DYNAMICS OF HUMAN IDENTITY

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Society and Identity

By educating and providing us with social, political, economic, national, religious and cultural milieu, society offers us a wide spectrum of roles to play, and we are rewarded if we play these roles as well as possible – roles of teenagers, workers, business people, politicians, priests, doctors, spouses, parents, pensioners, Russians, Australians.

The traditions, the dispositions and the country where we live – they also push us to play certain roles. This push, sometimes subtle and gentle, sometimes blunt and insolent, forcibly imposed or voluntarily accepted, moulds our nature up to a degree that we may become fully identified with the designated roles. We may even stop to notice that we are playing roles, assuming that what we are doing is participating in a genuine and authentic life. Unfortunately, this is not the case.

Each role inevitably epitomises some *fixed identity*. Society prefers to operate with fixed identities – they help to divide people into groups, to 'push' the groups into separated "boxes" and computer files (hierarchical or nested into one another), to label these boxes and files with names, numbers and codes, and then to do with them all sorts of manipulations. And above all, to exercise control.

Social control cannot function without building a well-structured system of fixed identities. It is easier to exercise control over *fixed group* identities than over *variable individual* identities which are elusive, flexible, resistant to control, open for change, evolution and growth. When squeezed into a fixed group identity, individual identity is in danger to lose its uniqueness and to become a mediocre entity in a majority of 'they-say' people, easily susceptible for manipulation and corruption.

Living individual identities are chaotic – extremely sensitive to changes (however tiny they might appear) occurring in both external and internal human conditions, unpredictable and, therefore, *free*. Fixed identities are locked into pre-designed ordered patterns – insensitive to changes, easily predictable and, therefore, *unfree*.

All kinds of control tools like tax file numbers, licence numbers, passports, identity cards, certificates, permission for residence, visas, etc. are extensively put into operation in to-day's society in order to keep human identities fixed.

Any fixed identity easily becomes a string of alphanumeric characters compressed to satisfy the requirements of a variety of computer data bases. Once captured by the computer, human identities become imprisoned for life in a System from which no escape exists. This is **The System of Fixed Identities** – a great relief for all kinds of surveillance authorities in human society. For such authorities each fixed identity has only one interpretation – potentially it is an *identity of a criminal*: if not behaving as the Rules of the System require, people are automatically treated as criminals – *in The System everybody must obey The Rules*.

The System is a procrustean bed for living individual identities. Remember Procrustes from the ancient Greek legends – that brigand who used to stretch or mutilate his victims to make them conform to the length of his bed. The same is happening with our individual identities in to-day's society – they must fit certain procrustean beds. If not, there are forces in society powerful enough to make us fit the bed. Once there, we are *predictable*, it is easy to deal with us – to wash our brains, to manipulate us, to delude and exploit us.

The System of Fixed Identities

Let us have a close look at the System of Fixed Identities (SFI): this here is the file of Australian citizens – red marks to all born in Australia, blue marks to all born in English speaking countries, yellow marks – to all born in Asia, grey marks – to all born in other parts of the world, and a tiny little black mark to each Australian aborigine in the file.

In a separate directory of SFI are the files with identities sorted by income. They reveal a very small list of rich and omnipotent identities and a list of poor and totally helpless identities, widely open for unlimited growth. The rich identities are the only ones who are allowed to escape the System if they want to – they are recognised as 'godfathers' of the System and its prominent supporters. Often, they recommend construction of new branches of the System both at national and international levels. They strongly influence outcomes of economical and political debates, election campaigns, executions of coup d'etat in different parts of the world, delivery of 'objective' news through the TV channels and newspapers, 'help' to poor countries, etc.

A huge file in SFI consists of identities belonging to so called 'middle-class'. Almost every identity in this file is in the grip of ever increasing (and difficult to pay back) bank mortgages, loans and taxes. The threat of unemployment hangs as a sword of Damocles over these identities; their voice in society is quite low – they can neither defend themselves when unjustly accused by The System (they cannot afford good solicitors and therefore the rich always win), nor can they have a proper medical help when seriously sick (they cannot afford good medical treatment).

With SFI, one easily grasps the *illusion* of contemporary representative democracy: long lists of electorate identity numbers are asked (or obliged) to vote for politicians, each with quite a similar identity requiring to play well with words, to listen carefully to what the few rich identities say, and to know how to lie to the majority of middle-class identities and make them believe that politicians care about their problems. In the western type of democracy political parties become almost identical in their platforms, and the 'elected' state leaders become impotent (and easy to be mocked and compromised) marionettes in the hands of a silent but extremely powerful financially *conspiracy*.

With identities locked in SFI, our lives become *performance*, more likely dramas than comedies, which *we all must enact*. We must enact the dramas in schools, in families, at work places, with friends and relatives, in clubs and communities. Very soon after being born, we are asked to enact them – not to live but enact! We become so absorbed with this inaction, that we are even afraid to stay alone – our identities have been assigned by society and when alone, we hardly know what role to play. So we hurry to turn on TV sets – this helps to be again in the performance. No need to think in silence, no need to contemplate about *who we are*?, no need to look for ways of liberation from the authoritarian files of SFI.

And this is exactly what perfectly suits those who have power in society.

