

Deep Dialogue in Social Media Spaces: A Brief Experiment

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A Brief Experiment in Deep Dialogue in Social Media Spaces: Orientation and Overview

Tom Murray

The Integral Postmetaphysical Spirituality (IPS) forum(s) included a number of experiments with facilitation modalities, and some participating in IPS forums were also active in hosting or mediating other online spaces. Within integrally-informed theory and practice communities there is an, at least implicit, invitation to *enact* one's theory, by either "practicing what one preaches" so to speak, or by using the theory to reflect upon the writing, reading, or dialogue process itself. IPS was thus, in a way, a forerunner in the area of hosting technology-mediated forums that were not only *about* spirituality, consciousness, and philosophy, but self-aware about the ethical and performative questions of *being and acting* spiritually or ethically aware or conscious within the knowledge building process.

In light of this, we set out to gather a group of experts in the area of supporting "deep dialogue" in online spaces such as discussion forums and videoconferences. The hope was that doing so would generate some insights that were valuable in general. Below we also describe the goals, conceptual framing and process structure of the dialogues in case that is useful to others wanting to do something similar.

About a dozen experts agreed to participate in this project: Bonnitta Roy, Andrew Venezia, Hilary Bradbury, Layman Pascal, Marco Morelli, Heather Fester, Daniel Thorson, Penelope Whitworth, Geoff Fitch, Daniel Görtz, and Tom Murray (participant-facilitator). Bios for the participants are at the end of this document.



Participants were separated into two groups of about six, for two 2-hour Zoom video conference calls for each group (for a total of 4 calls). We also created an online discussion forum, hosted at Marco Morelli's Infinite Conversations website, for participants to reflect on the online discussions in between sessions. These discussions, and links to the recorded conversations, are available at www.infiniteconversations.com/c/commons/integralreview. In addition Andrew Venezia and Layman Pascal have penned reflections on their experiences, below in this article.

We invite readers of this journal to add their own thoughts about the process and related topics by going to www.infiniteconversations.com/c/integralreview. The idea here is to replicate a "fish bowl" face-to-face conversation structure, wherein a small group engages in conversation (in this case the "experts") which is first silently witnessed by a larger community, followed by opportunities for the larger community to be in dialogue about the experience.

Why dialogue? The following quotes describe the purpose and format of the experience, taken from text that Murray emailed to participants or potential participants, or from the Orientation page in the discussion forum. The goal was to gather a "small group of experts together" from within the broad community of the "integral diaspora" to "reflect on the emerging state of the art in ... facilitating or hosting online interviews or discussions forums."

The general theme is this: in these modern times of online video-conferences and hyper-text/social-media forums, how can such tools (existing or to-be-invented) be used in novel ways to support deep inquiry, collaborative meaning making, "knowledge building," and "action inquiry" – with an integral/second tier/meta-modern sensibility? Also: how do we structure online interactions so that we support the "levels of consciousness" we like to talk about– how can we "walk the talk" as we talk?

You do not have to bring 'answers' to these questions – we are all trying to figure out how to host online conversations with radical depth and expansiveness. You are invited to bring questions, experiences (including abject failures, forehead-slapping epiphanies, slogs through the doldrums, etc.) to our conversations.

The *orienting questions* that we will allow to unfold and speak through us are:

1. What is "deep dialogue" to you? – i.e. What does it look and feel like to participate verbally in ways that source deeper or transpersonal layers of the self and the collective?
2. What are the possible results or benefits of this type of participation?
3. How might we support this type of dialogue in virtual spaces?

We can each hold appropriate expectations about what is possible in the very limited context of one or two calls—while still wondering "What is possible?" I will *consider the dialogue a success* if the majority of participants have even a single tiny new insight or realization (about anything). Or perhaps you will fall in love a little bit with one person you did not know. I also like how Bonnie Roy has framed a higher bar for some of her F2F groups: to generate insights emerging from the leading edge of human thought – that have never been spoken by anyone (regardless of how modest or trivial they may seem). Also, I won't

consider it a success unless there is some laughter among us. So I invite all to relax, sink in, lighten up, and do some serious play.

Deep dialogue? Because all of the participants have experience with both contemplative practices and contemplatively oriented dialogue processes, I did not try to pre-define what was meant by "deep dialogue," but left its meaning open to emerge within the conversation – but I did constrain the topic as follows.

We are focusing on open dialogue, which can be contrasted with things like debate, decision making, and interviews. We are focused a particular kind of dialog we could call deep dialog, that is informed by contemplative practice and possibly also by adult developmental theories and psychotherapeutic, transpersonal, and shadow-work models. We are here to ponder what is possible when people bracket out the normal functions of the ego and its social games and try to sense into something deeper, and do that as a collective, and see what emerges from that collective.

I trust that the "transpersonal" will manifest in its own way an advanced group like this. We will begin by talking about supporting deep dialogue and increasingly try to reflect on and embody the ideas we raise. My own meaning of "transpersonal" includes a tender vulnerability and willingness to participate openly, which hopefully ameliorates the spiritual bypass and cultism that can be associated with the term. But I also want to say: don't try to be "transpersonal" in the dialogue :-)

Process Details

The facilitator's posted *Process Guidelines* for the discussions were:

- The usual considerations about being respectful to each other go without saying for group like this.
- Share the road. If you consider yourself someone who takes up a lot of space in discussions then consider scaling it back a bit; and if you consider yourself a quiet or shy person then assert yourself a bit more.
- Pretty much anything goes – feel free to take risks. I consider this a profanity friendly space in case you're wondering.
- Silence is golden here, and I'll facilitate a structure that allows for more silence in the middle phase.
- Tom will be trying to balance the roles of being a facilitator and participant. But I ask that we all take responsibility to co-facilitate here in terms of monitoring the energy the flow of things.

