

Integral Leadership Review

Volume X, No.4

August 2010



Notes from the Field

Sense and Sensible Shoes: Notes from an “Almost Integral” Observer

Jeannie Carlisle Volckmann



When Russ asked me to attend the 2010 Integral Conference with him, naturally I was delighted. Escaping the July 100+ degree temperatures of our Sonoran Desert home, spending a little girlfriend time poolside with Sara Ross, meeting people that Russ admires and respects, and learning more about that “integral” thing that my darling husband is so passionate about, seemed like a good idea to me. However, as valuable as my goals of having some precious alone-time with Russ and centering-time with Sara were, I believe that I came away from the conference with more than I came for. After engaging with other attendees in social settings, attending several formal presentations, the opening ceremony, the keynote address, and engaging in numerous spontaneous conversations, I have a deeper understanding of what draws Russ to the

world of Integral and why he holds the inhabitants of that world in such high regard. After experiencing the Conference, I can now say, with complete comfort and confidence, I’m “almost integral.”

Thursday Evening: Dinner for the editorial committee of Integral Review

This was a preview of sorts of the panel discussion that took place on Saturday afternoon. The depth of intellect, the mixture of interests, the range of energies, and the appetite for laughter of the members of the editorial committee genuinely impressed me. Of course I realized that Russ and Sara were brilliant, but who knew that there were so many other inspired and gifted integralists as well? Among those present were Jonathan Reams, Bonnitta (Bonnie) Roy, Russ (Dr. Everything) Volckmann, Tom Murray, Sara Ross, Marcus Moltz and Steve Weiss. This group of dazzling intellectuals, philosophers, theorists, and sages was my introduction to the Integral community (a term Sara eschews but as an “almost” I feel free in using it). And, beyond the pleasant and commodious conversations that evening, I noticed the following day the only shoes I saw the women attendees wearing were of the “sensible” sort, and (of course this is just my observation) most seemed vivacious, vibrant, spirited and authentic... all in low heels... I thought to myself, “This is going to be cool.”

Embodiment and Human Development: Exploring Fairy Tales and Myths as Developmental Markers*

I chose to attend presentations by my interest in the topic. As my current work (PhD, ABD) is investigating the American Cowboy Mythology and its place in political leadership, I decided to attend Rosemary

Anderson's talk, "Embodiment and Human Development: Exploring Fairy Tales and Myths as Developmental Markers." In addition to my current interest in the American Myth, for years I have taught an ethics course at a private postsecondary school in Arizona in which the instrumental significance and operational affect of fairy tales on cultural values were themes we would return to in class discussions time and time again. So naturally, the title of the presentation intrigued me.

Anderson sought to answer the questions, "How does the human body, mind, and spirit find comfort in life? Through what means do we find security, placement, and pleasure in a universe more vast, complex, and changeable than our fantasies can explore? How might our relationship to our body change were we to cherish the human body as the site where spirit finds its home in the world?"(1)

Anderson also discussed at length the conscious contact we can have to our past and future lives through an awareness of the ongoing conversation in which our bodies, minds, and spirits. Memories of past lives are attached at some level to all three aspects of self. Knowing our future embodiment, who we will become in a future incarnation, relies on the ability to recognize the clues that our past embodiments reveal to our present embodiment. For Anderson, human development begins before birth when our spirit, or life force, chooses to enter the fetus, and ends at some moment of our choosing after death, as in the work of Jenny Wade. This cycle continues, going through 10 exchanges, until the last stage is entered and the life force chooses to "integrate into wholeness" (5). Throughout these cycles, a person develops different ways of healing the injuries of the past and this allows the transformation necessary to move to the next stage of development.

From my perspective, both myth and fairy tales as they relate to human development were given short shrift (if indeed any shrift was given at all) in the presentation. True, I had attended based on my assumptions about the title; still, the questions posed in the introduction of Anderson's talk were left orphaned at the close of her presentation. She spent a lot of time on her Axial Model, which tracks the transmigration of souls into their chosen bodies and the stages of awareness each level produced. As a device to graphically illustrate the movement along the axis, Anderson used James Cameron's recent movie box-office phenomena, *Avatar*. The rest of the time was taken up by playing long clips from the movie. It was as though the vehicle of *Avatar* became the destination. Rather than a device to transport me on a journey toward elucidation, it stranded me on the roadside, surrounded by an ethereal, vaporous, blue fog.

