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Start Date: 04/24/07



**Jonathan Reams**

- Purpose** To explore how a Process Model approach views Holons
- Outcome** An understanding of any nuances or distinctions the PM can make relative to Wilber's description of holons.
- Questions** How does the PM view the notion of holons?  
Can they be a grassroots/bottom up thing, or is this conception even relevant from a PM view?

### Introduction

Daniel wrote:

is it possible to understand a holon as a rhizome (or more properly a rhizome as a holon or set of holons)? Not as an arborescent structure, such as a Chomskyan tree diagram or a Dilbertian corporate model, but literally as a grassroots or bottom-up embrace? Wilber suggests it's not really possible in SES, because transformations move in a top-down manner...

I think that it would be great to begin by laying out Wilber's view of holons, and then Bonnie's/PM view. From there, a peek under/beneath both the way the term is conceptualized and what it rests on could lead to situating relevant distinctions between the PM and Wilber.

Other thoughts?



**2 Bonnitta Roy**

revised 04/24/07 12:19PM



#### Part 1: The Initial Critique

The Taxonomy of Holons



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view

*In response to Jonathan Reams (1)*

This is a great cross-fertilization question. I love the way Daniel plucked it from Ed's post with spontaneity and alertness.

Here is a bit of arm chair sociology, which will help frame my response. There are two reasons why I think "Wilber-the-Phenomenon" happened.

(1) When Wilber first started writing, the kosmos was not comprised of perspectives, but of "holons all the way up and all the way down". He had a beautiful way of composing his ideas of the holon, and he touched something that was latent and un-articulated in an entire generation of people. He gave us a secular guide to S/spirit through the Whole/part schema.

Culturally, we were beginning to intuit the ancient idea of "turtles all the way down" -- but instead of the mythic framework, the notion of holons resonated with our ecological and cultural senses of being embedded and enmeshed (to borrow Hargen's wonderful terms) -

- and so appealed to the modern and postmodern people we had become. Until Wilber's elucidation, most of the popular articulation of holonic relations carried the odor of those pre-rational turtles. But is Wilber's holarchy any more rational than Turtle-dom? Or does it actually appeal to us at the affect level?

(2) Still, I don't think his schema would have taken off the way it did, had Wilber not attached a strong hierarchical association to Turtle-dom. This, too, proved to have enormous appeal to his readers, and also turned out to be an enormous "problem" in how people used it to "prove" they were/are at higher altitudes than anyone else. Hence all the food fights in Wilberland.

I have attached a word document that represents a quite detailed critique of the assumptions that Wilber makes in positing the 20 tenets of Holons. This critique is based on an alternative process approach of "generative orders" which critiques Wilber's taxonomic (structural) organization of holons. Like all theories of generative order, it seeks to establish balanced parody between wholes and parts, which are seen to actualize each other.

(3) Here is where I do critical theory: The "process" underlying Wilber's holarchy is "transcend and include." His transcend and include paradigm of spirit rising to Spirit is anachronistic at best -- "old wine in new bottles", as they say -- having exhausted its transformative potential with Hegel, but not [...more...](#)



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3

Bonnitta Roy

04/24/07 6:33AM



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### Part 2: The Construction

*In response to Bonnitta Roy (2)*

The PM takes two steps in forwarding the idea of evolution and development through a process approach. The first step pertains to notion here of rhizome. The PM looks at the process microgeny of cognition, proposed by Jason Brown, as an example of an alternative paradigm to evolution and development. Whereas Wilber uses the holarchic paradigm which considers parts complexifying to greater and greater wholes, in an advance to a higher and fuller evolutionary enlightenment, Brown's process theory considers greater degrees of articulation, or finer and finer parcellations of forms, from an aspectless whole. For Brown, however, there are innumerable simultaneous waves developing from the source, and receding -- and it is the complex landscape of their inter-net-ions that is responsible for the actual (cognitive) occassion. Each wave exhibits a certain "action potential" as it arises from the source-- and it is the potential at the source that is continually evolving new potentials, such that, after exhausting its potential, the "wave" recedes to the source, and "recharges" with new --potentially novel-- potential to actualize. Its actualization also being influenced by the complex constellation of innumerable processes.

If we illustrated this with a Flash program, it would look like rhizominous growth, spreading and receding in this area or that, moreso in some directions than in others at different snapshots of time, with a complex narrative history. It would, curiously, look like the growth of synaptic organization in the brain.

