

Americans may have
no identity, but they do have
wonderful teeth. Jean Baudrillard

Identity in Sheep's Clothing

Culture

What shapes us
(customs,
ceremonies,
myths, lore,
values, etc.)

+ Language

What and
how we
communicate
the values
we encode

+ Psychology

How we feel
about ourselves
and others

- + **Sociology** How we relate to others
- + **Physiology** What we look like physically to ourselves and others
- + **Myth/Religion
Worldview** Our values
- + **Proxemics** How we relate to the human ecology/
environment

Culture:

the sum of socially transmitted behavior patterns (arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought characteristic of a social system).

Culture reflects the prevailing social, moral, intellectual, and aesthetic refinement, and style of social and artistic expression particular to a society.

Language

is not just the use of sound and written symbols that represent the human voice to express and communicate thoughts and feelings, that are shared by the people of a particular place or by a group of people with a same history and sets of traditions.

It is much more.

It is the nonverbal method of communicating ideas, by a system of signals, signs, symbols, or gestures and body postures, special jargon and vocabulary of scientific and professional groups. Language is "culture," and therefore is the sum of social behavioral patterns, and reflects the prevailing values and beliefs, social, moral, intellectual, and aesthetic refinement, and style of expression.

Psychology:

the science that studies the mental processes and behavior of persons and the emotional and behavioral characteristics of groups, or their activities.

Sociology/Anthropology
study human social behavior.
Their spectrum of study includes
the origins, organization,
institutions, and development
of society.

Both disciplines provide
analyses of social institutions or
societal segments as self-
contained entities or in relation
to society as a whole.

Physiology:

the biological science
that investigates the essential
and characteristic life processes,
activities, and functions
(from tummy-tuck to
birth control)

The Semantic, Syntactic, and Prag- matic Dimensions of Identity

These dimensions weigh the quality of identity:

the fidelity and expediency of transmission and reception of its inner constructs, addressing both contents and context.

They organize concepts of identity into rhetorical categories of meaning and refer to the individual identity in relationship to others and their institutions.

How well can others perceive the identity?

Is the identity seriously affected by poor conditions, like social, cultural interference?

Is the identity clear, transparent, diffused or opaque, not understandable?

Does the identity remain assessable throughout a range of typical social and cultural interactions?

Do people from various cultures, religious, educational and economic backgrounds, read different things into the identity?

Are the most important elements recognized?

Can the identity be learned?

Can the identity grow with time or does it stay in place?

What values does the identity represent?

What does the identity denote?

Does the identity seriously contradict or support its context and message?

Is the identity, and its elements, capable of systematic application for a variety of interrelated concepts?

Do people find the identity confusing and do they fail to understand it?

Does the language embedded in the identity refer to an already accepted tradition or philosophical thought or is it breaking new grounds?

Are all elements of the identity related to the message?

Physical human factors

The human technical anatomy as the device for interaction with the object/image/experience: muscle, eye/muscle coordination, stamina/fatigue.

Psychological human factors

The behavior of the various human types as imprinted by individual perception.

Social human factors

The behavior of groups, their sense of order, hierarchies, territory, belonging, place.

Cultural human factors

The culturing through ancient and modern world views, philosophies, religions, mythologies.

Proxemics

The social science that uses physical, psychological, social, and cultural factors to understand the human's interaction with his values:

Physical space

**Emotional and
psychological space**

Ideological space

Identity as Territorial Marker

Concept of “identity”:

Need for ownership, control,
and territoriality.

Through physical, social, and
cultural territoriality,
humans compete aggressively for
emotional space, rewards, and
attention . . .

. . . aggravated by a continuous
change pattern in the population
aggregates.

Shifts in social hierarchy and increasing competition for all resources.

Consequential physical (as well as emotional) stress, with a continuous emancipation of citizens, distancing themselves from the control by others (embodied in the entities of state, business, and church).

Identity is part of the sociology of **survival of the fittest.**

Survival of the fittest

is the foundation of capitalism. . .

and in fact,
of all human competitive activities:
procreation. . .

of all man made institutions –
from commerce and education
to sports and church.

Even charitable Mother Theresa was a serious territorial contender and competitor.

Very few persons could give away as much as she did, owning nothing and wanting little more than salvation.

She emerges as one of the fittest in the contest for the supremacy over the field of benevolence, equally admired or despised as if she had been a political or sports figure in their respective realms.

Language as Identity

Belgian-French
structural
anthropologist

Claude Levi-Strauss, argues that kinship and identity contain fundamental aspects of culture that are made up of specific kinds of structures, including the structures of myths of a clan or tribe.

