Introduction to Interviews that Apply Integral Lenses to Sustainability and Politics

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One of the apparent implications of our growing connectedness and concern for global challenges—economic, political, social, ecological, spiritual and more—is that there seems to be a parallel development of attention to ways we have of thinking about these challenges. To stretch this notion a bit more, we are looking for ways that we can engage as complete beings in addressing the challenges that face all aspects of our places in communities, nations, and the world and as individuals threatened with possible survivability challenges, as well as opportunities to realize our potentials in ways we may have never considered before. It seems quite natural that we would turn to systems theory and quantum/complexity theories in the material realm in that they seem to offer approaches to assist us. It seems just as natural that we begin to engage with the non-material aspects of existence, as well.

One of the newer institutions for sharing innovative efforts around the world is the TED conference. Originally, all of these conferences were held in Monterey, California in the United States. Here is their description

> TED is a small nonprofit devoted to Ideas Worth Spreading. It started out (in 1984) as a conference bringing together people from three worlds: *Technology, Entertainment, Design.* Since then its scope has become ever broader. Along with the annual TED Conference in Long Beach, California, and the TEDGlobal conference in Oxford UK, TED includes the award-winning TEDTalks video site, the Open Translation Program, the new TEDx community program, this year's TEDIndia Conference and the annual TED Prize. (http://www.ted.com/pages/view/id/5)

Since then the conferences have spread around the world, most of them being referred to as TEDx conferences. What is useful to those of us not able to attend is that presentations are recorded on video and posted on their website. The result is a host of inspiring, challenging, innovative presentations in many fields.

In a recent TED presentation Stewart Brand—a man who has been involved in addressing whole earth challenges for decades—presents four environmental heresies.

1. The growth of cities is good for the environment. It relieves the destruction of subsistence farming and engages individuals who move from the countryside into the city in entrepreneurial processes that support their economic development (which promotes educational development, etc.). What is needed is support these activities through such things as provision of energy and crime prevention.
2. Further develop nuclear power. It is the cleanest energy technology we have.
3. Develop even more genetic engineering for crops. It allows for increased food yields to meet the needs of a growing population.

    4.   Use more geoengineeing to control the earth's climate.

His brief presentation following TED guidelines does not address some downsides of his proposals, such as the estimate that we will run out of fissionable materials for nuclear energy in just a few short decades or the history of humans' engineering endeavors. By the latter I mean that the negative impact of engineering strategies can often be devastating on the ecology. A simple example is the construction of dams to control flooding and that have destroyed habitats of people, fish, and animal life. Similarly, there are concerns among the scientific community that geoengineering has control and predictability problems, with potential unintended consequences. From a political point of view, sophisticated systems of geoengineering could be used as weapons in our hugely at risk humanization (meant pejoratively) of the technology.

Brand's heresies are one set of many energies being directed at addressing assumptions and challenges we face in the world today. These are technical challenges, as well as social challenges. These are challenges to our life conditions and worldviews and our connection to the universe. If we are going to be capable of more sophisticated, holistic and generative approaches for addressing these challenges it is essential that we increase our understanding of the implications and ramifications of the choices we make to intervene in the ecology of the world. Our inattention has contributed to the state of the world's ecology today in which our choices may lead to the premature demise of our children and their children. Therefore, we need to develop our capacities to intervene that are not only driven by current and anticipated realities, as we understand them, but also leverage the best tools we have for our efforts. Challenging assumptions, as Brand does, is part of that. And we have inklings of the power of new ways of being, seeing and doing the world and ourselves that can help us evolve that sophistication. Transdisciplinary, integral and other developmental approaches offer us some of this potential. Systems theory has a contribution, as does design thinking.

Fred Collopy, Professor and Chair, Information Systems Department, Weatherhead School of Management, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio points out in a *Fast Company* blog that design thinking needs to be introduced in a way that it does not take on so much baggage as to make it of marginal utility by leaders and managers of our institutions.

Note that design thinking goes beyond product design. Michael Ben-Eli (more about him in a moment) notes that Buckminster Fuller used the term "design" to imply a number of distinctive qualities:

−   A sense of an underlying order,
−   A "whole," marked by coherence, and
−   The implied presence of a deliberate intelligence.

This way of thinking about design goes beyond the material into the realms of cognition and the senses. Its implications, according to Ben-Eli are

−   Design can involve an active initiative, the shaping of a particular configuration (a particular part of reality),

- It can relate to a subjective experience as when we recognize order in an observed phenomena, and
- It can entail concepts as well as physical entities and combinations of both.

Further, "This value driven, ethical aspect is derived from a hierarchy of three concepts that are central to Fuller's design philosophy. They include:

- Acknowledgement of the mystery and inevitability of an implicated higher order,
- A particular definition of Universe, and
- A specific view concerning the function of humans in the cosmic scheme of things.