One significant difference in this process version, is that while development depends upon initial potential, and the narrative history of its articulation, the mature forms themselves representing realized actuals are also the exhausted potentials (they self-define); such that new potential for evolution is a process "that occurs" within the aspectless source. This idea is surprisingly consistent with what does occur in evolution. There are no transitional species. The geological record shows us that species emerge as populations, not individuals, and it is populations, not individuals, that speciate. This is consistent with

Brown's theory of cognitive microgenesis, wherein populations of microgenies emerge together and interact to constitute the actual cognitive occasion.

If we stretch this paradigm onto the notion of SDi, for example, we come up with an alternative interpretation of the [...more...](#)



4 **Bonnitta Roy**

revised 04/24/07 11:07AM



**Part 3: The Integration**

*In response to [Bonnitta Roy \(3\)](#)*

The second step the PM makes, is to look at the alternate paradigms of whole-part relations -- that of Wilber's transcend and include paradigm that considers parts giving rise to greater and greater wholes -- and that of Jason Brown's paradigm of actualized potentials that considers parts arising from an initial greatest whole. There are two drawings of a nautilus shell in the article that illustrate these two paradigms -- it shows that the paradigms are distinguished by how one conceptualizes the arrow of time. The PM contextualizes these two great paradigmatic systems by showing that they are determined by the conditions of structural enfoldment in the way they are conceptualized, or in the way that these epistemological categories are projected onto experience to create one or another picture of "the real world."

The PM recommends practicing to think outside the terms of structural conditions, that is, in a way that the arrow of time is not fixed in relation to wholes and parts, potentials and actuals. It recommends releasing the "need to establish an ontological basis" by relaxing into the ontological dimensioning of experience, namely the experience of the anterior aspect of reality being always already, even as the posterior aspect of reality unfolds within a temporal directive. The PM challenges those who study development and evolution, to adopt this new integral paradigm, that isn't forced to choose between dichotomous pairs, in order to address complex issues in completely new ways. To consider that "reality" is not an expression of an ontologically given holarchy, nor an expression of an ontologically fixed order, but that there is a continual and openly dynamic process to that which is implicit and that which is explicit, and the aspects which are brought forth in one or another paradigmatic expression, is ours to choose.

Its like playing in the sandbox.



5 **Bonnitta Roy**

revised 04/24/07 9:32AM



*In response to [Jonathan Reams \(1\)](#)*

By the way, it is interesting to note from this analysis, how deeply antithetical Bohm's view was to Wilber's from the get-go. Embedded in Wilber's theory is a very strong ontology - his holarchic organization of reality. Bohm, on the other hand, was working with a holonomic view-- where in a very real way the part can in fact stand in for the whole, akin to Blake's view of the "Universe in a grain of sand."

To what extent the diametricity of their views escaped Willber's notice, or alternately, to the extent that it was transparent to Wilber, is an unknown. However, it is typically the case that when one's own embeddedness is not transparent to one's own self, the criticism that results is empathic and acerbic -- which was in fact the case with Wilber's intolerance of Bohm and his advocates.

Bohm died before he was able to work out a coherent articulation of his greater view,

since when he died, it was still in process. Bohm was moving from the holonomic view, itself tagged to a strong ontological interpretation of the implicate order, to a more process-oriented view of generative order with his notion of the holomovement.

Currently, Jonathan (Reams) and I are working together to carry forward Bohm's ideas through a process model approach.

Bonnie



6 **Bonnitta Roy**

04/25/07 6:58AM



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*In response to [Bonnitta Roy \(2\)](#)*

For those of you who were unable to slop through the detailed critique of the twenty tenents of holons, I am posting here the rather poetic conclusion (as a temptation to invest the time to understand the rest).

Tenet 20 in Stuctural Terms:

12(S). *Evolution has directionality.[towards]*

- a) *Increasing complexity.*
- b) *Increasing differentiation/integration.*
- c) *Increasing organization/structuration.*
- d) *Increasing relative autonomy.*
- e) *Increasing telos.*

Tenet 20 from a Process Approach:

12(P). *The arrow of time is simply "a structural facet or feature of the modus operandi of cosmic processes. Nature's processes are interrelated and interlinked ... and space-time in itself is a manifold of such patterns-a feature of the exclusions and interference of such processes."*

What this process is, that establishes an arrow of time, and the increasing dimensions of complexities that accompany it, is the topic of structural conditioning in the epistemological field.

