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978-0-521-29311-2 - Opening and Closing: Strategies of Information Adaptation in Society

Orrin E. Klapp

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Opening and closing

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Strategies of information adaptation in society

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To Evelyn,
Merrie, and
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Preface

This book views society according to a theory of opening and closing. In the last fifty years it has become plain that the concept of progress is biased in favor of opening. This book asserts that closing is as needed as opening, for creativity as well as for keeping what we have. Because of bias in the concept of progress, modern society has wandered into a crisis of social noise and failure of resonance.

The book interprets a variety of phenomena according to the theory that individuals and societies normally open *and* close to information and communication. For example, closing responses are reflected by nostalgia, meaninglessness, concern about pollution, suspicion of conspiracies, wanting to close boundaries or emphasize ethnic roots, or seeking a guru. On the other hand, opening is illustrated by modernism, expansionism, adventurism, ecumenism, joining, romantic rebellion, and faddism – enthusiasm to communicate, try things, open doors, let oneself go. Opening is scanning for desired information, whereas closing is a natural response to too much adverse information broadly conceived as social noise, including information overload and entropic communication.

Nor is closing merely against such things. It is also *for* something, such as synergy as a payoff of cohesion, as in cults, and good redundancy. Such redundancy is not useless, but is playback of valued parts of one's past. It feels good because it is the basis of resonance, meaning, and identity. Nostalgia indicates need for good redundancy.

All this leads to a theory that opening and closing, by optimizing information, constitute a strategy of living systems against entropy. Four categories of information – good variety, good redundancy, bad variety (noise), and bad redundancy (banality) – are conceived of as sectors of a sort of field in which the game of life is played. Stresses such as information overload and loss of trust come from straying too far and too often into losing sectors. Boredom is a penalty of bad closing. Strategy requires sensitive alternation of opening and closing according to advan-

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tages perceived. Therefore, openness or closedness is not a fixed structural feature of a system but a changing life strategy of organisms and groups. Communication fluctuates, in amount and content, in shifting popular moods, cycles, and in what I call surges and spasms.

It is a challenge to modernization to more clearly distinguish good from bad opening. Rising GNP is of little help with problems of social noise or bad closing. Modernization, using appropriate indicators, should heed redundancy needs and the costs of social noise. Study of communication balance within the human scale should help show a better way to progress.

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O. E. K.

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