The first dialogue (for both groups) was lightly facilitated using a "U" structure, a process metaphor adopted from Otto Scharmer's "U Theory" (*Theory U. Leading from the Future as it Emerges. The Social Technology of Presencing, 2007*). A full description of each of the possible steps is below, though these steps were guided with few words, and participants were not asked to keep track of the formal process or what phase they were in.

1. *Downloading* – intellectual discussion on what is known (mostly 3rd person, "single loop").
2. *Open mind* – including: suspending judgment of others in favor of curiosity; reflections on *us and our* discussion so far (2nd person, "double loop").
3. *Open heart* – including: reflection on one's own state, feelings, needs, and being (1st person, approaching "triple loop"); tuning in to experiences of rationality with individuals and the whole; allowing the emotional, perceptual, and imagistic/magical functions of the self to speak.
4. *Open Will* – a "bottom of the U" space of silence to allow for a "letting go" and "still point" of silent awareness and presence; supporting the "letting be" of releasing and allowing for a possible "letting come" of insights or images from the creative unconscious.
5. *Emerging* – moving gently from the silence into a possibly more "transpersonal" dialogue; gently bringing in insights or images generated from the silence; while intending a "remaining in the moment" and "speaking from the heart" of conversational spaciousness.
6. *Energizing* – Allowing the conversation to become more intellectually active and reflective again; reflection and recap of what was learned in the entire experience, and how it affected one.
7. *Prototyping* – conclusions, decisions, and/or concrete steps or plans for moving forward, and how and when to evaluate success. This step is included for completeness RE Scharmer's model, but we did not plan to include it.

So much for planning. In the actual dialogues (dialogue #1 for both groups) I as facilitator was reluctant to squelch what seemed to be very engaged interactions, and the first three steps took up the bulk of the time. Because the participants were familiar with such group states, I was trying to allow for a natural and increasing infusion of spaciousness into the conversation, though in the end I did include a short period of formal silence followed by "emerging" reflection.

In all of the dialogues the 2 hours went by very quickly. The second dialogues were even less structured. Participants seemed to appreciate the invitation into the more spacious and relational modes in Dialogue #1, but also there was a general sense that they wanted to chew on the ideas more, so the second conversation (for both groups) was more free-form.

It was indeed a great honor and pleasure to be hosting such a wonderful group of individuals in coming together. We are in the process of considering whether to organize future dialogues with the same participants, or new configurations of participants.

Reflections and Themes

Andrew Venezia and Layman Pascal have penned essays in this Issue reflecting on their experiences in the dialogue groups. Below I will comment from a facilitator's perspective on some additional themes.

Overall my sense is that participants were engaged and enjoyed the conversation, and enjoyed engaging in a "generative space" with others, some of whom they were meeting for the first time. However, it also that case that there was little in the way of closure or feed-forward outcomes from the engagements (this is reflected in both Andrew's and Layman's contributions).

Readers are encouraged to listen to the dialogues (link above). Topics discussed included:

- Social grounding and immediate trust,
- Performance and performativity in social media,
- The progression of relational action logics,
- Transformative knowledge creation,
- Contagious yawning and being embodied while virtual,
- Allowing for dream-level content to emerge,
- Immersiveness and the end of "digital dualism,"
- Spontaneous unfolding of relational mystery,
- Relationally vs. insight,
- Technology and distopia,
- Endings, catastrophes, and grief.

Theme #1: Facilitating facilitators. It can be challenging to facilitate a group of "experts" on the topic of facilitation itself. One of my goals was to balance inviting in the exceptional expertise of the participants while avoiding an overly intellectualized or opinion-driven discussion. In embodying or practicing "what we preach" I wanted the participants to be on the edge of their knowing, dipping freely into the emergent co-created present. I specifically invited participants who had experience with "contemplative" and "deep" orientations to dialogue, so though I planned to occasionally nudge them toward such directions, but did not want to micro-manage or "lecture" on things they knew well. I also wanted to honor the significant process skills of participants and give them opportunities to sense into the flow of ideas and energy and co-participate in steering the boat. In the end I think I erred on the side of allowing for emergence, and some participants would have appreciated more structured discussion topics and a sense of concrete progress.

Theme #2. Immediate Trust. Before the conversations even began there was a lively text dialogue about trust and vulnerability in newly formed groups. One participant noted that "... it takes many hours to build the social capital and shared meaning before productive dialogue can happen..." While another posted "Maybe a starting question is How do you IMMEDIATELY enter into a trust situation? – without social bonding, territory claiming, attachment to identity...belonging needs, etc. Maybe that could be the meta-text/meta-cognitive awareness we all aspire to from the get go?"

Theme #3. Rationality vs. insight. A theme in text conversations following the first dialogue was the pros and cons of facilitating more spacious and relation modes of conversation, vs. allowing for more content-based dialogue and insight-generation. For some, slowing down a conversation to allow for more spaciousness, "presence," and emotional intimacy felt a bit awkward to contrived. For others, the type of deep dialogue we were advocating is not possible without taking the time to build relationships. This relates to the above theme RE whether a transpersonal type of "immediate trust" is possible in the right contexts– i.e. a bypassing of the usual social relationship forming that allows for an efficient move into collective insight generation. My own judgment is that this particular group was able to skip *some* of those steps and enter quickly into a trusting space allowing for a degree of authenticity and vulnerable sharing.

