

The Map, the Gap, and the Territory

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Introduction

Two recent articles by Matt Rentschler posted at Integral University Presents,¹ combine to give the reader examples of how one can take up any given theme, in this case art, and codify it into an AQAL² framework. In the first article, *Introducing Integral Art*, Rentschler fits various art “styles” into corresponding quadrants according to the perspectives which generate the styles. In the second article, *Understanding Integral Art*, he describes how the artist can improve his/her self and art, as well as the potential of having the Muse visit more often, by simultaneously working on all lines of development. Alternately, the art critic can apply the AQAL framework and its concept of development along lines, levels, states, types, to improve his/her critical analysis of the author and the work. The overall result is a kind of AQAL primer on art. I have tried reviewing it on those terms—as a simple primer written to introduce the reader to the AQAL model.

Still, Rentschler reminds us that it is important to distinguish an AQAL map of art like the one he is presenting, from the actual territory, “art.” But while these two articles demonstrate that Rentschler has a clear understanding about the categories that prescribe the AQAL model, he seems to be unable to make clear distinctions about those “other regions”—the territories—art, integral art, art interpretation, integral art interpretation. There are three major distinctions that I think are germane to his articles, namely:

1. The making of an AQAL meta-map, which requires the systematic arrangement of previous interpretations according to the AQAL model;
2. The exploration of the territory “art,” which requires what I call “*gap-diving*” into the territory and reporting back;
3. The elucidation of Integral Art, which requires the “gap-diver” to explore the territory in completely new, a-perspectival ways of seeing, thinking and experiencing, and reporting back in terms of what Gebser³ calls “a new form of statement.”

The making of meta-maps

While there is a certain utility in organizing large amounts of knowledge in a generalized framework, in order to situate the reader with respect to the material, or to orient the reader with respect to the author’s own perspective, there is also a great deal of over-simplification that comes with the kind of systematic generalization it requires—oftentimes reducing rich ideas and

¹ Both articles can be downloaded from

http://multiplex.integralinstitute.org/Public/cs/files/35/integral_art/default.aspx

² AQAL is an acronym coined by Ken Wilber, corresponding to All Quadrants All Lines, ideas used in his work.

³ Gebser (1985, p. 308)



complex human endeavor to conveniently distributed categories. This is the kind of approach that produces textbook primers, like those sweeping books on art history that introduce students to the various “art-isms:” expressionism, formalism, romanticism, neo-romanticism, and the like.

Rentschler’s article demonstrates how we can re-align these convenient judgments into AQAL terms. My sense of this, however, is that by doing so we are creating, as it were, a map *twice-removed from the territory*. It seems to me more valuable to describe how those primers failed us in the first place by giving us the impression that entire realms of human endeavor can be easily codified in such convenient terms as “expressionism” or “formalism” *because* they limit their interpretation to mono-logical domains.

It also seems to me that it would be more valuable to re-examine the actual territory, and look with new eyes—eyes that are liberated from the previous modes of interpretation that by *delimiting experience into categories, also limit our experience to those categories*. Not only to reiterate the subjective (in AQAL shorthand, the upper left or UL) aspect of Expressionism, for example, but to show how even Expressionism, which is conveniently judged to be an UL enterprise, is inextricably constituted by, and inimically interweaves itself into, all the other domains. To show that the convenient but partial truth about Expressionism is “it is UL;” but the inconvenient truth about Expressionism, as with all human endeavors, is the constant confronting and testing of limits, stretching and smashing of boundaries—creating and destroying interpretations *all at once*. No art, no artist, no enterprise, no idea, no methodology is ever situated in just one quadrant—however convenient to categorize them in such a way. It seems to me that an Integral approach on Expressionist artists would be to show how the regions of their minds, their work, their culture, their world, are in constant dynamic relationship, continually testing and crossing the tentative boundaries between domains of understanding and spheres of meaning. Doing this would, I believe, help us get closer to their territory.

Gap-diving the territory

Rentschler warns us, toward the end of the second article, “The map, however, should not be mistaken for the territory; the model should never get in the way of the Muse.” The point, well taken, is that there is a gap between the map and the territory, the model and the Muse. Moreover, we *realize there is a gap*. Furthermore, for the first time in history we have the ability to create meta-systemic maps to describe the gap. However, Rentschler’s article is supposedly about art, supposedly about the territory that is art—and therein lays the confusion. These articles are not actually about art, they don’t actually *go there, into the territory*. These articles are exercises in AQAL map making.