Ben-Eli's presentation flows from here into a parallel discussion of design thinking that emerges from design as a process of realizing intentions. "Design is fundamentally an integrative process involving the synthesis of elements into a coherent whole. Synthesis is paramount. It involves the intuitive ability to see the possibilities of novel combinations." Here we see the principle in action underlying out interest is systems and design thinking, integral theories and transdisciplinarity. Ben-Eli also has outlined a clear relationship between design as a process and an intention. His PowerPoint presentation on this is available at http://www.sustainabilitylabs.org/page/design-science-framework-change.

Embracing these approaches also leads us to examine our assumptions, many of which stem from values, worldviews, ideologies and—some would maintain—neurology and biology. Brand models this, as must we.

In the pair of interviews to follow I present individuals who have two very different and, I would suggest, complementary approaches to addressing the politics of ecological and developmental challenges. Yet, even from their divergent paths they have reached some very similar conclusions and intentions, as you will see.

Jan Inglis focuses primarily on local communities and the use of an intervention designed, tested and implemented in the US and in Sweden by Sara Nora Ross and others. She describes how this process (TIP: The Integral Process for Working on Complex Issues) works (see here for a workshop overview or here for articles). Fundamentally, hers is a think globally, act locally strategy.

Inglis' work has been primarily with individuals and communities, particularly from her small community base in British Columbia, Canada. She is focused on how change occurs and how individuals evolve into healthier ways of being. Thus, her attention has been on individual and cultural change. Her interests have led her into peace movements over the years, as well as engagement in local community politics. She has engaged in bringing many different fields of study and action to inform one another and find ways of creating an integrative approach to social change. She founded the Integrative Learning Institute and its curriculum for social change agents, the Cultural Coaches Training Program.

Michael Ben-Eli brings many years of experience based, in part, on his association with Buckminster Fuller, his training as an architect in the United Kingdom, and his work all over the

globe on behalf of bringing his design perspective to engagement with change and development capabilities. While he eschews politics, there is great political relevance in his work. He has founded the Sustainability Laboratories that includes this vision.

Our Vision and Mission

*Join us in working towards a common vision of the future,
in which all humans live in peace, where enduring prosperity is ensured by
purposeful, holistic design and smart use of appropriate technology,
and where all the planet's ecosystems and living creatures thrive.*

*Join us in working towards a **Vision** of*
**a sparkling, vibrant Planet, where all humans develop to express
their full potential without ecological offence and without
any individuals, or groups, adverseley affecting others.**

*Working towards this vision, the **Mission** of the Sustainability Laboratories is*
**to act as a catalyst for accelerating the transition of world's society
and its economy to a sustainable basis by
researching, developing, demonstrating, and facilitating
adoption of breakthrough sustainability practices,
expanding prospects and producing positive, life affirming impacts
on people and ecosystems in all parts of the world.**

As I read this, nothing could be more political in its implications. But his message seems to be that the path to sustainability will be served best by focusing on the practices and activities that support sustainability through both technological and cultural design. In his sustainability principles he extends our attention from the technical and the cultural into the realm of the spiritual (a treatment of these may be found here).

Taken together, we find the elements of an integral perspective on sustainability and change. We see in the lives and work of these individuals the integration of the domains of attention required for generative development. And we are challenged to consider how we engage with "politics" to move forward. The world of action represented by these individuals is not just action in the realms of individual, community and cultural development designed to address ecological survival and sustainability. Theirs are political acts often taken outside the realm of formal politics.

In economics we speak of the formal and informal economies. The latter are those aspects of

economies that are difficult to identify and account for through financial and government bookkeeping and taxing activities. Just as there are hidden populations in census surveys there are hidden economies and hidden political dynamics. To address the world of integral politics we can look through at least two lenses, which can be expanded through a metatheoretical approach into many more lenses.[1] The first is integral as it represents a "theory of everything," that is, it can produce models and maps in which we can integrate widely diverse ways of knowing and researching political dynamics and systems on the individual and collective levels, include "meta-collectives" which move our attention from community and nation to the global perspective of politics. It can include lenses related to governance, agency and communion and many others. The point is that to gain an integral perspective involves the application of transdisciplinary approaches through the use of multiple lenses.

A second is to understand politics from a stage of development perspective. Here we would consider what politics might look like in a social stage where the focus in on family and tribes, as well as other stages of phases of human and cultural development in which politics is played out through institutions to enforce rules and correct behavior, to one that seeks to integrate diversity through transcending and including all those individuals and cultures at various stages of development. In these interviews we can glimpse both these perspectives, albeit they have not been made explicit. I trust that these interviews are in service of our development and learning in this process.

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[1] See the work of Mark G. Edwards (2010) on this theme, Organisational Transformation for Sustainability: An Integral Metatheory. New York: Routledge, and also McGregor, S. L.T. (2009). Integral metatheory: Beyond specializations, theoretical pluralism and conventional metatheory. *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal, 38*(2), 142-157. http://fcs.sagepub.com/.