These highly structured myths facilitate understanding of cultural relations and relationships.

He places concepts of myth into opposite differentials of extremes, juxtaposing semantic concepts, and because the language structures of the narrative supply the syntactic glue, he sees his anthropological research as part of the Language domain.

Myth, being everywhere, not bound by rules of accuracy or probability, never the less, follow the same language structures no matter where they are found.

Levi-Strauss argues that myth is language, because in order to exist, myths have to be placed into narratives. Their structures belong to language.

Social and cultural myths live in the paradox of timelessness and in time.

He also argues that myths are not mere subsets of Language, but are Language themselves.

Having adopted his thesis,
then Language is the holding tank
and concept reservoir for all and
everything, including **Identity**.

Valuation/Evaluation:

Without language metaphors
norms, standards or values
cannot be established.

The Loss of Language is the Loss of identity.

Linguists agree, when a language, the most important individual element identifying a culture and its people, dies, the unique and special knowledge of the culture, which is embedded in the language representation of customs, ceremonies, myth and lore, is lost.

Of 7,202 languages spoken worldwide today, 440 will be extinct within two decades.

The total aggregate of presently spoken languages will be cut in half within this century.

At this point in time, fewer than 10,000 or 0.3 percent of the world population speak one of the 3,340 rarest languages.

Example:

Only 185 people speak **Karitiana**. They live in a Brazilian village of not more than 191 inhabitants.

Today, fifty-two percent of the world population are speaking one of just twenty languages. (The reasons that half of the languages presently still in use will be silenced within this century are mostly because of global/economical and self-preservation).

Hundreds of aboriginal and native tribal languages will be forgotten, having the unfortunate fallout, that anthropologists will be unable to reconstruct migration patterns or a more appropriate taxonomy or accurate timeline of the evolution of languages.

In America,
the concept of the **melting pot**,
a gradual,
often unconscious process of
assimilation,
tries through a mildly coercive
process to assimilate
minority groups
into a national mainstream.

In some instances it may not be
mild but super-aggressive.

The pressure to meld individual, ethnic, cultural and social differences into a national standard is pernicious.

It is in complete contradiction to concepts of individuality, diversity or choice.

It favors the dominating culture and subverts those in the minority.

A single standard society viewpoint necessitates a sometimes light or heavy handed approach, because the more room is given to individual identity, language or tradition of a minority, the greater the increase of separation and distance from the mainstream or the single standard.

James A. Hijiya
Professor
History

Northerners think that the
American identity starts
at Plymouth Rock, Massachusetts;

University of
Massachusetts
Dartmouth

For Southerners it is Jamestown,
Virginia.

Even Westerners seem to agree
that their national identity begins
when English men and women
alight from their boats and plant
their boots along the seaboard of
the East.

Massachusetts and Virginia, according to national consensus, are gradually joined by eleven other colonies touching the Atlantic. From there westward the course of history takes its way.

The colonies “pull apart from England, rush to the Mississippi, purchase Louisiana, annex Texas, steal California, and foil a plot to drag history southward through secession.”

As commonly thought and taught, early American history moves steadily across the map from right to left.

The defining event is either the Revolution or the Constitution: Colonial history is limited almost exclusively to those people in those colonies, which will create a new nation.

Because the configuration of individual states provides the basic structure for American history, and therefore the **American Identity**, it is inevitable that people not belonging to these states will be neglected.

That is why Native Americans, the Spanish, Mexicans, and the French are relegated to serving as historical backdrops.

The typical schoolbook hurriedly introduces the Aztecs, Columbus, and Samuel de Chaplain, but then forgets them as it settles down to describe in chapter after chapter the minutiae of Anglo-American life, without reference to the rise and fall of a Native American empire.

As now conceived **Identity** occurs only in close proximity to Anglo-Americans.

Hijiya's history includes the immigrants from Asia whose descendants will trek east as the true "pioneers," the actual first "settlers," of America.

His history places
the Spanish and the French
not along the English border
but in the centers of their
own empires in America;
a story not merely of
territorial expansion
but of expansion for some
and contraction for others;
of conquest and defeat.

He proposes to show that America does not start as a colonial seedling along the Atlantic seaboard growing across the continent but instead as a land mass occupied in different places by different people with different identities, at different times.

This history of stolen identity, becomes painful, considering that in Massachusetts land trials, as recently as few decades ago, the collision between two completely different language cultures, the written and oral, was not properly refereed.

Claims of land ownership by Native Americans were denied on the basis that they could not show archival proof of their identity and therefore of their existence.

