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Self-reflexive Challenges of Integrative Futures

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Augmented version of an earlier document (*Wilber, Lorimer, Varela and Everything*, 2003) in response to the critique in the special issue of *Futures: the journal of policy, planning and futures studies* (40, 2, March 2008) on "integral futures". It appears under the revised title in a different format in that journal (2008) with other responses. Abridged version published in: *Futures*, 42, 2, March 2010, pp. 154-161 [doi](#)

Introduction

Abstract: Contrasts the approach to "futures" characteristic of Ken Wilber, and Integral Futures, with the approach taken by David Lorimer, and the Scientific and Medical Network. The differences between these approaches, for any integrative understanding of futures, are presented as arising from stylistic preferences and biases which are usefully highlighted with a range of metaphors. These however highlight the challenge of any more integrative understanding, especially in the light of hidden dynamics of exclusion in a questionable effort to demonstrate that one approach is "better" than another in a complex human endeavour -- especially when the future is sensed strategically through other metaphors than "vision". Consideration is given to the possible use of a pattern language to address such issues, especially given questions regarding the adequacy of text on a conventional surface to hold complex significance and interrelationships. It is concluded that integrative futures is then the strange quest for how cognitively to embody the extremes represented by Wilber and Lorimer in the present -- to evoke the greater harmony through engaging creatively with the dissonant pattern of imperfections.

This exploration is about "everything" as exemplified by the initiatives of Ken Wilber and David Lorimer. More precisely it is about how such reflections affect me and enhance or inhibit my own integrative understanding.

Part of the fascination in endeavouring to craft a comment on the special edition on "integral futures" (*Futures: the journal of policy, planning and futures studies*, 40, 2, 2008), as edited by Richard Slaughter, lies outside the technicalities of academic discourse through which positions are presented, criticized and debated. The question for me, and I assume for others, is how a coherent understanding is enabled in the face of a spray of "points" and "lines" of argument -- to say nothing of the very "volume" of such discourse which somehow makes up the "body" of available knowledge at this time. At the same time one knows full well that pre-logical biases and preferences swing into play in filtering, weighting or dismissing content considered (highly) significant by others. One may also be aware that the body of knowledge, like any planet, has "curvature" -- giving rise to "horizon effects" that ensure that some knowledge will not be available to me and that some I prefer will be cast into shadow when those others are appropriately enlightened.

It is for such reasons that it is valuable to consider the challenge for anyone coming to integrative questions for the first time and struggling to work out what are the integrative relationships between positions that seem to be at odds with each other -- especially when those differences and dynamics are not integrated into what are put forward as integrative frameworks. My own early attempt to honour those who took integrative matters seriously was the profiling in 1976 of 421 "Integrative, Unitary and Transdisciplinary Concepts" within the context of the *Yearbook of World Problems and Human Potential* with a bibliography of relevant studies. That exercise also endeavoured to associate those understandings with the separate extant set of understandings of "human development" and of "human values" as described in *Futures* at that time (*World Problems and Human Potential: a data interlinkage and display process*, *Futures: the*

journal of forecasting and planning, 7, 3, 1975, pp. 209-220). However one of the obvious challenges was whether the degree of integration of any integrative endeavour got beyond the binding of the book in which the various approaches were presented (delightfully named as *Buchbindersynthese* in German).

There is also something subtle to be questioned in any "confrontation" between one's own "integrative" efforts over the years and those of any other -- however wise, experienced or honourable. This is the context for considering here the work of Ken Wilber (and "integral futures"), in contrast with that of [David Lorimer](#) (notably as director and principal bibliographer of the [Scientific and Medical Network](#) and its *Network Review*).

Ken Wilber

The achievements of Ken Wilber in addressing a wide range of issues articulated in many traditions and disciplines are truly heroic. His energy and productivity with regard to "consciousness" have been widely acknowledged. His books touch in various ways on these topics (*The Spectrum of Consciousness*, 1977; *A Brief History of Everything*, 1996; *A Theory of Everything: An Integral Vision for Business, Politics, Science and Spirituality*, 2000).