As for telos, and the pull toward an Omega point, in the process model, we will see how, outside of the epistemological field with its directional arrow of time, there is alternately an ontological domain, with its atemporal dimension of simultaneity where telos is not merely the pull toward the omega point, but the simultaneous push back toward the source; not merely the increasing autonomy of distinction, but the simultaneous encounter of the whole; not merely the increasing structuration of the actual, but the simultaneous recovery of potential; not merely the increasing differentiation of parts, but the simultaneous actualization of relatedness; not merely the increase of complexity, but the simultaneous resolution of universals into unbounded wholes. The promise then, of such a process approach, is to be able to avoid the timeless recourse to the relentless "two truths doctrine"-the one in which the tenets holds and create the map of the prison; and the other in which the prisoner gets to escape.



7 **Richard Carlson**

05/19/07 4:23PM



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Bonnie



I think you have done an excellent job in deconstructing holons as simple include and transcend model. The problem in general I see with this model is trying to adapt a metaphor which may work to some extent in biological systems to individual human and social systems (This is also a huge problem with adapting complexity metaphors to human systems as well) But one has to look no farther the originator of the holon theory Arthur Koestler to see the nature of the problem. It could be said that Koestler was a genius and wrote some great novels and studies of the history of science, however the man was also something of a serial rapist as well! The same problem one finds with Martin Heidegger, who if you read his philosophy may appear, if one uses the terminology of spiral dynamics (which I personally disdain) he may appear as a globally situated second tier thinker, yet the dude flirted with the Third Reich. How does one resolve that contradiction? IMO not even supplementing a modified version of Gardner's waves and streams can save this theory.

In many spiritual disciplines it is said the higher one progresses the greater the danger of the fall from grace. (the fallen Brahman or Alan Watts and even Bill Clinton for that matter) If someone had managed to transcend those lower memes (btw I think memes is also a very bad metaphor) one would think they should have known better.

rc



private



8 Jonathan Reams

05/20/07 3:53AM



Rich,

The point you make about the issue of how a person's whole life and how they live it impacts their theories is one I have also been pondering for some time. It has come up again and again in various encoutners with ideas that appear to have value and utility, and people who have shadows as well as these ideas.

I find that it is still an open question, with the recognition that people can gain insights and articulate ideas that have "truth" to them and can contribute to the building of knowledge. Sometimes separating these out from the person can be hard, and sometimes the ideas are ultimately flawed by the personalilty. Other times, I look at "truth" differently, and find that if it does not improve us as persons, enable us to grow spiritually and master said shadows so that we live more as a conduit of grace, then what kind of truth is it?

In my understanding of the process model, I would say that "truth" as information, maybe even knowledge, in the epistemological field can be successfully divorced from the person and used. In the ontological dimensioning, I think that matter of truth cannot be split from the moment to moment living of it through us as persons/Beings.

JR



private



9 Bonnitta Roy

05/20/07 7:51AM



*In response to Richard Carlson (7)*

*The same problem one finds with Martin Heidegger, who if you read his philosophy may appear ...*

This is an important point, because any philosophy, like the PM, that utilizes the ontological, is highly vulnerable to totalizing and fascistic interpretations (the author notwithstanding). I think Ken Wilber has done a really good job of separating the relativistic from the absolute -- and while his AQAL can be intellectually totalizing, he

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always throws in the two-truths doctrine, where all interpretations drop into emptiness and nondual equanimity. It may be great hubris on my part, to try to language a model that avoids the recourse to the two truths doctrine. But that is how I started, years and years ago-- trying to reconcile immanent spirit with transcendent Spirit. I had this model called "Telos" -- which was an exegesis as to why there is an *apparent* telos operating in the universe. It was basically a Whiteheadian process interpretaion of a Schoepenhauer worldview (without the emphasis on the pesimism, and with emphasis on the creative and aesthetic). Whitehead had posited a God-Like Superject, who was responsible for the unification of experience (the sequence of prehensions into actual occasions) into a unified subjective self. I wanted to eliminate the posited God-head ... and so started to think how ontological elelemts were enfolded into a "self" ... and thought that it was this kind of process that gave us the experience of a Telos.

I had only read western philosophers, when I saw an article in Fast Company Magazine about Wilber -- and then one winter I read his collected works. It was at that time that Wilber was writing the excerpts, and he (with the helps of Sean Hargens, I believe) were incorporating Whitehead and process philosophy into his works. When I read the first parts of the first excerpt, I thought "My God, he's writing just what I am writing." It was a very exciting time for me. I wrote furiously, and then my computer crashed -- telos into the void.