Place as Part of Identity

Even if a geographical location has ramifications, **Place** is not just an intersection on a map, a point between two railroad destinations or where one resides or stops for the night.

It is an amalgam of diverse physical, emotional, and perceptual elements – real and imagined (myths).

Place is football field, factory, neighborhood, garden, park and childhood hiding place, house and home, school, church, mosque and hospital.

The individuality of **Place** is forged by the people that inhabit it over time and the evolution of their sense of personal success, failure, alienation or belonging.

They invent **Place** and in return, **Place** gives them certain identifiable characteristics.

Place is the heartbeat of a community that offers over a lifetime security, fulfillment and contentment but also tragedy, pain, and despair.

It is a valued refuge,
home of origin,
the center where things are
discovered,
ideas set in motion,
relationships found, and
plans developed.

Place is deeply imprinted on the soul. When removed from **Place** one's memories activate and bring bittersweet longing for the personal, cherished quality of things, persons, and experiences connected with it.

Acts of recall – activating all senses through mementos, keepsakes, and correspondence – generate deliberate, sentimental, and pleasurable nostalgia, comprised of fact and fiction.

1.000

The Mythology of Place

1.010

The History of Place

1.011

Identification with
Inhabitants of Place:
Immigrants, Settlers, and
Native People

1.015

Major Historical Events
that shape Place
(internal/external)

1.012

Growth and
Development of Place

1.016

Etc.

1.013

Governance of Place:
Town Counsels, Mayors,
Citizens

1.014

Roots of Place:
Growth of the West

1.020

Altruistic Concepts of Place

1.021

Freedom of the Press
(newspaper, radio, tv)

1.025

Right of Ownership
(property, holdings, etc.)

1.022

Freedom of the
Assembly

1.026

Occupations of Place

1.023

Freedom from
Censorship

1.027

Etc.

1.024

The Bill of Rights

1.030

**Religious
Identity and Place**

1.031

The various religions of Place

1.032

Identity through
Religious segregation

1.033

Identity through
Religious freedom

1.034

Identity through
Separation of Religion and
State

1.035

Perception of Hierarchy
Comparisons of various types
of religion

1.036

Etc.

1.040

**Values:
Freedoms and Legal
Protection**

1.041

The right of Habeas
Corpus

1.042

Right of entry

1.043

Trial by jury

1.044

Prevention from seizure

1.045

Innocence until proven oth-
erwise

1.046

Double jeopardy

1.047

Social, Racial,
Economic, Educational Seg-
regation

1.048

Equality

1.049

2.000

The Physical Face of Place

2.010

Natural Resources

2.014

Minerals
(iron, copper, aluminum,
etc.)

2.019

Oil

2.020

Coal

2.015

Parks, Reservations

2.021

Atomic energy

2.011

Conservation/abuse

2.016

Depletion of land
(problems with
insecticides, fungicides,
herbicides)

2.022

Solar energy

2.012

Wildlife

(birds, fish, mammals)

2.023

Electric power

2.013

Water

(pollution, desalinization,
irrigation)

2.017

Energy

2.024

Landscaping/Architecture

2.018

Gas

2.025

Etc.

2.0200

Urbanization

2.0201

Village, Town, City,
Metropolis

2.0206

Shopping Centers,
Business,
Entertainment

2.0202

Demographics
Ethnic Diversity

2.0207

Transportation

2.0203

Population Explosion

2.0208

Etc.

2.0204

Suburbia/Country

2.0205

Slums

2.0400
Agriculture

2.0401
Farms

2.0402
Price supports

2.0403
Mechanization of
farming

2.0404
Labor problems

2.0405
Surplus

2.0406
Etc.

2.0500
Commerce

2.0501
Airlines

2.0502
Automobiles and roads

2.0503
Barges and waterways

2.0504
Steamships

2.0505
Railroads

2.0506

Businesses/Shops

2.0507
Industries

2.0508
Professions

2.0509
Etc.

3.0000

**The People of the
Community
that make up Place**

3.0101
Education

3.0102
Personal School Experience:
primary, secondary schools,
colleges, post-graduate edu-
cation

3.0108
Segregation

3.0109
Drop outs

3.0103
Belief/disbelief in
Educational television

3.0110
Education for everybody

3.0104
Belief/disbelief in
Teaching machines

3.0111
Adult education

3.0112
Etc.

3.0105
Belief/disbelief in
Testing techniques

3.0106
Primary, secondary schools,
colleges

3.0107
Accreditation

3.0200

Medicine

3.0201

Fear/comfort with forms
of available care

3.0207

Cancer, Aids

3.0202

Experience of Childbirth

3.0208

Heart diseases

3.0203

Training of physicians

3.0209

Accidents

3.0204

Medicare

3.0210

Smoking, liquor

3.0205

Other insurance

3.0211

Etc.