Ken Wilber is necessarily a controversial figure. Part of the purpose here is to explore how what he has achieved, and how he has achieved it, challenges my own understanding. This is given a particular focus by the seeming completeness of his understanding expressed through his much-cited AQAL "quadrant model" -- and the certainty of his perspective in terms of what he terms the Witness.

1. Controversy: In what way does any "Theory of Everything", like Wilber's, allow for, or predict, controversy? In such a model, where are those who do not subscribe to it? How do they "have their place" within the framework with which they disagree? Is their state of consciousness to be understood as being of a less refined form? To what extent does Wilber's model imply that those who disagree with it are necessarily less aware -- namely that agreement with it is an indicator of a subtler state of awareness?

There are many insightful spiritual traditions with strong advocates. Without questioning the merits of the synthesis achieved by Wilber, surely a major challenge is to position the variety of other patterns of insight in a manner that honours the decades (if not centuries) of dedication to such disciplines?

The delicate question here is how to position understanding that may be perceived as "lesser" in the light of some other model without precluding the possibility that from some other perspective it may indeed offer a worthy pathway and ultimate insight, that may be equal, if not "superior" to that advanced by Wilber. Is it possible that appropriateness may be a function of education, culture, genetic disposition, or other predetermining factors?

More fundamentally however, what role does controversy -- and the clash of perspectives -- have in relation to the subtler states of consciousness? Is the dynamic it represents fundamental to life and awareness in some way -- in a world in which many aspire to "make a difference" and are extolled to do so in a competitive environment?

2. Doubt vs Certainty: Wilber's work appears notably lacking in doubt. Certainty has been sought and achieved and wrapped into a model. Where is doubt in that model? Is it in some way implicit in the challenge of understanding the transition between various levels of the model?

In many traditions the struggle with doubt and the accommodation with uncertainty are important dynamics. Mathematics has had to become resigned to its failure to achieve the level of certainty that was its original goal ([Kurt Gödel](#), etc). The poet John Keats is renowned for recognition of the essence of maturity in terms of "[negative capability](#)". This is the capacity of "being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason".

Does the absence of doubt preclude dialogue of a quality from which mutual learning can emerge? No doubt, No dialogue?

How does Wilber provide for such dialogue in a context in which his model, as with many others, generates controversy? He himself deliberately avoids the conventional pattern of conferences and dialogues -- with occasional exceptions where these are primarily centered on his work. Is this a form of avoidance of challenge by those who might consider themselves his peers -- however erroneously? As a lifestyle choice, this may not be cause for criticism, but it does raise the question of how his model catalyzes fruitful dialogue in contexts where others prefer other models.

3. Questions vs Answers: As with much spiritually-oriented discourse, Wilber positions himself through his model as an answerer of questions. This is the traditional guru-disciple relationship that is honoured in many traditions. The disciple asks the questions. The guru answers them.

Does the guru have questions that he might appropriately address to other gurus in a dynamic in which all are questioners and answerers? Why is the dialogue between gurus of very different persuasion so impoverished -- given their undoubted wisdom?

What is the status of "question" or "answer" in relation to theories of Everything? Do questions and answers occur at certain boundaries? To what extent do they reflect a dualistic dynamic that needs to be transcended to hold any subtler modes of awareness? More intriguing still, why is a Theory of Everything framed as a noun, when it might be a verb or some other grammatical device?

4. Future development: A major challenge for any model is its status in time. As a Theory of Everything, how eternal and sustainable is Wilber's model? There are many models that claim to be unchanging, notably those associated with scriptures. Their relationship to other models constitutes a major challenge for society.

When such models are effectively "set in stone", one must either subscribe to them -- thereby automatically distancing oneself from others -- or subscribe to some other model, thereby finding oneself marked or stereotyped by the first.

How does Wilber's model account for development of understanding over time? Whilst he gives considerable attention to the development of understandings of consciousness, he positions his model as the culmination of such development. How then does such a Theory of Everything provide for its own development? Its structure would seem to preclude any analogue to growth rings in a tree trunk.