Inquiry into Living Identities

Yes, we can survive with all those control tools and numbers of SFI, with all those political games and lies, and debts and mortgages, without bothering with questions like *who we really are*? and *what is the meaning of our existence*? – simply continuing to perform fixed roles in society and to co-drift with the flow of years: studying, working, building families, growing children, experiencing glimpses of happiness and a great deal of stress, a bit of joy and a lot of pain, good health when young and diseases afterwards.

However, with the increase of social complexity, the number of roles to play also increases. Often people cannot cope with this number. This can generate unbearable stress. As a result, "the individual and social being no longer coincide" (Gorz, 1994). A drive to get out of the performance, out of The System suddenly arises in human minds and hearts. And with this drive comes the quest for individual identity free from the prison of SFI.

Once we start to reflect about the purpose of our coming into existence and living in this full of enigmas, paradoxes and illusions world, once we begin to try to go deeper into the strange interplay of forces (desires, passions, intentions, expectations, motives and hopes) constantly emerging inside us, and to see how they effect our lives, the lives of those around us, and our endeavours for change and grow, we can never stop the inquiry of *who we are*. Because it is an inquiry into the nature of our inner selves, an inquiry deeply into the core of human identity as *it is* and not as the forces of society (both conspicuous and in conspiracy) are presenting it in SFI.

This inward journey in search for individual identity is not easy at all. Society acts against this kind of journeys. It insists we put on again those specially designed identity masks. And only if we find enough *power of will* to persevere, then we may discover that as a matter of fact:

(1) each human life unfolds in a unique way: "*no one can express my life for me and no one can say how I must express my own life*". The individual identity is both a cause and an effect of this unique unfoldment – a cause, because it relates to specific genetic and psychological characteristics of the individual, and an effect, because it absorbs the idiosyncrasy of individual experience.

(2) there are forces in society interested in imprisoning human identity in cages, boxes and classification schemes in order to exercise power, control and suppression over people. An advanced computer technology is at service to those forces, promoting an attitude of treating ordinary people like potential criminals, each with a fixed identity code locked in a globally expanding human control system (SFI) designed to humiliate those who are powerless in society and to suppress their individual freedom.

(3) living identities undergo *changes* together with the unfoldment of the individual lives. As human life dynamics are both complex and chaotic, one cannot predict exactly in what direction an individual identity will change. A liberated identity can grow, fall down or stay still, wandering without direction or eagerly pursuing higher endeavours and aspirations.

Two Attractors of Identity Dynamics

In to-day's society there are two distinguishable attractors for the dynamics of human identity – one is the *attractor of separateness*, the other is the *attractor of unity*.

1. *The Attractor of Separateness*

When changes in individual identity are oriented towards the **attractor of separateness**, they make individuals compete, fight for better positions in society, for more acquisition of power, money, prestige. When drawn to the attractor of separateness, human identity celebrates individual EGO with all its sick fantasies of success and dominance over others. The attractor of separateness makes us constantly to look at the world through the eyes of *what this world can give us*.

At the attractor of separateness, human identities can be easily fixed and separated into boxes with different labels and numbers on them. The communication between 'boxes' is difficult, if not impossible. This is exactly what is manifested today: the gap between the rich and poor parts of society has became so deep that people in one of the group started to behave in a very different way than people in another – almost like entirely different species.

The forces in power always support the attractor of separateness. The ancient political maxima "*Divide et Impera*" (divide in order to rule) has worked, works and will work perfectly at this attractor.

2. *The Attractor of Unity*

When changes in identity are oriented towards the **attractor of unity**, they make individuals respect, help and listen to each other. Being at the attractor of unity, human identity celebrates the differences between people, their uniqueness and their drive towards understanding, dialogue and

complementarity. The attractor of unity makes human identity look at the world through the eyes of *what we can give to this world*.

At the attractor of unity, individual identities

- *are self-referential*: they rely upon themselves for their growth – they do not put themselves at the mercy of any fixed group identity (no matter how attractive it seems to appear) or authority;

- *do not lose their uniqueness* (singularities): at the contrary, they share these singularities in order to allow complementarity to emerge.

The more self-reliant and diverse individual identities, the more rich and creative is their emerging complementarity.

This complementarity leads to a new form of group identity – not a fixed one, but dynamic, that is, open to evolve simultaneously with the co-evolving individual identities.

Towards Attractor of Unity

The question is: "Is it possible for to-day's society as a whole to move towards the attractor of unity?" Unfortunately, the answer is negative. As a whole, our society is unable to move towards the attractor of unity. The forces of power which propel the engine of the attractor of separateness are extremely potent and strong. People's orientation towards consumerism and competitiveness also pours oil in this engine. Politicians cannot oppose the will of the richest minority operating in almost invisible way (as a kind of omnipotent conspiracy). If politicians decide not to obey the rules of this conspiracy, they are immediately removed from the political stage.

What is possible to do at this moment is *to continue creating local communities living at the attractor of unity*. Such communities already exist in a number of locations around the world. They demonstrate the vital importance of people's togetherness as an ontological condition for our *being in the world*: one cannot be happy when some other person in community suffers. At the attractor of unity, people understand our inseparability with one another and with nature. And this is the beginning of the new Renaissance – the only one that can save us and our planet from destruction.

References

Gorz, A. 1994 *Capitalism, Socialism, Ecology* London: Verso