As one participant pointed out, the stakes were not very high however. Our engagement did not include the types of difficult truth-telling or conflict resolution that (1) challenge groups who need to get real things done, and (2) can lead to deeper intimacy beyond the "fire" of shared dissonance and discomfort.

Theme #4. Endings, catastrophes, and grief. One thing that was striking to me was that, without any prompting and without having (yet) heard the other group's recording, in call #2 both groups veered into conversations about the dire straights of humanity. There were flavors of "here we are talking about abstract ideas but the world is in real trouble, what are the concrete, realistic things that people can do?"; and "will this technology we are talking about just take us into a dystopian hell of disembodied being and tech-materialistic narcissism?" I don't know what was in the air or in the news that week, but the discussion was thick with stark and serious questions the future. It allowed for rich dialogue about opening to grief and humility in the face of it all; and wondering whether the whole project of modern technology was, in the end, in service to humankind.

Additional resources on deep dialogue. Olen Gunnlaugson and others (including Andrew Venezia who appears in this Issue) organized a large on-line conference in 2017 called "The We-Space Summit" with over 150 contributors— see <https://www.thewespacesummit.com>. The online dialogues include many on themes related to "deep dialogue." Participants in our discussion were among them, and additional interviews featuring those participants can be found at:

- Bonnitta Roy's interviewed by Venezia on generative dialogue:
<https://www.dropbox.com/s/vaqsufacntmd2a/we-space%20Bonnie.mp4?dl=0>
- Andrew Venezia interviewed by Bonnitta Roy on We-space:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3wqJ2ZOSoyM>
- Andrew interviewed by Thomas McConkie McConkie on "(We)-Dreaming:"
<https://youtu.be/swcfECDEiEw>
- Tom Murray interviewed by Venezia on Contemplative Dialogue Theories and Practices:
https://drive.google.com/open?id=1nqV_B1rgmExMnsHdQU5FfgR9rj1FF38q
- Bonnitta Roy, Mushin Schilling, Anne Caspari, and Tom Murray, interviewed by Andrew Venezia, on a panel discussion on Collective Insight Practices:
<https://drive.google.com/open?id=18lY6F0Vg4i9pYgs16P8t1S6leyJFcOzR>

In 2016 Gunnlaugson published a book titled *Cohering the Integral We Space: Engaging Collective Emergence, Wisdom and Healing in Groups* (available on Amazon.com). It includes chapters by Geoff Fitch and Tom Murray.

- Fitch's "In, As, and Toward the Cosmic We," available at www.pacificintegral.com.
- Murray's "Contemplative Dialogue Practices: An inquiry into deep interiority, shadow work, and insight," available at: www.perspegrity.com

Papers on the topic by other of our dialogue participants include:

- Roy's "Open Group Practice: Eight Social Selves" at
<https://www.kosmosjournal.org/article/open-group-practice-eight-social-selves/>

- Venezia's "I, We, All: Intersubjectivity and We Space, Post-Metaphysics, and Human Becoming An Integral Research Project" at <https://www.dropbox.com/s/m2h1xfsb00jr8l/venezia-i-we-all.docx?dl=0>

Reflection #1: More is Possible

Andrew Venezia

More is possible.

I find myself left with this feeling on this side of participating in these dialogues, after listening to the two I was not directly in, and after thinking about them and how to approach their central inquiry about communication and communities online, and their place in supporting deep dialogue and vice versa. Indulge me please: I will calm down and return to this.

More is possible: it is fitting that I'm writing these words, that they are abstracted from a sense of what I might actually mean as an articulating body, and as a heart-center of intelligence. Stripped of as much context as possible, and without narrowing down what it is I intend, I mean all possible meanings simultaneously, or at least quite a few.

I was happy to hear the work of Jean Gebser brought into the stream I did not participate in, as his sense of what Integral Consciousness is and entails invites this kind of transparency, which may start with a disorienting palimpsest of separate shifting contexts and meanings opening into each other and closing each other off, but which opens into a kind of simultaneity of consciousness beyond particularized or localized meaning. Gebser is a Virgil in this post-metaphysical comedy.

The fit of my writing these words then is ironic, and I am hoping that this irony relaxes into paradox, that this paradox might itself open into a polarity, and that this polarity might erupt from its tensions, a movement out that is at once an irruption, a 'breaking-in' of consciousness. Definite, linear meaning, directed but only alive in your reading. The explicit as the beat of a boundless, knowing silence. Purpose without objective. Or, more to the point for the inquiry at hand, a transparency that does not balance surface with depth, or place them into relationship so much as it liquidates and electrifies. I'd like to offer that any notion of deep must include this transparency of a simultaneous but not amorphous depth-and-surface as the display of consciousness.

I commend Tom in his guidance of this inquiry, in allowing these tensions to live without trying to finally define what it is that we mean by 'deep,' giving us the opportunity to explore the question in a way that is not merely additive or combatative, and allowing us to practice even a resistance to our habitual ways of weaving voices and ideas in dialogue: novelty beyond mere combination or even exponential emergence. Calling back to the paradoxes we are untying ourselves from in this sort of discussion, I mean a guidance that allows each moment to be a guide, each voice and pause and accident and glitch, each step and trip the utterly whole and incomplete voice of life, leading-itself: leading-(from to as for with by in among beyond below & all other relationships of possibility)-itself: leading-itself.