Such development may derive from evolution in Wilber's own thinking, within his lifetime. Others may offer ways forward that supersede his Theory of Everything -- as suggested by David Lorimer with respect to the recently published work of Jorge Ferrer (*Revisioning Transpersonal Therapy: a participatory vision of human spirituality*, 2002). To what extent does any model of the status of Wilber's constitute an act of colonizing the future of the development of consciousness and understanding -- a form of conceptual imperialism? By saying what "is" for others, to what extent does it preclude new insight as has tended to be the case of those models "set in stone" in the past?

This question is rendered all the more complex because, as a model that identifies the awareness of timelessness, how new insight emerges over time to challenge a particular model is a dynamic that constitutes a paradox. In a sense there is "nowhere" to go in space-time because one is already "there". But movement in space-time nevertheless has its "place" in a model that transcends space-time.

5. Witness: Wilber attributes the highest value to the awareness of the Witness through which the essence of "everything" is "tasted" (*One Taste: The Journals of Ken Wilber*, 1999). He positions this awareness as the culmination of many disciplines requiring years of training to which only the very few are prepared to submit themselves.

Whilst few would question his dedication in achieving such awareness, his account of it does position him as having an exclusive insight from which he can make pronouncements that only the foolhardy -- from the perspective of his model -- would dare to challenge. To what extent has he designed and built himself an impregnable castle or prison? To what extent are the insights of that castle more accessible to others than his claims imply? This possibility is highlighted by the contrast in many traditions between rapid enlightenment and that which is the fruit of long effort as reviewed by Peter Gregory (*Sudden and Gradual: Approaches to Enlightenment in Chinese Thought*, 1991). In Christianity any such rapidity is indicated in terms of "grace".

The "centro-centric" understanding of Everything through Witness awareness precludes the possibility of distributive understanding of Everything. By this might be meant the possibility that, as with the fingers of a hand endeavouring to hold a ball, Everything can only be "grasped" by several fingers together. Is it possible that his Witness awareness is but one of the fingers and that fingers from other models are required for larger awareness? Of course "grasp" is an entirely inappropriate metaphor as he would indeed argue.

6. "Shadow": There is a long tradition of considering that gurus who have struggled towards wisdom and subtler modes of awareness, as in the case of Wilber, are in many ways above criticism -- to the point of being "shadow free". Indeed the problematic facets of their characters are not a matter for reflection by their disciples, typically urged into "positive thinking". Such facets only emerge in accounts by the disaffected whose objectivity is itself questionable -- as "negative thinking". Is the existence of such problematic facets of relevance to the insights of any Theory of Everything? Is the failure to address them in a non-dualistic manner evidence of the kind of polarized thinking such a model seeks to transcend?

Of what relevance are the insights of depth psychologists suggesting that it is through such "shadow" features that greater integration and maturity lie? Is it not the case that such shadow features are precisely what undermines meaningful interaction between those of differing traditions and approaches to subtler forms of awareness? Again, is concern about such shadow dynamics not a healthy corrective to false certainty -- enabling the degree of doubt vital to new learning?

7. Formal metaphors: Wilber's core model takes the geometric form of concentric circles divided into four quadrants. As such it resembles a mandala or yantra. But there are many kinds of mandala or yantra that are used to carry other insights into the realms of consciousness. More generally still, to what extent do many features of mathematics (and especially geometry) not have the capacity to act as templates to carry insights of relevance to a Theory of Everything? The point to be made is that it is possible that is the class of such features that may have the capacity to carry the degree of diversity characteristic of Everything -- and that the geometrically simple form selected by Wilber is not adequate for some purposes that the model is required to serve.

Whilst a circle may indeed be understood as a basic means of carrying the notion of Everything, Emptiness and Nothingness, what functions might other mathematical features have that are not well-carried by that chosen for the expression of Wilber's model?

What mathematical transformation could usefully be applied to complexify the basic model? What would be the additional significance of representing the model in three dimensions as concentric spheres -- with eight quadrants instead of four, for example?