To write authentically *about any territory*, such as “art,” one has to *go there*—to take a dive into that gap, plunging toward the territory as deep and as far as one can let oneself go. To extend the metaphor, we have to dive for as long as we can hold our breath—which is the suspension of making convenient interpretations for as long as it takes to touch bedrock. And then—and only then—are we qualified to report back. What was it like? How deep did you go? What did you discover? Did you touch the face of the Muse? “Go on,” I want to shout out to Rentschler, “dive in. Be a gap-diver!”

It is terribly difficult to be a good gap diver. For this we have the words of greater thinkers and writers, greater artists than ourselves. Here are some examples of writing from the territory:

To be an artist, you need a teacher. And it is for this reason, above all, that I began collecting carpets. Many years ago I began to realize that carpets had an immense lesson to teach me. That as organized examples of wholeness or oneness in space, they reach levels which are only very rarely realized in buildings. I realized, in short, that the makers of carpets knew something which, if I could master it, would teach me an enormous amount about my own art.⁴

The Chinese sage said that one must grow with the tree. I know nothing truer. ... By entering into the object one comes into one's own ... and in the work, I found myself.⁵

In this way the Kimberly rock art of the past has been incorporated within an interpretive schema of the present: the Wandjina on the one hand, repainted again and again over time *becoming one with the present*.⁶

It is possible—even probable—that a growing, evolving awareness may hold sway, and a society may come to exist in which the integrated, unified relation to the world, in which individual feeling, the form of the world, and the feelings of others, are woven together in a less and less broken whole. *There [must be]... a direct connection between the living structure of the world and the achieved person-ness we experience in ourselves*.⁷

But sensing that nothing opposes it—supposing that there are also lines and forms as well as colors on the other innumerable planets and suns—it would remain praiseworthy of us to maintain a certain serenity with regard to the possibilities of painting under superior and changed conditions of existence, an existence changed by a phenomenon no queerer and no more surprising that the transformation of the caterpillar into a butterfly, or of the white grub into a cockchafer. The existence of painter-butterfly would have for its field of action one of the innumerable heavenly bodies, which would perhaps be no more inaccessible to us, after death, than the black dots which symbolize towns and villages on geographical maps are in our terrestrial existence.⁸

Nature is not at the surface but in the depths, and colors are expression of this depth at the surface; they surge up from the roots of the world.⁹

Or we might look to traditions like Japanese calligraphy, where the ink, the painter, the painting, the environment, the past and the present pivot on the here and now, gathering in a field of opening in a moment of ripeness.

⁴ Alexander (1993, p. 15)

⁵ Matisse, quoted in Neret (2002, p. 85)

⁶ Morphy (1998, p. 59)

⁷ Alexander (2004, p. 265)

⁸ Van Gogh, quoted in Erickson (1998, p. 168)

⁹ Cezanne, quoted in Gebser (1985, p. 486)

Integral Art

In his seminal work *The Ever Present Origin*, Jean Gebser points out a critical distinction between the Rational Level tendency to codify perspectives, that is to arrange any number of perspectives according to their relations in systematic terms (aka, making maps) and the Integral Level which goes beyond the mapping of perspectives, beyond even the making of perspectives, into thinking and experiencing in *a-perspectival ways*. This is a difficult idea to come to terms with if one has already relegated (in one's mind, through various exercises) all of the territory to a map of perspectives. If we have trained ourselves to see everything and everywhere through AQAL eyes, how can we understand the meaning of a-perspectival, or ever come to accepting such a possibility of a-perspectival thinking and experience? The significant question I have then, is how do we get from where we are, to *Integral*; from AQAL to A-perspectival? According to Gebser, we need a new form of statement:

If we do not decide to risk “upsetting” some persons and things, and indicate the inadequacy of systems with their categorical rigidities, we will not be able to approach the new world reality. ... [There] is a clear indication that the qualities of time which are today pressing toward awareness cannot be expressed in mere categorical systems. ... We are compelled, in other words, to find a new form of statement.¹⁰

As Integral writers, we need to be experimenting with new forms of statement. As integral thinkers, we need to go beyond the very horizons of thought and experience we have just recently come to define. Here is where Integral Art comes into play. Every age has their artists to forge the way into the next, to pierce through all our convenient truths into uncharted territory. We need only to be open to what they have to show and tell, despite the dissonance in us it might create, and in spite of all of what we know.

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¹⁰ Gebser (1985, p. 308)