3.0206

Mental health (psychiatry,
tranquilizers)

3.0300
Culture

3.0301
Identity through Art

3.0302
Identity through
the Selection
of Entertainment

3.0303
Identity
through Music
(folk, jazz, fine arts,
opera etc.)

3.0304
Identity through
Theater

3.0305
Literature
(magazines, paperbacks,
readings, performances,
etc.)

3.0306
Etc.

3.0400
Politics

3.0401
Political identity:
communists, fascists,
libertarians, etc.

3.0402
Two-party system

3.0403
Foreign relations

3.0404
Common market

3.0405
Belief/disbelief in the
need for legal structures
(Congress, states,
cities, etc.)

3,0406
Worldview / Bias

3.0407
Etc.

3.0500

Social Problems

3.0501

Crime
(statistics, detection,
penal, rehabilitation)

3.0506

White collar crime

3.0502

Age
(delinquency and
old age, social security)

3.0507

Labor (employment/un-
employment)
job loss, job gain,
minimum wage scales

3.0503

The poor

3.0508

Youth
(4-H, scouts,
Jr. Achievement, etc.)

3.0504

Segregation

3.0509

Depression

3.0505

Native Americans
reservations

3.0510

Etc.

3.0600
Leisure

3.0601
Travel

3.0602
Leisure

3.0603
Sports

3.0604
Etc.

Natural Corollaries

Bauer Birds build nests of amazing complexities from reeds and grasses and fill them with glittering assortments of objects just to attract their mates, as well as signal to other Bauer birds an identity marked through territorial boundaries.

It seems that inherited natural identity, a combination of color arrangement and feather formation, posture, and agile motion . . .

is not enough to signal to others the outstanding and singular qualities of individuality.

In this case, to become distinguishable from the species, even the environment has to be incorporated and rearranged in considerable ways to achieve the goal.

Maybe humans are not much different.

In their sphere, identity is also not natural and organic, but artificially constructed in relationship to a complex system of values that are permanent or in constant states of change, self-selected or selected and imposed by others.

Ordered into a biological and ethnic taxonomy of language communities and placed in fecund or less fertile environments with a variety of geological and climactic conditions, each micro system, in addition to the characteristics of shared features, has its own variables, which is manifested in the construction of cheek bones, eye lids, eyebrows, hair, skin color, and other features.

Within each major ethnic segment of the human social culture there are shared proportions of skeleton, muscles, skin tone, and hair, spawning standards of perceived ideal proportions, which change over time and lead to judgements of too big, too small, not the norm or perfect.

There are good reasons why a person (who in relationship to the norm is too tiny or emaciated) would want to project characteristics of strength and power and offset reality to impress others. Samurai and most tribal warriors understand the necessity to project and intimidate through an illusion of larger or taller body size in form of broad-shouldered battle dress, larger headgear, and feathers that extend the dimensions/ volume of the figure.

The Social Construction of Identity

Social anthropologists suggest that the human species has evolved to such an extent that members are actually capable of creating individual biotopes – niches in which physical, social, and cultural environments become suitable for certain kinds of stereotypical personality projections – namely, the ideal business man or woman, the politician or the clergyman.

From childhood on, the culture learns to deal with levels of integrity perceived in individuals or groups. Examples abound of hidden, masked, and changed identities in literature.

In Gottfried Keller's *Kleider Machen Leute* (Clothing Makes the Man), charlatans living by their slight of assumed identities become socially acceptable for a moment by merely changing their outer appearance.

Children are introduced to fables like “the wolf in sheep’s clothing” .

Even in traditional mythology, embedded in the success-story of the 19th century

German sea merchant Ballin, is the concept of a fake identity. . .

Ballin, without any financial backing or social standing, worked from a tattered shack on the pier in Hamburg.

But by corresponding on smartly engraved stationery, he worked himself up the social and financial ladder so that today one can find boulevards in Hamburg named after him.

This mythology contextualizes the fact that one of the very first typography courses **was not** taught within an art or design school, but at the Harvard Business School. It helped to shape the identities of early corporations, at a time before the dawn of marketing.

Mythology fast forward:

At some business schools in the admissions process applicants have to choose for themselves a metaphoric animal-identity that parallels their personal traits and characteristics.

In this process, carnivores like wolves, lions, cheetahs, and tigers, or animals of cunning like fox and coyote usually win out over animal identities like mustangs, gazelles, and zebras.