David Lorimer

Whereas Ken Wilber's strength may be understood as a synthesizer who has positioned his output in a manner to gather a network of enthusiastic supporters for his work, David Lorimer is an exemplar of a quite different strategy. The mission of the Scientific and Medical Network (SMN), and its journal (*Network Review*) has been declared to be: "To challenge the adequacy of scientific materialism as an explanation of reality". In fulfillment of this mission it organizes conferences and workshops, notably on consciousness-related issues. The journal carries articles on a wide range of topics in conformity with this mission.

Whereas Ken Wilber's efforts result in a synthesis, in the formal construction of which the contributions of others are barely relevant, the *Network Review* carries the variety of perspectives that point in various ways to such a synthesis. However any reading of a whole issue makes it absolutely clear that, although there may be some resonant associations between some contributions, it is the contrasting features of the diversity of contributions which is most striking as described by the author in that journal (*Musings on information of higher quality*, *Network Review: journal of the Scientific and Medical Network*, 61, 1996, pp. 32-33).. The image that comes to mind is of a conference hall with the many contributors each pointing to where the overarching truth is to be located -- but pointing in quite

different directions. There is no synthesis in the wilberian sense. Many contrasting Theories of Everything -- and ultimate states of consciousness -- are presented. This might be said to respond to the concern expressed by Marcus Bussey in this issue (Resistance is not futile: escaping the integral trap, *Futures: the journal of policy, planning and futures studies*, 2008)

There is a paradox lying at the heart of integral futures (IF). This paradox is built into the word integral which, as Joseph Voros points out, is rooted in a meaning base which includes: 'whole, complete; essential; balanced; joined into a greater unity' [Integral futures: an approach to futures inquiry, *Futures*, 40, 2, 2008, p.197]. It is this word 'unity' that troubles me and explains why, although as Jennifer Gidley and Gary Hampson (2008) point out there are multiple 'integrals' in circulation, I generally avoid both the noun and the adjective in my work.

However, for the purposes of this discussion, the focus here is on David Lorimer's role in providing extensive reviews of numerous books for the thrice-yearly issues of the journal. The argument here is that there is an interesting sense in which, in contrast to Wilber's static model, it is the dynamic of Lorimer's continuing passage amongst this diversity of perspectives -- effectively "walking their talk" through his brief, but assiduous and sympathetic identification, with each such worldview -- that provides a form of distributive synthesis. The coherence binding the disparate and competing (and occasionally mutually disparaging) theories of Everything is the proactive awareness of David Lorimer. It is his dynamic awareness that is a crude analogue to Wilber's Witness awareness -- for indeed Lorimer is bearing witness to the variety of endeavours to give form to a Theory of Everything (including that of Wilber).

Lorimer's achievement is to provide a framework through his activity through SMN to transcend the phenomenon identified by Mara Bellar (*Quantum Dialogue: the making of a revolution*, 1999), namely how world famous scientists associated with the development of quantum theory promoted their views by dismissing their opponents as "unreasonable" and championing their own not-so-coherent ideas as "inevitable".

This dynamic synthesis does not lend itself to articulation in some closed and final form. In fact it is Lorimer's receptivity to further insights that is vital to ensuring the viability of SMN as an attractor. He may however venture such a partial synthesis in the moment for particular purposes (*Radical Prince: The Practical Vision of the Prince of Wales*, 2003).

The point to be made here is that the larger perspective is poorly represented through any one Theory of Everything at this time -- especially because of the way in which each such theory is challenged to account for theories that do not fully accord with it. Such discordant theories are nevertheless part of the reality to which all are exposed and from which all must elicit a synthesis, if only by excluding as inadequate all but the one which they prefer.