I can of course write an actual sentence, and as promised I will calm down and stop being so obtuse. I will try and unpack my agitation here more linearly, explicitly: Integral Consciousness, in Gebser's sense, entails a radial break from its predecessor, which Gebser calls the Deficient Mental. We are living in this potential transition; we are emerging from– and so in a sense, invisibly bound by– what it is to be Mental. As Mental beings, we conceptualize this as a movement forward. A reaching-to-grasp, an overcoming. This kind of orientation can be seen in many of our acts of self-construction and presentation. We 'do-to,' and are formed and shaped in reaction to this doing-to even in the attempt not to. As discussed in the dialogue, (1st call, group 2), we've hacked the biological representative of this, our dopaminergic pathways, so powerfully as to be able to give us a little hit basically whenever we'd like. My five-year-old daughter knows the excitement of hearing the mailman come. We can make the mailman come just by looking at our phone.

We communicate this way as well– the postal metaphor is no accident. For many of us in this cultural milieu, dialogue means a kind of considered back-and-forth, the sharing of views, the receiving and listening to an-other, the possibility of an empathic alteration in our views, or at the least a coming-to-appreciation of the other's being and meaning, and the exciting possibility of something genuinely emergent– something that could not be without dialogue. This understanding, this being-understood, this resonance and participatory emergence are also deeply wired into our biology and– particularly from our earliest, formative relationships– our identities and ways of being. All of this, at least as we currently conceptualize it, is predicated on a kind of exchange, a back-and-forth (or co-participation in a group) in which separate beings come together to transfer something, whether information, opinions, or energy, a process that has spatial and temporal metaphorical elements in its conceptualization. Integral Consciousness does not entail a rejection of any of this, but it is also not a result of this activity, nor is it bound by the same spatial and temporal constructions. It's not an outcome of an exchange or process. Or: it is not possible to express this communicatively, symbolically. It cannot come from the outside-in. Clearly there is some purpose to explicating, to communicating, to attempt to understand and be understood, otherwise anything I wrote would simply be drivel– I am, after all, trying to express, understand, and articulate something here myself. (It's drivel, sure, but hopefully not simply so.) My sense– what I am trying to articulate here– is that to the extent that we inevitably, and over-and-over again, fall into the kind of self-organizational mechanisms that Gebser describes as Mental, is the extent to which our rich, nourishing, fascinating and enlivening dialogues, present a kind of distraction. I do mean 'inevitable,' so this is not really a critique: the practice of these dialogues at a sophisticated level seems to me to involve the continual discovery of our own unacknowledged ways of shaping our identities and activities, and releasing them (which can be affirming them) in favor of something else subtle and intuited and nonetheless real.

As an example of what I am saying, I will try and lay out one of these from my own experience of the dialogue. In the second discussion I participated in between Tom, Bonnitta Roy, and myself (Hilary had not yet joined though would later,) we began to talk about the recent and discouraging climate report. As we did, with Bonnie's helpful poking, I became aware that the powerful anxiety that I entered the call with was reflective of my own reasons for participating in the dialogue in the first place: I have experienced a qualitatively different kind of being-human in certain intersubjective practices and experiences, and feel like if we are to find ourselves with any semblance of civilization surviving our moment of crises, we will have done so through and in the

kinds of consciousness these practices have initiated in my experience. I want Integral Consciousness to save the world. “I” want that – my own sense of egoic identity is constructed in parallel with that projected outcome, and the anxiety of its not happening, with all the projected consequences of that– the massive suffering that would entail globally and locally: I have a five-year-old daughter, and I do not want to see her die of starvation, or perhaps worse to endure protracted years of crisis that end in misery. To the extent that I am attached to that desire and its attendant fears, to the extent that what “I” am is comported in relationship to that desire– precisely to that extent will I be inflexible and ineffective in my response to this moment. I can release the attachment in recognizing it, or at the least notice it, and find a kind of freedom and liberation. This liberation is a kind of release, even if a micro-release of a certain kind of tension, a freedom of life giving itself in response to the moment, and without attachment to a kind of outcome that is still hoped-for. The world is not in need of saving, and I will still participate in this life as wholeheartedly as I can.

What does this have to do with the particular inquiry around Deep Dialogue and online communities? In a certain sense, not much. My assumption here, from listening to the discussions, is that Deep Dialogue for most of us participating, involves a sense of mutual understanding, of being able to effectively express our own and receive others’ expressions, while in a reflective inquiry about how we are participating that allows for surprise and emergence– to engage from a place that allows for the simultaneous possibility of waking and dreaming consciousness, and the consciousness of self-reflexive awareness. We do this, as anything and as mentioned, for reasons that we are sometimes aware of and sometimes unaware. I orient to this current piece of writing not as a way of responding to the initial inquiry, but as a way of looking at the whole process, including how it is that we responded to that initial inquiry. I should note that it didn’t seem that we were often responding to the question directly. I’m not even sure at this point what that inquiry was, even though I asked Tom and heard it from him several times. It never quite stuck. Rather than that being a problem, I think it’s again a reflection of skillfulness– the point of this, as I take it at least, was not to generate an answer to a specific question, but to foster a kind of dialogue that allowed us to bring something forth that was not present before: to allow that ambiguity and unclarity to call forth surprise.

This written cap of the whole endeavor is in some ways the least dialogical element of them all: I am writing as an individual, and these are my interpretations and takes – I do not pretend to be accurately summarizing or representing anyone else’s position here. In another sense, as it takes the entirety of the process as its starting point, and comes as a response from listening and considering all of the words spoken and written through the whole process, it comes as a response to everything said and unsaid – if you participated in the dialogue and do not hear at least an echo of some of your words and intentions, I’ve probably not done my job very well. I am trying most to honor the sense of animation and engagement in these discussions – whatever it is that is important here, something matters; something brings us to the edge again and again. This something, this animating force, this willingness to state clearly what is most dearly true– and to be ever and sometimes painfully incomplete and even wrong, this I hope to do justice to.