"Climbing a Great Hill": Integral Diversity Maturity Illustrated in the Autobiographies of Nelson Mandela and Malcolm X*

Toni A. Gregory & Michael A. Raffanti: "Climbing a Great Hill": Integral Diversity Maturity Illustrated in the Autobiographies of Nelson Mandela and Malcolm X" was more than rewarding; it was scintillating. Gregory and Raffanti developed a framework, Integral Diversity Maturity (IDM), by drawing heavily from the work of Roosevelt Thomas and his concept of "diversity tension," as well as Ken Wilber's AQAL model of interpretation. This tension existed both for Mandela and Malcolm X (as well as millions of others acted upon by the oppression of racism). Yet through a process of personal reflection and responding and reacting to the diversity tension, Mandela and Malcolm X gained a "clarity" about the nature of the tension. This clarity, or "maturity," allowed both men to accommodate new, expansive, and productive ways of relating to self and interacting with the world as a whole.

Gregory and Raffanti felt diversity maturity as outlined by Thomas was missing a critical consideration of human development of individual consciousness and "also lacked the crucial link between diversity maturity and processes of human development"(4). Wilber's AQAL provided the perfect structure to expand their "view

of diversity maturity as a transformative learning phenomenon” (5). In their conference paper, Gregory and Raffanti explain:

“Diversity can be conceptualized as the multidimensional and dynamic interaction between quadrants, levels, lines, types, and states. In this paradigm, the four quadrants represent a co-enacted field of probability waves and potentiality/creativity out of which multiple, complex events emerge in each quadrant and interact with each other within and between quadrants” (5).

Rewiring, Clarifying, Mastering, and finally Transcending are the stages that both Mandela and Malcolm X experienced and that took them to Diversity Maturity. Raffanti covered Mandela’s journey through these steps and Gregory followed Malcolm X along his path. Their intricate paths and stages of self-development suggest that diversity (and its accompanying tension) has long been considered in such a narrow field of vision it has been rendered as a one dimensional representation of conflict between different races, of men and women and heterosexual and homosexual. In truth, according to the two Union Institute & University scholars, diversity has a multiplicity of levels, layers, connections, and echoes that are interwoven into the warp and woof of human experiences. If we recognize the multiple dimensionality of diversity, we can identify another person’s (or our own) course in their stages of development toward Integral Diversity Maturity. As we better relate to and understand the dynamisms of diversity tension within us as well as the “other”, we can escape the culturally imposed restrictions on the potentials and possibilities, as did Mandela and Malcolm X

Gregory gave the example of the invisibility of diversity tensions beyond the traditional black and white racial issues. She was to conduct a workshop on diversity at a college (somewhere in the Rockies) that had a predominately white student population. Gregory had the challenge of talking about diversity to students who did not believe there were any “diversity” issues in their community. After some discussion, the students identified a substantial, ongoing, yet relatively unmentioned source of tension at their school: The tension was between those who skied and those who did not ski. This was far from a trivial matter. Issues of inclusion in and exclusion from important social, academic, political, and career opportunities hinged upon whether or not a person belonged to the skier group. Through this conversation, both the skier and the non-skier students could gain a deeper understanding of the powerful external and internal mechanisms of diversity at work.

Gregory and Raffanti’s fascinating, well-crafted, impeccably researched, and painstakingly analyzed presentation was poorly attended. If you missed it (and you probably did) I strongly recommend you read the conference paper of this forward-thinking innovative duo. This is a topic that most of us, like the students sequestered in their homogenous citadel of learning, believe we already know as much as we need to know about diversity. This paper will challenge any such false notions.

**Movement Building through Metanarrative:
An Ideological Approach to Enacting Integral Futures****

Again, the title drew me to the presentation. Movement: I suspected that word was used in the context of not standing still. Building: The movement (whatever it is) is just beginning, and metanarrative, an overarching, all encompassing story would be the builders’ tool. Ideological: I understood this to mean a group of ideas and values that guides action. Approach: This is a notion of coming nearer... Enacting Integral Futures threw me. I didn’t what this meant, but I was hopeful.