Perhaps it might be useful to see the Scientific and Medical Network as an orchestra in which the various instrumentalists are pursuing different theories of harmony. Certain chords and melodies may briefly articulate and give coherence to the whole, but the creative dedication of each musical explorer is not (yet) to be sacrificed to an overriding pattern of concord. It is within this context that David Lorimer moves as a new type of "conductor" whose role is specifically not to impose order upon the whole. Rather through indirection he must seek to ensure that one instrumentalist is at least aware of the experiments undertaken by another, in the hopes that from this awareness may emerge a collective responsiveness to a larger understanding. As a conductor of the most *avant garde* form, it is his role to bridge between the most disparate musical experiments and to hear the "overtones" that justify their seemingly discordant preoccupations.

A question of style?

As a philosopher, Nicholas Rescher (*The Strife of Systems: an essay on the grounds and implications of philosophical diversity*, 1985) responded to such distinctly unintegrative conflict by concluding:

For centuries, most philosophers who have reflected on the matter have been intimidated by the strife of systems. But the time has come to put this behind us -- not the strife, that is, which is ineliminable, but the felt need to somehow end it rather than simply accept it and take it in stride. To reemphasize the salient point: it would be bizarre to think that philosophy is not of value because philosophical positions are bound to reflect the particular values we hold.

This said however, Rescher's argument does not necessarily preclude the possibility of new ways to take the strife "in stride". Indeed it has been argued elsewhere by the author that new forms of transdisciplinarity may effectively emerge from "striding" (*Transcending duality as the conceptual equivalent of learning to walk*, *Journal of the Interdisciplinary Crossroads*, 2, 2, 2005).

A largely forgotten philosopher, W T Jones (W. T. Jones, *The Romantic Syndrome: toward a new methodology in cultural anthropology and the history of ideas*, 1961) responded to the curiously conflictual dynamics of the many authors seeking to define the "romantic period" and produced a set of seven axes of bias on which they were variously positioned -- thereby predicting the nature of the dynamics between them in academic discourse. He generalized the approach to other domains, presumably making it relevant to the debate on matters "integrative". There are several other authors who have produced other such characterizations that could be used to the same end .

A more specific approach might be to identify interesting metaphors by which to characterize and distinguish approaches to matters "integrative", raising the possibility of metaphorical challenges and resonances between them:

- **spatial metaphor:** To what extent can the AQAL structure be compared to the biblical [Tower of Babel](#) on which people progress upwards to greater insight? Is the approach of Lorimer then to be seen as equivalent to the management style of "walking the floor", exploring the many buildings in a more or less urbanized knowledge environment that continues to develop organically?

- **garden metaphor:** Is the AQAL structure to be compared to a highly formal garden, whereas that of Lorimer to an untamed wilderness garden -- or perhaps an extensive botanical garden specifically seeking to include a wide range of exotic species?
- **symbolic space:** Is the highly structured integral approach to be compared to the eternal qualities of the imperial Forbidden City of Beijing, or the Imperial Palace of Tokyo? Does that suggest that the challenge offered by Lorimer is the contemplation offered by the empty spaces and varied perspectives in a classic meditative Zen temple garden -- in which underdefinition is the highest art?
- **culinary metaphor:** Is Wilber to be compared to a French master chef, distinguished by the taste he has brought to the categories presented [9], with Lorimer to be compared to a Japanese master chef distinguished by it being impossible to determine whether he has done anything to the categories presented in the raw?
- **gallery metaphor:** Is Wilber to be seen as offering a collection of carefully chosen paintings in a viewing gallery forming a gentle spiral from the ground level up to the top of the building -- precisely ordered into stages along the way (as at the [Guggenheim Museum](#) in New York). By contrast Lorimer might be understood as offering a vast and "rambling" collection across the years -- which can be systematically explored, as with the [Hermitage Museum](#) in St Petersburg, only over a lifetime.
- **music metaphor:** As a symbol of integration *par excellence*, is Wilber effectively promoting what the Catholic Church distinguishes as "sacred music" -- uplifting to the human spirit understood in a particular way -- in contrast with the vast array of other musical forms by which people are variously "uplifted" according to their own lights? Is "integral futures" then to be challenged by its *diabolus in musica* -- the forbidden chord?