So, given the above, here are a few of the core generative tensions as I picked up on them that we seemed to be navigating in the dialogue, along with my sense of how these tensions might animate an Integral Consciousness.

Deep & Surface

What might we find in the depths? ‘Deep’ is one of the foundational myths and metaphors of our modernity, our egoity, our individuality. One of Western Civilization’s oldest surviving myths, The Epic of Gilgamesh, describes in part the quest for immortality, sought for as a plant that grows only at the bottom of the deepest lake. That constantly striving, constantly diving, that move to get, justify, capture, validate – it shares the same architecture as the need to be (individually) understood, to find one’s place in community as one’s own self, whether that be in relationship, or society– or life itself, reflected in what is deathless. Not a refusal of depths in a return to the surface, nor a weaving or connecting or communicating the depths with the surface, my sense of what we’re bringing forward as a relinquishment of the striving for depth is the possibility that depth is an action, depth is the striving, and on the other side of that striving (note: not the achievement or fulfillment of the striving) is a simultaneous inexpressibly obvious depth-in-surface.

The drive towards an experience & The open-ended exploration of experiencing.

This is, I think properly, a subset of the above, or at least simply a change of clothes for the above, the paradox perhaps best expressed as: we are all participating in this dialogue driven by a strong desire, one which shows up in a diversity of expressions in each participant and which animates each of our lives, and yet for this desire to find satisfaction and fulfillment, we must be willing to radically let go of, not the drive itself, but our attachment to it. The experiences are crucial, just as in personal meditation, but our attachment to them makes us blind to that which is inexperienceable. We will always and ever have our ways of bringing the past to the present, and the future. We can always let go of them with one hand and lean into everything that is not.

Form and Openness

But even creating a kind of form around the above (say, ‘giving the instruction to “lean into the deep yearning of the moment and release its expressions”’) will end up stale without a relinquishment into an ungraspable openness that cannot be formalized. Neither can we simply resist form: it’s woven into everything we do, and we fall simply into our conditioning and habits by saying ‘no form.’ We can tear habits up this way, drastically see through them, but we can also be trapped by the deepest and darkest habits we bring to life. By this point you may be expecting what I am going to say: the way is not to balance form and openness merely, or be aware of them, though this is a crucial start: the way is to relinquish their distinction as being anything other than a creative, skillful, conceptual activity. Content & Context, or Content & Process I fold in here as well.

Action & Consideration

“We have to be doing this while we write a Constitution,” Geoff Fitch (non-verbatim) expressed at one point, which may have been the conceptual highlight of these dialogues for me. I was hesitating participating in a second round because I have been drawn to these practices in recent years where they are most explicitly tied to some kind of action in the world, some kind of human organizational capacity – as noted, I (have) want(ed) Integral Consciousness to save the world. Again, the key here would be the articulated realization of the inseparability of infinite possibility

and definitive action. Love by any name pliable enough to appear through us as full-throated red-blooded dry abstraction.

I connect this also with ‘explicit verbal communication & other modes of performance, such as drama.’ It is impossible to abstract the articulation of verbal communication from the articulations of the bodily being. We have perhaps been trained to stifle the movement of our bodies and souls and hone them into the forms of our particular cultures, but if the torrent of life has been loosed without negating this ability to rationalize, would its result look all that different to an alien anthropologist than a quiet, engaged, joyful conversation? Something in which particular meanings are used as paint brush strokes on a canvas of consciousness which is itself obvious meaningless/meaning-full shining through each gesture?

Trust, familiarity, vulnerability & Habit, formality, conditioning

Our email exchanges in the group that would be participating in the dialogues revolved around this initially, a theme that in the fleshiest level seems to me to be a reflection of the more abstract Depth and Surface polarity, which is accidentally why I’m using them to bracket this section. In trust I may be myself – which may include a very non-vulnerable relaxation into what is most familiar and comfortable, but which may also include the safety to explore in a vulnerable way. In habit I and we have lived as a success so far, but the complexes of habits I call myself may well present as a wall disallowing a liberated-coming-into-being. Who am I and how do I fit? How do I honor the support and challenge of my otherness in society, and the support and challenge of my own, onliness, uniqueness? Speak without overpowering, listen without becoming absorbed? Perhaps no question has more surreptitiously animated our past few centuries, and perhaps no dilemma must more urgently blossom into a still only intuited way-of-being-as-the-world-together. A walking talking interbeing of love, fully free in service. A conscious obviousness that we are not only selves sharing in experience of this moment, but this moment experiencing as our self?

I have tried to articulate these polarities not as oppositional to each other – I don’t think they are (Depth vs. Surface, e.g.) Rather, they are complementary – each polarity emerges from our ways of conceptualizing and so shaping experience. Each of these polar complements are in some sense a ‘child’ of our tendency to dualize experience conceptually. That dualization is the hallmark of Mental Consciousness in Gebser, and I have structured this short paper around his work, and my interpretation of it, because as noted I think he is our Virgil for this moment of crisis and comedy.