Although he was gentle in spirit and subtle in tone Jordan Luftig issued an unmistakably clear call to action for the integral community. His talk Saturday morning was a manifesto; he delivered a courageous, iconoclastic

treatise on taking the next steps toward an integral life as the leading edge in the transformation of society. In a different parlance, I heard Luftig say it was time for the integral community to “put some skin in the game.”

Luftig believes, and I think rightly so, “The integral community has become too far removed from something that we must now reclaim in order to change the cultural climate, quicken the global integral movement, and pave the way for integral approaches to climate change. Namely, in the form of a question, what about our voice?” (53) As a person on the periphery of the integral community, the lack of voice, or the unwillingness (as I saw it) to actively use their voices was their greatest flaw and a guarantee that as a community, over time they would evaporate, disappear or fade into that place so many other well meaning, progressive, innovative groups have gone: footnotes in history textbooks. In other words, “It means nothing if it does nothing.” It is not to say that there is no intrinsic value in research, of attending Wilber Meet-Ups, sponsoring seminars, workshops, or sharing thoughts and ideas on list serves, etc. These activities are often quite rewarding and fulfilling, and the human connections we make when engaged in these activities has meaning in and of itself. However, it is to say that there is another level of meaning beyond intrinsic value, an instrumental value of directed, commonly held beliefs and goals that can change whole worlds.

Getting back to the subject of voice, I was heartened to hear Luftig’s own story about the process of loosing and then reclaiming his. “I realized,” writes Luftig, “that my communication breakthroughs came at the expense of my integral voice. About the same time, it dawned on me that the communicative action of meeting others on their own terms is an extremely popular rhetorical move among integral practitioners. As a result, it became apparent that while we of the integral community might excel at helping others to find their voice—something that is paramount to social movements—we sacrifice our voice and vision in the process” (61).

I left Luftig’s presentation with two particular thoughts:

1) If concepts like “operationalize” and “ideology” might hold value for integral theorists, something positive and lasting for humankind may actually materialize out of this mélange of brilliant, gifted, clever, and able intellectuals I saw in the Editorial Committee of Integral Review during my first night at the conference.

2) Historically, we call iconoclasts (like Jordan Luftig) heretics, and historically, we do unspeakable things to heretics. The whole thing reminded me of Plato’s Cave. The only reason the returning prisoner wasn’t killed by his friends was because they were still in chains.

The Long Road Home

Russ and I had a long drive back home so we left for Tucson early Sunday morning. It was good to have debriefing, reflective, processing time together after the conference. In fact, weeks later I find myself still engaged in “unpacking” (a phrase that seems to be more acceptable to integralists than “deconstructing,” although I think it’s a distinction without a difference) my experience at ITC 2010. I have a better understanding of why Russ is so deeply attached to the integral world; I think it’s anchored in hope. The ideas and positive energy effervescing through the conference was palpable; it is almost healing. Yet, there were real problems for me. I attended more than the three presentations I wrote about. In some instances I was dazzled, a couple released my “inner cynic,” and at least one was disturbing. I’m concerned that the “superstar” appeal suppresses criticism. It bothers me that there is so much “insider” nomenclature. However, energy created by the aggregation of intellect, the real potential for operationalizing social transformational power Jordan Luftig introduced, the sincerity of the smiles and yes, the sensible shoes, draws me to this group. I have already started working on a website: Almost Integral <https://sites.google.com/site/almostintegral/>. When it’s totally constructed, I hope it

will be a place for other people like me who “are not quite there yet” to gather together, to share, and to nudge each other closer to the whole.

* “ITC 2010 Conference Proceedings” ITC <http://www.integraltheoryconference.org/talks>. Web.

**Luftig, Jordan. “Movement Building through Metanarrative: An Ideological Approach to Enacting Integral Futures” *Journal of Integral Theory and Practice*—Vol. 4, No. 4 (47-65) ITC 2010 Conference Proceedings” ITC <http://www.integraltheoryconference.org/talks>.

About the Author

Jeannie Carlisle Volckmann recently left her position as a General Education instructor at Collins College in Phoenix, Arizona where she taught Cultural Diversity and Ethics. She is completing her PhD at Union Institute and University in Ethical and Creative Leadership. She is also an intern with the *Integral Leadership Review* for 2009-2010.