In terms of the gallery metaphor, one may like or not like any piece to some degree. But it is surely unhelpful to focus on whether this or that piece is true in some unique sense that marginalizes all others. They may be facets of a larger understanding, but it is less helpful to be attached to any one as especially true. Is this saying that we are moving into an era (if we are not already there) in which the collection of such pieces will become more vast than those of the works in the Hermitage collection. In the quest for "integrative", what can one hope to derive from walking its galleries? Is it rather the case that in the new era many will have their works "hung" in special collections on the web to be perused with a variety of agendas? Many others will be hung more discretely -- if not privately.

Integrative implications and the hidden dynamics of denial

The issue then is what does all that constitute? What happened to simplicity? What happened to a simple integrative truth or insight -- philosophical or religious? The inconvenient truth about truth would seem to be that its simplicity is not to be found where it would be most convenient for it to be. Is the very size of the collection in process of creating a cognitive analogue to that of overpopulation? Of course many of the integrative works on display are pushing for the uniqueness of their own perspective. But why the assumption that the rest of the world should be persuaded of the merit of that truth above all others?

The challenge is then of how one prefers to explore competing alternative understandings of "integrative". It is within such a context that causal layered analysis (CLA) has a role to play as presented by Sohail Inayatullah (*The Causal Layered Analysis Reader: Theory and Case Studies of an Integrative and Transformative Methodology*, 2004).

There is something unsatisfactory about discourse with strategic implications when it is challenged by lack of self-reflexivity -- especially when those who disagree with the implications exploit any such weakness to oppose them. Is "integral futures" to be assessed in relation to CLA as a "better mousetrap" as the arguments of the critiques of C. Riedy (2008), R. S. Slaughter (2008) and J Voros (2008) would seem to imply? Or should be assessed as a "mousetrap" which subsumes the functionality of CLA, rendering the latter of problematic significance. Marcus Bussey (2008) skillfully explores the implications of this attitude as he detects its manifestation in their arguments.

The irritation for any observer of the quest for "integrative" is this obsessive need to be right and to marginalize others as wrong or inferior -- with little consideration of for whom this evaluation may usefully hold. From the perspective of Jones 7-fold axes of bias, it is the degree of separation of preferred integration within that space that then determines how wrong each perceives the other to be. The challenge is what then?

Perhaps most tragic -- in a period when contrasting perspectives are presumably essential to governance in crisis -- is the manner in which preferences and problematic dynamics engender forms of discourse that are rarely if ever "integrated" into "integrative" frameworks.

This is most evident between the leaders of distinct approaches -- who are not renowned for enhancing the quality of their dialogue (if they ever meet) to ensure the emergence of higher levels of integrative insight. To make the point as vividly as possible this has been described elsewhere by the author using the metaphor of body odour (*Epistemological challenge of cognitive body odour: exploring the underside of dialogue*, 2006). It is not so much whether we can share each other's "vision", it is that many of our decisions are based on whether the initiative of the other "smells" right. Decision-makers, especially entrepreneurs, may talk about "vision" in public but they may well act on "smell" in private -- whether attracted or repelled by cognitive pheromones, as discussed previously (*Metaphor and the language of futures*, *Futures*, 25, 2, 1993, pp. 275-288). Rather than "vision" or "smell", Wilber (1999) has favoured "taste".

This ignored integrative issue is currently exemplified in the very specific case of the future strategic integration for a future Mediterranean Union as proposed by Nicolas Sarkozy, President of France and opposed by Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany. As indicated by Ian Traynor (*Germany pours cold water on Sarkozy union*, *The Guardian*, 14 March 2008):

Diplomats say the fundamental problem is one of personal chemistry, with Merkel's self-effacing sobriety jarring with Sarkozy's

A pattern language for design of appropriate complexity?

In considering the above metaphors it is tempting to consider that "integration" could be treated as a challenge of design in response to taste -- as a matter of "cognitive decor". Such an approach could be given considerable focus through the work of environmental architect [Christopher Alexander](#) by generalizing his approach to the design of spaces -- places in which it is a pleasure to be. His work had been based on abstract principles (*Notes on the Synthesis of Form*, 1964) followed by insights into a set of practical patterns (*A Pattern Language*, 1977) -- then related to the widely recognized nature of the attractiveness of such spaces to which he refers as the "quality without a name" (*The Timeless Way of Building*, 1979).