In a competitive world of survival, the paper-scissors-stone game is real.

The Fear of an Inadequate Identity

In our own historical backyard,
Lazar Lissitzky becomes
El Lissitzky, Ludwig Mies changes
into Ludwig Mies van der Rohe,
Charles-Edouard Jeanneret
takes the name of Le Corbusier,
and Marcel Villon turns into
Marcel Duchamp.

Do these changes represent dissatisfaction with family heritage and social and middle class standings?

Is it a wish to drop all former identifiers? (Thus immersing incognito while cutting bait from tradition and shedding former histories.)

The name **Mies**, for example, translated from German is not very flattering.

Mies is a term of disdain used mostly to describe conditions of weather or negative qualities of experiences,

like "a miserable dinner party"

or "the wretched weather".

By adding his mother's maiden name with the specific prefix "van der" to the alteration, which is very common in family names of landowning farmers and their offspring in the northern regions of Holland and Germany, he anoints himself aristocrat.

In Germany the same prefix of "van der" is also attached to a lower rank but well recognized level of nobility.

Through this name change, chosen consciously or unconsciously, Mies van der Rohe is escaping the specter of middle class standing and the trauma of having his work called *miese* or wretched – even *woeful* architecture.

Designers and the Field of Language

When designers enter into the field of identity they are hardly equipped to deal with the obvious and hidden complexities of social language, its development and acquisition.

They rarely step out off their one-way visual language platform. They are connected mostly to formal image and icon making.

They avoid the communication aspects that involve the meaning maker – namely the reader of images and icons (in this case identities) – who has to make sense of a very stilted and abbreviated language.

The interpreter is asked to traverse an enormously deep social and cultural crevasse, mostly through instinct, but without much guidance.

Internationalism,
from which stem the doctrines of
standardization, streamlining,
and the military-like process of
designing institutional and corpo-
rate images, believed that there is
universality in the experience
of all peoples.

This may be true for the most
basic survival needs, like
provisions for food, shelter, pro-
creation, and even for emotional
security, freedom of thought,
expression, and movement.

But not for much more,
because people from different
cultures belong to
different language communities
with language systems that
represent and encode completely
different sensory worlds and
value systems.

Example:

The concept of death has
multiple, positive and negative
interpretations.

From anthropological sources, one can ascertain that certain Native American tribes hold little vocabulary but none for ownership of objects, space or time.

Their experiential filter would not translate to European or Asian sensibilities, and vice versa.

The Corporate Struggle with Marketing Identities

There are too many examples that epitomize the reality and conflicts with identities or what identities can or cannot deliver.

A clear identity is critical in the hierarchical struggle for dominance of a market as in the "Cola Wars".

It separates and connects at the same time.

One could question the reality of Generation X.

Did it really exist or was it artificially concocted or contrived?

Did individual youths find their identity in the value descriptions presented by the media or did the media clearly see a social phenomenon in action?

The late Jay Doblin, weaned on Raymond Lowe's streamlined marketing methodologies, at one of the rare occasions that allowed him to let down his hair, mused about identity design and corporate images as the most lucrative aspect of design service.

At the same time, he suggested that identities are without any kind of proven functional reality or proven communication benefits.

“Identities may be good for clients, but they are great for design businesses.”

Maybe the most difficult task for an identity is to be more than what the whole of the parts can be.

There are some negative after-effects when the book's cover is more exciting than its contents or where negative behavioral attitudes of personnel belie concepts of helpfulness, responsibility, selfless service or openness.

Under a motto:
"No secrets, no surprises",
the letter marked "confidential",
points clearly to a institutional or
corporate farce.

Can an identity exude moral or ethical attitudes?

Not often.

During a time in the last century, while the Container Corporation of America ran an outstanding advertising campaign of humanistic themes of duty, morality and ethics (Great Ideas of Western Man), its CEO was driven in a chauffeured limousine to prison – where he was interred nightly for unethical price fixing.

No matter how wonderful the external image may have been, it could only rub off some (but not enough) of the tarnished truth.

Example:

American tobacco companies are sponsoring most of the major art exhibitions at the nation's most reputable museums to divert scrutiny of their dismal ethical records.

There are corporate identities that function well. They are mostly bound to a single person or family who over long periods have delivered quality and dependable goods or services.

However, in these times of runaway and rollover mergers, restructuring, and reengineering, there is no time to really assess the real characteristics that make up these newly emerging companies.

What are they?

Who is behind them, corporate wolves or sheep in Gucci clothing?

Who knows?

Time will tell and reveal their true identity.

You are what you are, not what you want others to believe.