I can not abstract myself fully from this being which I am as anything other than a loving play. I am not possible without this discussion, without this intention imprinted conscious electricity that allows form and meaning to synchronize across the globe, without the fibres of the optics. I am spontaneous and edited – I am myself and a woven collection of voices, distant in time and space but here. My mind lives in Ghent in Belgium, even as it is revealed to be non-local and a-temporal in a recorded and virtual discussion. I write in New Jersey, I wrote in Belgium, I spoke in Ghent and spoke in Amsterdam, and was heard in various places in the New World and wherever you are now. I speak from nowhere because I am heard everywhere. This voice on the imagination of paper, where is it now, where could it be but the source of your very being?

We notice with less effort, having created this artifact of our consciousness as a global network of communication, what has always been possible. This all exists simultaneously, the electronic and digitalized nature of our infrastructure, brought about through our ingenious perfect rational translatability of information, allows a coordination and communication which is not merely linear or abstract. Too often perhaps (and for me!) this nonlinearity breaks down into a kind of pre-linearity – an everything-all-over-the-place. It can also foster – I think it is fostering– a kind of radical post-linearity, the kind wherein that phrase ‘post-linearity’ is not ironic.

Reflection #2: Every Procedure is Creative

Layman Pascal

Every procedure is creative.

That’s where we start but how far can we go? Gathering together in our flesh or online is a procedure that evokes a particular set of potentials. We cannot perfectly determine how much we are boxed in by electronic communication tools or how much we are set free by the assumed naturalness of shared body space. Nevertheless, we are intuitively certain that some kind of amazing phenomenon can emerge from clusters that share information and energy with each other – just as lightning bursts forth from charged particles gathering in the dark clouds. Powerful. Sublime. Emergent.

Yet lightning is deeply ambiguous. It is as likely to be harmful or useless as it is full of glowing electrical promises. Lacking clear goals, sufficient forms and a resilient apparatus for receiving, storing and utilizing this power we have, at best, only a brief and beautiful disruption of ordinary consciousness.

I love these delicious flashes but I suffer from the fact that *more is possible*.

Many of my own favorite & most profound “peak experiences” have occurred in powerful interpersonal spaces of unpredictable intimacy. At times I have played the role of conductor and initiator for such orchestral triumphs but their lasting impact and the mechanisms which distinguish the exalted group moments from the merely decent events are still a mystery. Nonetheless, I think these are very important experiences. There is an obvious sense of emerging significance and transcendent possibilities implicit in both the highest and most modest of such shared encounters. Beyond that it even feels as we are collectively on the cusp of very practical insights that can be glimpsed only through the kaleidoscopic prism of the multidimensional, transpersonal supra-heart. It feels like there are tools at hand for the illumination of self, the awakening of love & the cultivation of a planetary wisdom-civilization by methods that incorporate but are not limited to the linear or technological mind. Great. I’m down with that shit.

However I remain deeply concerned about the most appropriate structures necessary to receive, utilize and transmit the curious wisdom of such “events”. While I privately rejoice in these moods, I cannot help suspect that even a wonderfully open context shared by sensitive, intelligent and well-meaning individuals might create only a fascinating and admirable puddle. And I don’t mean to disparage admirable puddles! The fragrant ethos of uniquely golden liquid and rose-scented

breezes that flow from the background of one engaged participant to another and another and all around and between into the generative dance of the anti-gravitational hive is pure and clean water for a thirst heart. MY thirst heart!

I'm down with that shit.

But still ... suppose we are trying to give birth?

The newborn creature we wish to unfold from our collective vagina may be construed, on the one hand, as a potential answer to a real-world conundrum or else as an emerging, rising or descending transpersonal intelligence that enfolds us into a deep intimation of shared meaningfulness. Is it a boy or a girl? Is it human or animal? Either is wonderful. In any case, however, we wish to birth a fully vibrant and functional organism – not merely a sac of mortal organs in a muddled heap.

We absolutely require a good skeletal structure. An intricate, robust and mobile skeletal structure specifically adapted to allow this particular creature to thrive in a very particular environment beset by all kinds of chaos and surprises. Without an adequately hard structure the soft miracles may perish after a few moments of glorious breathing and vanish from the world. So let us not mistake a miscarriage for a successful birth merely because of their many common features!

Despite the experiential success and learning opportunities provided by the dialogues I think we must consider them to have been, somehow, insufficient in terms of structure...

Our group events were certainly a neat experiment. Most of us have tried other similar experiments and many of us enjoy social-improvisational practices of shared sensing, creative languaging and full-spectrum mutual affirmation. In a way it is precisely because we have a lot of this experience that we should be able to loosely predict both the possibilities and limitations likely to occur in even very high-level, depth-oriented group exchanges. The question of how to build upon the success and bypass the limitations is a wisdom we might hope for the experience itself to provide but it's ability to provide that intelligence may be limited by the same factors. We are left with guesses and intuitions...

Two of the most common guesses found in the self-reflective discussions seem to revolve around the notion that we are initially inhibited by a combination of egoic social anxiety & instrumental reason. Our hope is get beyond these by a combination of brave sharing, progressive familiarity and availability to subtle, nonlinear prompts from various aspects of our whole being. Sounds good. Is the premise reliable? I fear it may not be.

We have an almost erotic fascination with self-organizing complexity – a force which we wish to collectively disinhibit by folding our subtle mutual experience of each other back into common discussion through synchronized presencing, prompted sharing and the playful articulation of half-reasonable images that emerge within us from the circumstances of the exchanges. This plausible strategy is undermined to some extent by the possibility that very similar procedures might lead to our own terribly clever version of “mob mentality”. What I mean to say is that we have no reason

to suppose that we are not accessing the *lowest or least relevant* form of our collective wisdom potential through our tactical attempts to elude anxiety and linear thought.