Of significance however is Alexander's approach to participative design, namely how people and communities choose from patterns and combine them to enhance the "quality without a name". This must surely qualify as an integrative approach of a high order. However, with similar concerns, it is appropriate to note the possibility of cognitive analogues to the arguments of Lars Lerup (*Building the Unfinished; architecture and human action*, 1977) who rejects the "behaviourism" of established architecture and its attempt to create a perfect fit between people and their physical settings -- thereby neglecting the manner in which people subsequently act upon their surroundings. This view was also strongly promoted by an early architectural futurist Yona Friedman. What indeed are the cognitive analogues to the design of integrative spaces -- perhaps as envisaged by Marsilio Ficino?

The very use of the term "pattern" reinforces the particular visual bias through which patterns are recognized. It is therefore valuable to recognize the challenge offered by Michael Schiltz (*Form and medium: a mathematical reconstruction. Image [&] Narrative*, 6, 2003) in relation to the calculus of indications of [George Spencer-Brown](#) (*Laws of Form*, Allen and Unwin, London, 1969/1994). Schiltz notes that form/medium is "the image for systemic connectivity and concatenation", as described by [Humberto Maturana](#) and [Francesco Varela](#). he further notes, that the notion of "space" is the key to reflexivity appropriate to any discussion of form and medium:

It was our choice to write in a plane surface that has made that distinctions indeed do cut off an inside from an outside, that 'differences do make a difference' ([Gregory Bateson](#)). Covert conventions at a level deeper than the level of form, preceding the level of form, have determined what the form would do. There lies a chance for developing a medium theory here. In this concrete case: the medium of the plane surface makes the difference. And in general: the topology of the medium makes the difference between distinctions making a difference and distinctions not making a difference. 'It is now evident that if a different surface is used, what is written on it, although identical in marking may be not identical in meaning'... Spencer-Brown has shown us that the 'medium is the message' ([Marshall MacLuhan](#)).....

Hence, **we are writing in a space that connects the level of first-order (operand) and second-order (operator) observations. That space is a torus. If considered operationally, distinctions written on a torus can subvert their boundaries and re-enter the space they distinguish, turning up in their own form.** The marked state cannot be clearly distinguished from the unmarked state anymore, leading to the 'indeterminacy' of the form. As the calculus explains, the state envisaged as such is a state not hitherto envisaged in the form. It is neither marked nor unmarked. It is an imaginary value, flipping between marked and unmarked, thanks to the employment of *time*. The form of the **re-entry**, as described here, has been the source of many commentaries....

Such conceptualization diverts sharply from an intuitive understanding of a medium. As seen here, a medium is far from a Euclidean container. Rather is it introverted space, it is identical to the *topology of the form*, it is the form's 'deep structure'.

What is then to be said of integrative approaches variously engraved as linear text on a planar surface -- or the consequent inhibition of their possible connectivity with other such approaches? Does the integration of spiral dynamics into integral futures respond to the concerns raised by Schiltz? Does the approach exemplified by Lorimer allow for the emergence of such complexity even if it does not reduce it to a conveniently comprehensible formula? Such questions have notably been addressed by the author in relation to Wilber's "one-way" use of the conveyor metaphor (*Potential misuse of the conveyor metaphor: recognition of the circular dynamic essential to its operation*, *Journal of Futures Studies: epistemology, methods, applied and alternative futures*, 12, 1, 2007, pp. 109-130).

Conclusion

The bias of this commentary lies in a preference for an understanding of "integrative" that accepts and transcends the challenge of Wilber vs Lorimer vs Anyother Theory of Everything. This challenge welcomes the formal garden offered by Wilber and the charming disorder for which Lorimer offers a hands-off curatorial role. Life is enriched by the co-existence of papal dynamics and stewardship dynamics -- but it is their relationship that calls for more complex insights.