That was all good, though. It gave me a break and a chance to start over. I picked up Guenther and got the Ah Ha! Guenther was doing process in a way that made Whitehead look like he was broken down in the tow lane on I-95.

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sorry for that diversion .... maybe it has a place in this response ...

The [...more...](#)



10

Edward Berge

05/20/07 11:36AM



Yo, I be gettin' a feel for wot u be sayin', aight? Word?

Yes, I was getting at something quite similar in the Ontology & View thread when talking about Gadamer and my dance experience as "a kind of aesthetic apperception, rather than a judgemental discrimination." And your goal of not positing an ontic basis, to live in open presence to the OD, to not get stuck in the endless cycle of relative recursivity, quite honestly sounds a lot like what Derrida does with "undeconstructability." For him it is always "to come" in the relative realm that is always subject to deconstruction (thus avoiding the ontic), but it is always already "present" in the khora, the space that gives place, but is itself not an object of "knowledge."



11

Richard Carlson

05/20/07 11:51AM



Thats correct Derrida posits a presence that we are always approaching but at which we will never arrive.





*All times are displayed in your local time (Eastern)*

2 Bonnitta Roy

04/24/07 12:19PM



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view

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(3) Here is where I do critical theory: The "process" underlying Wilber's holarchy is "transcend and include." His transcend and include paradigm of spirit rising to Spirit is anachronistic at best -- "old wine in new bottles", as they say -- having exhausted its transformative potential with Hegel, but not having lost its popularity with the totalizing tendencies of ego. Worse, Wilber uses his "transcend and include" paradigm to make false science. Looking at his holonic representations of the cultural memes (versionSDi) it can be shown how he mistakes development with evolution, conflates ontology with phylogeny. Wilber ascribes his "transcend and include" paradigm to the memes, suggesting that orange transcends and includes blue ... ; that green transcends and includes orange, blue ... ; that yellow transcends and includes green, orange, blue ... . This is tantamount to saying that any individual human being transcends and includes any individual dog. But my dog certainly has abilities that I don't have! And chimpanzees (according to recent DNA tests) actually have made more evolutionary advances than humans, since they mutually

parted from their evolutionary branch. The point is, the axis of evolution, from species to species, or meme to meme, is a conceptual categorization of generalities -- an abstraction that has no individual instantiation.

Curiously, and famously, this was the exact same critique that Kierkegaard levelled against Hegel.

[ "Existence" (Existents) denotes the concreteness and individuality of a life lived in time and the requirements on personality that are implied by these features of selfhood, as contrasted with and contravened by the efforts of aesthetes and "pure thinkers" to conduct their lives abstractly sub specie aeterni, neglecting the particular self (oneself!) to be formed in accordance with the noble concepts and chosen from among the interesting possibilities.]

The stream of individuality (development) can not be described by the stream of abstracted evolutionary generalities, -- there are no individual instantiations of evolution. So when "students" of Wilber started using the evolutionary schema of SDi to asses hierachical relations between individuals, it was bad science in service of ego.

We are all born as pre-conceived adults, with potentials and obstacles for achieving our highest actualization. So if you have green values, and aspire to yellow values, you might actualize that develomentally, but you are not adding a new emergent meme to the noosphere-- anymore than any given chimpanzee is going to morph into a new human some day. And finally, there is no evolutionary correspondence to how advanced a specific line is, and whether or not that line will be the progenitor of future, "higher" forms. We did not descend from the fabulous fishes of the precambrian explosion-- we descended from the lowly worms that survived the massive cambrian extinctions.

The PM suggests that whole-part relations are examples of dichotmous thinking. In other words, their relations self-define by exclusion, not inclusion. To be fair, the one place where Wilber's paradigm has some value, is with respect to the self-system. Wilber describes the development of the self through stages such that "the subject of the previous stage becomes the object of the subject of the next stage." He cautions that as this process unfolds, it is important that the subject of the next stage both transcend and include (not repress) the subject of the previous stage, through its objectification, but that the objectified prior subject is embraced, as it were, by the next subject. Whereas Wilber wants to tag this process to his whole-part transformations, the PM suggests that this is process of interior-exterior relations, in which the interior aspect of the epistemic field, progressively exteriorizes as object fields.