It seems to me that the problem is not that the context of instrumental, technical and goal-oriented reason leads toward a foreclosing of unplanned emergence but rather that the quasi-romantic attempt to disinhibit the unspecified panoply of inner functions moves us away from the realistic problem of accessing the correct parts that should be contributing spontaneously and the correct structures which can recognize, receive and utilize whatever is produced by the sharing of the proper subcomponents of ourselves. Even the idea of “just exploring” and “learning whatever is there to be learned” and “feeling it out” are actually particular goals which must be indexed to guesses about the particular methods of sharing likely to produce *that kind* of satisfying mutual field outcome – rather than some other kind of satisfying mutual field outcome. Spontaneously availability among reasonable competent and interesting participants is not an alternative to instrumental methods but rather a specific case which suffers from not being specified. How are we to know whether our desire to find deepen and more elaborate dimensions of the experience is not being stymied by our strategic open-endedness?

This is a cautionary note. It should not imply there was no success. As Hilary observed, following the first session of Group 1, there is a “relational action logic” movement through the event which migrates toward increased humor and multidimensionality. Something changes and grows. This occurs over the course of one session and, to some degree, is picked up in subsequent discussions. We just don’t know what ... or how much ... or how to do it better.

So here we are collectively before the problem of *transformative knowledge creation* in groups. The first thing that knowledge must do is to draw a distinction between its own possibilities. Are we elaborating a particular knowledge or the production of a shared transpersonal identity? In integral terms are we working primarily in the Lower Left or Lower Right quadrants of this affair?

We can see the negotiation between these two zones occurring within the discussion groups. And we can speculate as to whether or not this indicates that a “transpersonal whatever” is addressing itself to this very question – the question of how transpersonal methodology applies similarly and differently to shared experience and to shared production of solutions, effects, etc.

Although both groups demonstrate the arising of this whole consideration, we can also see a kind of division of labour in which Group 1 leans toward the LL and Group 2 leans into the LR. The distinction is slight but noticeable. Over the course of their sessions the first group remains, arguably, more attentive to the methodology of emotional engagement, open-endedness, folding in unplanned subtle prompts from their own interiors, engaging in very open feeling responses to each other, etc. And the second group, while being convivial and open, attended a great deal more to the problems and potentials of the procedures and technology being used. Thus the mutuality & the media together formed an inquiry both within in each group and spread across the two groups. And it can be construed as resonating with the first major distinction that integrative metatheories need to make about collective action – the intersubjective/interbehavioral distinction.

In my observation (possibly privileged as I was a member of both groups in different sessions) the first group seems to have paid a lot of attention to a shift from anxiety, instrumental logic and

mental storytelling toward mutual ease, sensing and a more nebulous, spontaneous mood. This strikes me as a process necessary primarily for the production of a common feeling or identity and not so much for understanding how a group, situated within a given techno-cultural environment can be turned to addressing particular questions. Instead there was a great deal of focus on authenticity, on surprise and upon the willingness to learn. An attentiveness to novel arisings and interpersonal commentary. A sense of play. The element of performance is strong here – both in terms of pretense and in terms of playful enactment. Bonnie referred to this aptly as *a transparent performance of people being relational-aware- reflexive*.

While this may seem initially like a very general and open place for a group to start, it can be seen in hindsight as a particular approach leading toward a particular set of creative outcomes. There is an interest about what must be shared in order to deepen and how our emotion enables or disables that – and a favoring, in some respects, of those who are willing to share the most or affirm the complex sensitivity of others with the most clarity. It was as if an eye were looking, looking, looking for pathways by which more diverse energies could be folded into the richness of the mutual touching field.

Conversely, the second group seems to have operated in a more objective fashion. That is not praise or blame but rather an observation about where the combined intelligence of the event, however well evoked or not, seemed to be characteristically moving – as if to pose itself a question in that domain. There is less gushing and laughing in this group and more concern about how we are showing up to each other through the digital medium, the historical moment and the cultural and practical dynamics in which each person is embedded. Questions start to arise about the limits and potentials of the medium by which the interaction is occurring. Ideas of ritual and medicine appear. Attention moves toward structure and suggests possible routes toward a schematic context in which the right kind of attention can be brought forward.

Interestingly, the second group ends up, by the end of its second session, in a very pessimistic place. Not depressive – but collectively embracing the tragedy of the world, history and technology. The first group is, especially in the first session, bolstered into a sort of optimism by the degree of personal sharing and emergent interest into how to feel together.

I don't know that answers were produced. However, I am extending my own experience of the collective pool by reinscribing my own critiques as if they were the very heart of the event. This movement duplicates the style of self-reflective, transparent enfolding that feeds the transpersonal event/entity by turning our responses about the vortex... back into fuel for the vortex. Thus, my initial sense that we have inadequately distinguished between LL and LR procedures (and treated very specific methods as if they were very general methods of discourse) now occurs in this present writing as the suggestion that the “vortex” itself is expressing itself in the form of inquiring into this very question. As, perhaps, the preliminary movement of evolving itself into being as an integral-level transpersonal we-space. It remains the case that there is some crucial difference between, say, a musical jam session and the kind of profoundly effective group diagnostic procedures that used to feature so prominently on episodes of *House, MD*.

That means the difference between the *internal experience* of mutual flow as the marker for success in terms of group emergence AND the *external fact* of getting a verifiable result even if

that means keeping the participants agitated, conflict-ridden and more autonomous. Not that it is necessary that negative experience produces objective results but that it does require an approach to the method of evoking collective intelligence that is indexed to efficacy in a particular context rather than the depth and wholeness of the experience of the participants.

