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INDIVIDUALS AND WORLDS

Mildred L. G. Shaw and Brian R. Gaines

Centre for Person-Computer Studies,
339, Canarctic Drive, Downsview, Ontario M3J 2P9.

ABSTRACT

Pask's theory of **P-Individuals** encompasses roles, groups, and societies, and allows a unified systemic approach to be taken to the interaction of individual and world. This paper gives a short exposition of the theory and links the dynamics of P-Individual formation to Popper's model of **3 worlds**, Wolff's of **surrender and catch**, Gray's of **lock-in and break-out**, and Kelly's of **personal constructs**. It gives an operational formulation of the processes whereby individuals at one level interact with, forming and being formed by, those at a higher level, roles with groups, groups with societies, societies with civilizations, and so on.

P-INDIVIDUALS

Gordon Pask has the capability of generating innovative constructs that subsume, simplify and elucidate a plethora of previously distinct concepts into a unity. One of his most interesting cybernetic constructs is that of a **P-Individual** (Pask 1975) which includes those of a **role, mind** or **personality** at one level through to those of a **group, team, society** and **civilization** at another. Role theory (Biddle 1979) is a significant psycho-social discipline in its own right as are small group theory (Shaw 1976) and that of cultures and societies (Honigmann 1973). They are separate disciplines and to talk of the "personality" of a society, or the "social network" of a mind, is taken as merely metaphor, appealing and illuminating as it may be. Pask, by taking a systemic approach, has shown that the metaphors do have formal foundations and correspond to a deeper underlying reality than we previously supposed.

Pask developed the construct of a P-Individual as part of his **theory of conversations and individuals** in which he identifies potentially conscious entities. An M-Individual or mechanically characterized individual is regarded as a biologically self-replicating system and is a hardware or processor distinction. A

P-Individual or psychologically characterized individual is a procedure executed in some M-Individual and is therefore a software distinction. Pask describes a P-Individual as having "many of the properties ascribed by anthropologists to a role" (Pask 1975, p302), and goes on to say that "it is legitimate, though at first sight bizarre, to remark that developmental psychology is a study of how a P-Individual comes to be correlated with a vehicle which is a developing M-Individual." He gives an example of P-Individuals as inhabiting a variety of M-Individuals. "A driver regarded as a P-Individual comes to terms with the perceptual-motor/effector-receptor facilities of his motor car which is an M-Individual very different from the body with limbs he uses to walk down a street" (Pask 1975, p303). However, and these are the key insights, he also notes that **an M-Individual may support many P-Individuals** and **a P-Individual may be distributed over many M-Individuals.**

In this note we illustrate how Pask's ideas interact with those of Kelly, Wolff, Gray and Popper to give a coherent systemic framework for the relationships between individuals and worlds, the ways in which individuals form social groupings, and societies form individuals.

P-INDIVIDUALS FORM CONSTRUCTS TO SURRENDER TO WORLDS

Figure 1 shows John, a person with a number of roles. He has formed P-Individuals as a husband, a sales Vice President of his company, a backpacker and a fisherman. Are these roles just descriptive or can we give them deeper systemic significance? George Kelly's (1955) **personal construct psychology** gives us a basis for this. The **personal scientist** (Shaw 1980), or process which is John as a husband, uses operators to make distinctions (Brown 1969) that Kelly terms **constructs.** They are distinctions about perception, about models, about values, about action. It is with the formation of these constructs that a P-Individual comes into being. John uses different constructs when he is in the role of husband from when he is in the role of fisherman, but some of the constructs he uses in the role of fisherman are also used in the role of backpacker and we show this as overlapping P-Individuals.

Figure 2 extends Figure 1 to include some of John's associates. Anne is John's wife. She is also a mathematician and a golfer. Larry is the technical Vice President in John's company, and Sue is the production Vice President. Sometimes John is acting with his wife or colleagues as one P-Individual and we show this by a dashed line. It will have constructs that are shared between

participants and others that arise from only one of them. For example, John and Anne form a nuclear family (Shorter 1975). This is a P-Individual which has legal rights, specific behaviour, concepts and language which are not those of either part but are made up of both. The product executive of the company (O'Shaughnessy 1976) is a P-Individual which has authority, responsibility, behaviour, language which is unique to the entity and not that of any one of its participants.

