I considered potential channels for publication of these developments, I found hostility in academic circles in addition to that already encountered in industry. One reviewer for the Institute of Radio Engineers referred to a manuscript of mine as "larceny," in the sense he considered I was stealing concepts

from electrical engineering for use in sociology.

In the fall of 1960 I was on a job assignment that required travelling to New York about once every six weeks. This meant that my discussion group did not continue, but I met many interesting people in New York with whom I discussed the potential correlation between maximizing the negative entropy of a social system and the problems of freedom of speech and religious liberty.

In the summer of 1961 I did some work in France on error detecting codes. In Europe I found people's attitudes much different in many areas. There seemed to be a more comprehensive understanding of human history and more of a searching for what might be the best path of the future for mankind. I seemed to sense a greater degree of freedom in Europe and felt that people took me more seriously than in the U.S.A.

About a month after returning from Europe, I awoke one night with a dream about a book on applying concepts of Information Theory, Cybernetics, and General Systems Theory to the problems of world peace. I feel that my experiences in Europe in some way helped integrate my thoughts into this outline which appeared in the dream. When I typed the first outline of the proposed book, I used the pseudonym "Joaquin Murrieta," because I felt that the identity problem in the electronics industry was too severe. A pseudonym would at least make it clear that the material did not have the approval of RKV Corp. and hence could not be construed as a proclamation of corporate policy. The particular name of an early California bandit came to mind in connection with the "I still call it larceny" review.

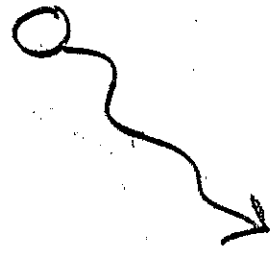
I presented the outline of the proposed book at a political science seminar at Stanford in May 1962. By this time I had

developed a new title for the book, namely: "Communication Theory in the Cause of Man." Next I found that some managers in RKV Corp. were disturbed by my proposed book to be written under a pseudonym. A series of reviews by committees was arranged within RKV Corp. to determine whether the Corporation would be interested in sponsoring the development of the book. At one stage I took a short leave of absence without pay to write up a research proposal for the book project. The Corporation decided against supporting such a project. However I submitted the proposal to Guggenheim Foundation and to the National Institutes of Health, but was unsuccessful in obtaining a fellowship or grant.

At the end of this stage of development I came out with three separate identities instead of planning to write under a pseudonym. I also planned for the present to abandon writing the book to concentrate on certain specific parts with the objective of presenting papers at scientific society meetings on specific parts of the total project. The three hats which I was split into at that time were: "Citizen-Individual," and "Philosopher-Communicator," and "RKV-Engineer."

This three-way split of identity was succesful for a while. I was invited to present a paper on "Negentropy and the Concepts of Freedom, Democracy and Justice" at the General Systems-- History and Philosophy of Science Section of the American Association for the Advancement of Science National Meeting in Cleveland, Ohio, December 1963. Since this paper was under my 'philosopher's hat' I paid my own travel expense and was on vacation at the meeting so I could speak as myself, and not be a robot mouthing corporation policy.

This paper led to my being considered for other meetings during the next year. I went to the S.O.S. (Scientists On Survival) meeting in New York City in June 1964.



INCOMPLETE

TO BE CONTINUED

Joseph E. Murray