3 **Bonnitta Roy**

04/24/07 6:33AM



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**Part 2: The Construction***In response to Bonnitta Roy (2)*

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If we illustrated this with a Flash program, it would look like rhizominous growth, spreading and receding in this area or that, moreso in some directions than in others at different snapshots of time, with a complex narrative history. It would, curiously, look like the growth of synaptic organization in the brain.

One significant difference in this process version, is that while development depends upon initial potential, and the narrative history of its articulation, the mature forms themselves representing realized actuals are also the exhausted potentials (they self-define); such that new potential for evolution is a process "that occurs" within the aspectless source. This idea is surprisingly consistent with what does occur in evolution. There are no transitional species. The geological record shows us that species emerge as populations, not individuals, and it is populations, not individuals, that speciate. This is consistent with Brown's theory of cognitive microgenesis, wherein populations of microgenies emerge together and interact to constitute the actual cognitive occassion.

If we stretch this paradigm onto the notion of SDi, for example, we come up with an alternative interpretation of the cultural memes. We see a complex constellation of forms whose relations and interactions self-define each other, such that "green" has no meaning except in relation to "...blue, orange\_ yellow..." ; and that what transcends and includes is that which is the source, evolutionary process which generates the cognitive landscape. No individual, no level(specie) transcends or includes any other-- rather, they represent mature articulations of the generative process that is sourcing their potentials as they actualize. The "whole" is not in the parts, nor is it represented by the relations between them, which are merely transformations of their generative process -- the whole that sources them.

## 9 Bonnitta Roy

05/20/07 7:51AM



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*In response to Richard Carlson (7)*

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This is an important point, because any philosophy, like the PM, that utilizes the ontological, is highly vulnerable to totalizing and fascistic interpretations (the author notwithstanding). I think Ken Wilber has done a really good job of separating the relativistic from the absolute -- and while his AQAL can be intellectually totalizing, he always throws in the two-truths doctrine, where all interpretations drop into emptiness and nondual equanimity. It may be great hubris on my part, to try to language a model that avoids the recourse to the two truths doctrine. But that is how I started, years and years ago-- trying to reconcile immanent spirit with transcendent Spirit. I had this model called "Telos" -- which was an exegesis as to why there is an *apparent* telos operating in the universe. It was basically a Whiteheadian process interpretation of a Schoepenhauer worldview (without the emphasis on the pessimism, and with emphasis on the creative and aesthetic). Whitehead had posited a God-Like Superject, who was responsible for the unification of experience (the sequence of prehensions into actual occasions) into a unified subjective self. I wanted to eliminate the posited God-head ... and so started to think how ontological elements were enfolded into a "self" ... and thought that it was this kind of process that gave us the experience of a Telos.

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The post modern correctly deconstructed the reified notion of an ontological basis. The consequence of this is that everything under the sun becomes relativised. And if everything is relativised, then everything is recursive. Hence, bounded. But people intuit that there is a place, or a space or a realm on the far side of their boundaries -- we are always peering into it, always stretching, or being stretched -- there is always more energy coming into the system, then we can account for, and so, that energy can feed back into the recursivity of the epistemological, or it can sneak out into the landscape of the ontological. In order to do this, without concretizing the ontological, we need to be immersed in the dynamic, processural nature of the ontological dimensioning of reality -- it is a kind of aesthetic apperception, rather than a judgemental discrimination.

You can see the dialogic dynamics... someone relates their experience, "there was a kind of door, and I walked through it, and on the other side I could see an image of my dead father" .... and then someone else tries to dominate the interpretation -- when there is no real need to assign any kind of metaphysical status to experiences. "I see a green leaf" doesn't mean I have to have a TOE to explain why. Conventional experience is shared by an apparently ontologically based objective world. Beyond that boundary of the conventional, the territory is a bit slippery. We try to close it up with equally objective "facts" organized into metaphysical categories.

The PM tries to show how/that we can live in a state of open "presence" to the ontological dimensioning of reality. It shows us how to tell the difference, to make sure we are not positing an ontic basis. The ontological dimensioning of reality cannot be enfolded in the self, cannot be enfolded into a shared intersubjectivity, cannot be enfolded in the empirically veridical "facts" of the world.... Those are like the boat afloat on the ocean. It can navigate by different means, and dip into the waters, but it cannot change the course of the currents.

*When we become present to its coursing, we begin to resonate with its depths.*