It is fairly straightforward to analyse the operations of P-Individuals once they exist. Psychology and sociology have a solid systemic foundation in terms of the theory of personal constructs and the calculus of distinctions (Gaines & Shaw 1981). However this leaves open the generic question of how such unities form. William Gray (1979) gives insight into this by pointing out the essential emotional component of system formation. He puts forward the view that emotions are integrating devices for the formation of thoughts and coding devices for memory. He notes that system formation occurs when precursors are brought together; activators initiate emergence of an organizing focus allowing entry to a community, and blockers inhibit emergence of an organizing focus preventing entry to a community. He uses the term **lock-out** when blockers prevent entry to a community which may lead to **break-in**, and **lock-in** when withdrawal from a community is prevented which may lead to **break-out.**

A further insight into P-Individual formation comes from noting that the communities are abstract entities which Kurt Wolff (1976) further abstracts into **worlds.** He sees individuals as **surrendering** to a world in order to **catch** its essence. For example, Anne is learning to be a mathematician and hence must surrender to the world of mathematics. As she is learning she is locked out from the world of mathematics and prevented from catching it. However, she is locked in to the world of the family since withdrawal from surrender to this world is prevented.

Karl Popper (1974) calls such a world a **world 3.** He defines world 1 as the world of physical objects; world 2 as the world of subjective experience; and world 3 as the world of statements in themselves. Hence world 3 is a product of the human mind and it is we who create world 3 objects. These objects have their own autonomous laws and create unintended and unforseeable consequences just like the results of all our actions. Books, journals and letters are typical world 3 objects as are myths, fictions and art.

We have previously sythesized these different approaches into a single framework (Shaw & Gaines 1981) and Figure 3 shows this

synthesis for the example given. Here is John with his P-Individuals of husband, sales VP, fisherman and backpacker, and Anne with her P-Individuals of golfer, wife and mathematician. Anne enters into the world of mathematics (Wilder 1981); Anne and John enter into the world of the family (Reiss 1981); John, Sue and Larry enter into the world of the corporation (Deal & Kennedy 1982). These worlds are independent of the particular individuals but are influenced by the individuals.

In Figure 3 we have shown the sales VP and the production VP as having overlapping construct systems, but the sales VP and technical VP as having no overlap although they enter into the same world. To illustrate this type of possibility Pask gives an example of two people explaining their concepts of constructing a circle. One makes a cylinder by rolling a sheet of paper, makes a cut perpendicular to the main axis and hence constructs his circle; the other starts with a plane and constructs the locus of points at a fixed distance from a given point. There is nothing in common here, although each produces a circle. One has the concept of a natural centre whilst for the other it is an artificially derived point. In terms of our analysis of analogy (Gaines & Shaw 1982), the circle is a construct within the "truth category" of lattice of analogies but the centre is not. Thus the same world 3 entity may be accessed through quite disparate construct systems.

This overall diagram shows the systems formed by P-Individuals as personal scientists making distinctions to form construct systems in order to surrender themselves to world 3s and catch their essence.

CONCLUSIONS

Pask's theory of P-Individuals gives a systemic model of a range of phenomena which correspond at different levels of the organizational hierarchy to a role, a team, a group, a society, or a civilization. The interplay between P-Individuals at different levels gives a model of the interaction between an such an individual and its social environment -- how they mutually mould one another. Considering the dynamics of this interplay links Pask's work with that of Popper, Wolff, Gray and Kelly.

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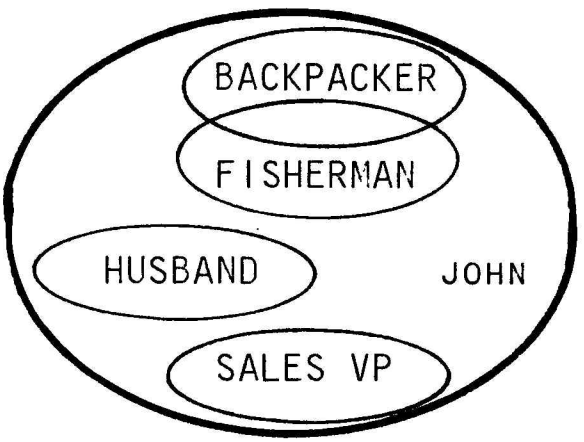
FIGURE CAPTIONS