Our hope for collective practices is that we can combine analysis and intuition in such a way that we can produce enough mutually valuable shared feeling and connectivity while also learning keys to the procedural dynamics by which particular forms of knowledge can be generated appropriate to various questions and contexts anywhere in the cosmos. We hope that part of the answer enters with ourselves and another part of the answer flows back out, toward us, from a familiar but alien presence that may be our shared soul. These dialogues were a series of probes into electronically mediated, integral-level embodied collectivity. One possible interpretation is that “we” and “each of us” conspired to enact a version of an inquiry whose resolution may stand at the beginning of a higher and deeper understanding of how to engender and utilize such spaces. It wasn't a failure but more is definitely possible. And I'm down with that shit.

Participant Bios

Hilary Bradbury

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Lead person in convening the global Action Research Community for those interested in action oriented, transformations research. She leads the AR+ Foundation, is editor in chief of Action Research Journal & Jubilee Professor at Chalmers U. She's asking how can our inquiry/science be more helpful to communities as we confront our sustainability crises (and how to deal with our inherited power structures that stymie people's contributions)?! Link to online bio: <https://actionresearchplus.com/meet-co-lab-stewards/>

Heather Fester

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Heather teaches creative writing and composition courses in the First-Year Rhetoric and Writing program at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs. She holds a Ph.D. in Rhetoric and Writing from Bowling Green State University and an MFA in Creative Writing and Poetics from Naropa University in Boulder, and she has taught and administered in college composition programs in some capacity for more than 15 years. Before UCCS and Naropa, Heather directed the Center for Writing and Scholarship at the California Institute of Integral Studies in the Bay Area. Also a certified coach, Heather assists others with their writing and facilitates a process for overcoming obstacles and fulfilling their unique visions. She is currently an event organizer for the 48th annual Jean Gebser Society conference. She has also facilitated an online forum for a reading group linked to the Integral Postmetaphysical Spirituality Facebook page.

Geoff Fitch

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Geoff Fitch is a coach, trainer, and facilitator of growth in individuals and organizations, and a creator of transformative learning programs. He is a founder of Pacific Integral, where was instrumental in the development of the Generating Transformative Change program, which has been delivered on three continents and in its 29th cohort. Through these programs, he has researched and developed novel approaches to individual and collective growth, and has designed and

facilitated dozens of residential learning retreats. He has been exploring diverse approaches to cultivating higher human potentials for over 25 years, including somatic and transpersonal psychology, mindfulness, innovation and creativity, leadership, integral theory, and collective intelligence. Geoff also has over 30 years experience in leadership in business. He holds a master's degree in Transpersonal Psychology from the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology and B.S. in Computer Science, magna cum laude, from Boston University, and has additional studies jazz music, philosophy, and management.

Daniel Görtz

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Daniel is a writer and sociologist, working with the publishing platform Metamoderna (www.metamoderna.org). His daytime job is In-House Philosopher at the Swedish IT company Glimworks and he is committed to developing the philosophy of metamodernism, especially in its political and economic forms.

Marco Morelli

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Marco V Morelli is a founder and lead editor of Metapsychosis— a journal of consciousness, literature, and art— and co-creator of Cosmos Co-op and the Infinite Conversations forum (where he goes by @madrush). He lives in Colorado with his wife, two daughters, and dog, and is working on a poetry book titled I AM THE SINGULARITY.

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Layman Pascal

Layman Pascal is a "white indian" whose family has lived for 5 generations among the remote islands of the Pacific Northwest. He also hates biographies & introductions so bear with him – this is difficult! What we have done already is so much less interesting that what we have not yet done, but I digress – He is (or has been) a meditation teacher, yoga instructor, public speaker, nondual theologian, lecturer on integral methatheory, shamanism advocate, author, artist, bad poet, co-chair of the Foundation for Integral Religion and Spirituality (FIRS), co-editor of the Integral Review Special Issue on Integral Postmetapysical Spirituality and strong contributor to IPMS forums, moderator of the Integral Life forum, and creator of such online oddities as: The Christmas Wiki, Pascal's Integral Batcave, the Integral Demonology Forum, the Integral Morality & Ethics Group, the Integral Gender Studies Forum and more. Currently he runs a Nepalese clothing store, cafe & sacred gift shop in Northern Ontario with his wonderful girlfriend while also practicing hypnotherapy and energy accupressure. Etc.

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Hosts collective insight practice at Alderlore Insight Center; catalyzes generative conversations around topics such as emerging culture, organizational change and complexity science. She leads a kick-ass

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Daniel hosts an interview-based podcast called Emerge (www.emerge.is), and works for an emerging 'metamodern' American political party called OneNation (www.onenation.party). In 2019 Daniel will be working in residence at the Monastic Academy (www.monasticacademy.com).

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Leader in the Integral community in the area of contemplative collective practices. Founder of a trans-symbolic orientation to practice called "We Dreaming." Co-Founder of Rainbolt, a consulting agency which weaves states of group flow and insight into organizational life.

Penelope Whitworth

Tenelope is an integral and transpersonal psychotherapist who has been practicing for 22 years. In addition to being a psychotherapist, she is also a neurofeedback practitioner and certified holistic/functional health coach. She works with a wide variety of issues, from the more "normal" (trauma, eating disorders, addictions, depression, anxiety, relationship issues) to the more unusual (spiritual emergence/emergency and complex/chronic illness). She has been facilitating online discussion groups (a couple dozen of them) in the areas of spirituality, holistic health, and Integral Theory, for the last 10 years, including The Integral Group on Facebook.