Integral futures is necessarily challenged by the difficulty of Ken Wilber in having positioned himself and his ventures in a style to be caricatured as the [Craig Venter](#) (*A Life Decoded: My Genome, My Life*. 2007) of memetics (rather than genetics)! One is concerned with mapping and "cracking" the human psychosocial "genome" and the other with mapping and "cracking" the human genome -- and then exploiting any exclusive patents to the full. Both might even be said to be equally concerned with "spiral dynamics".

There are learnings to be derived from the comparison with both the papacy and Venter. This is evident in the efforts made to control or marginalize the intellectual/memetic copyright of others. In the case of Venter, the predictability expected from his success has been undermined by the complex dynamics of folding proteins. The Pope has been faced with the legacy of his predecessor's excommunication of Galileo and Luther centuries ago -- with a degree of rehabilitation being offered only in this current decade. What is the nature of the "excommunication" that "integral futures" might now practice and how long might it take for that to be regretted? How

does "excommunication" feature in integrative thinking? What dialogue guidance does "integral futures" offer to those who might find reason to disagree with it? (*Guidelines for critical dialogue between worldviews*, *Journal of Futures Studies: epistemology, methods, applied and alternative futures*, 11, 2, 2006, pp. 137-154).

One designer of complex modern airport buildings makes the valuable distinction that appropriate integration may be sought through the simulated representation of the flow of people and goods through the airport -- a conventional systems explanation. This view "from another plane" he distinguishes from the valuable insights to be obtained by viewing the airport from within the reality of any flow through it. It might be argued that "integral futures" offers a judgemental **explanation** from the plane of a "cyclopean" meta/virtual perspective, as in the first case. Is there also a need for insight from within the flow -- an **implanation**", as argued elsewhere (*Cyclopean vision vs Poly-sensual engagement*, *Journal of the Interdisciplinary Crossroads*, 2, 2, 2006, pp. 219-251)? Above all, however, there is surely a need for processes that reconcile the tendency to assert primacy for particular methodologies and philosophies -- a paradoxical need that could be understood as a self-reflexive joke.

The strategic challenge over centuries has been framed as the normative reduction of multiple incommensurable prescriptions to a single integrative variant -- the same "hymn sheet" -- whether by persuasion, manipulation or violence. Resources continue to be allocated desperately to this end, despite only too evident incapacity in the delivery of remedies, and abetted by both skillful "positive" reframing ("spin") and deep denial. Almost no attention is given to the challenge of interrelating incommensurables and minimizing the violence done to them in the process -- the challenge of "poly-ocular vision", essential to the avoidance of "sub-understanding", as argued by Magoroh Maruyama (Polyocular vision or subunderstanding? *Organization Studies*, 25, 2004, pp. 467-480).

This is a challenge of embodiment that calls for a new order of self-reflexivity, as presented by [George Lakoff](#) and [Mark Johnson](#) (*Philosophy In The Flesh: the embodied mind and its challenge to western thought*, 1999) and by [Francisco Varela](#) (*Laying Down a Path in Walking: essays on enactive cognition*, 1997) It is again paradoxical given that this can itself be understood as just another prescription -- even though, following Schiltz, its "inscription" needs to be on a more complex surface that evokes a "postcription" as a self-reflexive feedback loop. More elegantly, borrowing from the famous poem of [Omar Khayyám](#): When "The Moving Finger" has written, the challenge is to where it then "Moves On".

As one provocative source of learning on the new thinking required -- returning to the musical metaphor -- what could possibly be the secret of the counter-intuitive success of the [Really Terrible Orchestra](#), as reported by Alexander McCall Smith (*And the band played badly*, *International Herald Tribune*, 11 March 2008)? Lorimer's role in striving to include the painfully challenged might indeed be compared to that of its conductor, where Wilber would necessarily exclude those instrumentalists who undermined the music of the spheres to which he is so well attuned. Integrative futures is then the strange quest for how cognitively to embody both roles in the present -- to evoke the greater harmony through engaging creatively with the dissonant pattern of imperfections.

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