Figure 1 P-Individuals within a person

Figure 2 P-Individuals formed by groups

Figure 3 P-Individuals surrendering to worlds through personal construct systems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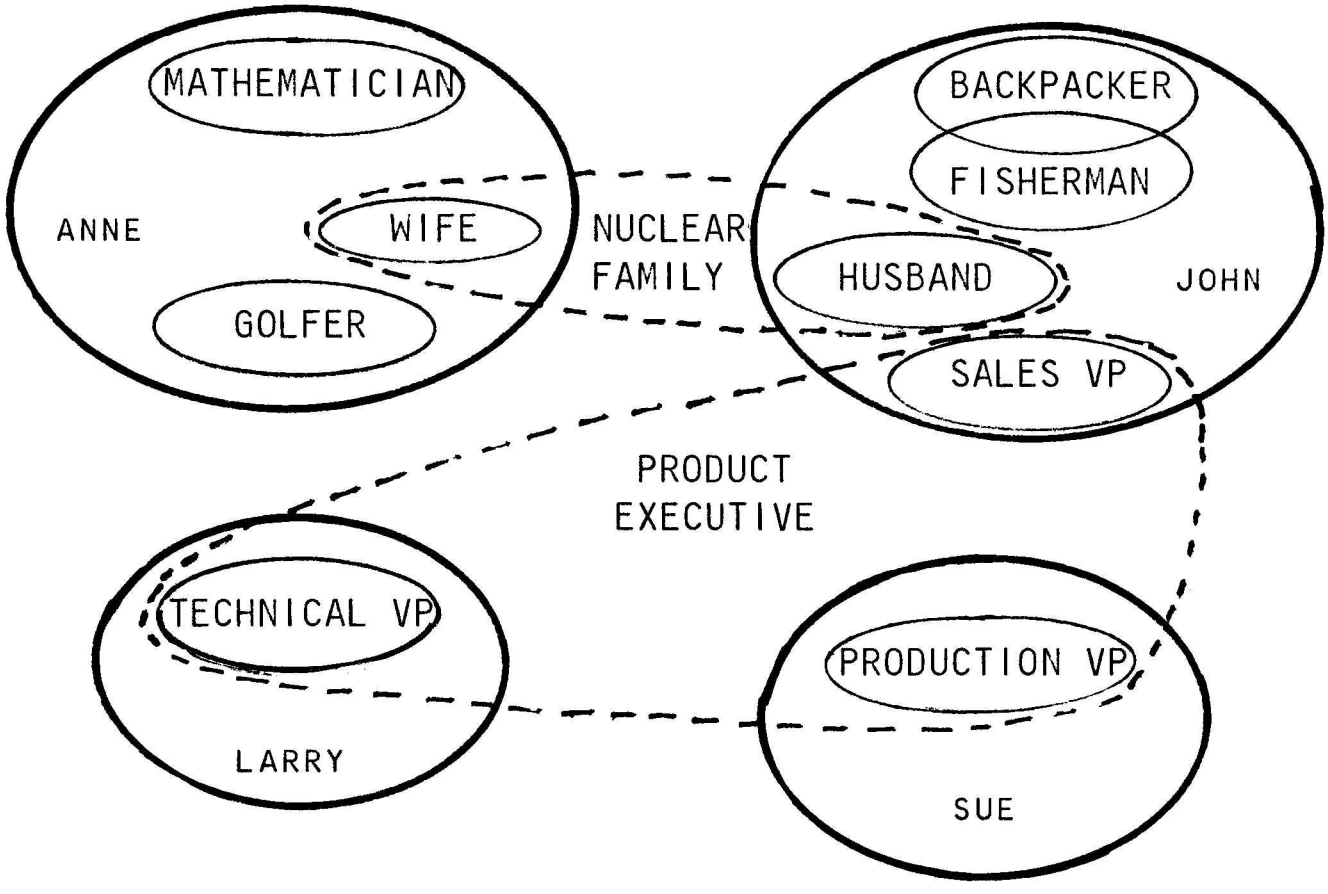
JOHN
SALES VP


MATHEMATICIAN
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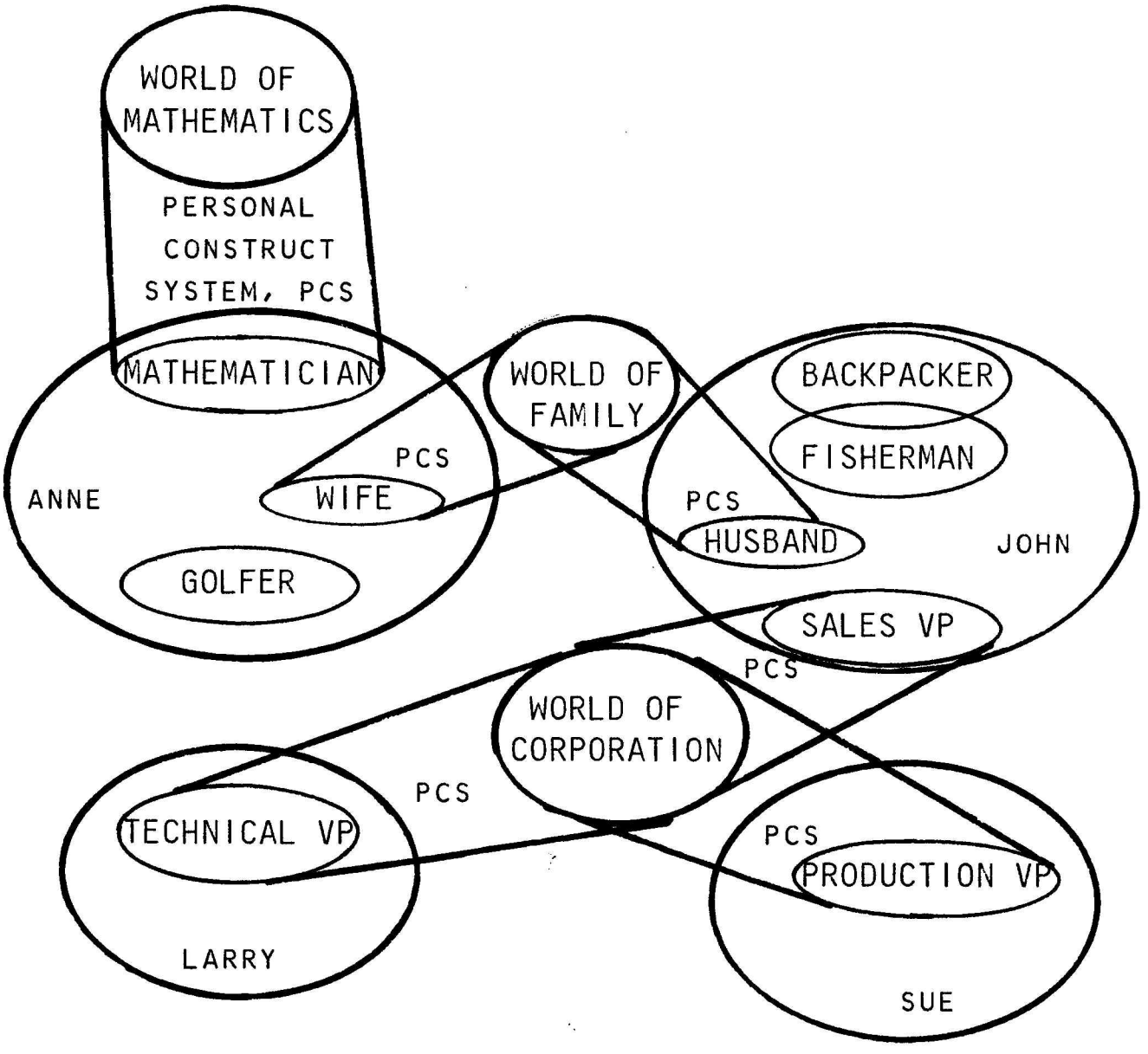
WORLD OF MATHEMATICS
PERSONAL CONSTRUCT SYSTEM, PCS
MATHEMATICIAN
ANNE
PCS
WIFE
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HUSBAND
JOHN
SALES VP
PCS
WORLD OF CORPORATION
PCS
TECHNICAL VP
LARRY
PCS
PRODUCTION VP
SUE