

Becoming World Becoming: Embodied Practice in Psychology and Education

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Abstract: In the Integral philosophy of Sri Aurobindo and Haridas Chaudhuri, consciousness and knowing do not suffice. What is crucial is actual participation in the making of the world. Beyond transcendence, there is a creative emergence in historical time of new possibilities of being and becoming. When we meditate, or act in the world, or engage in other kinds of spiritual practices, we directly, concretely, change the ground of our being. We are changed in our bodies and we are changed in our interactions in the world. There is a creative spiral: changes in breath, changes in activity, become changes in consciousness. How we interact, do work, have feeling, changes us, as does our reflection upon them. The conditions, practices and tools of the historical era in which we live shape us as we shape them. What becomes important in practice is to learn tools and perspectives that expand our ability to participate in the making of the world.

Keywords: Creative, emergence, integral, ontology, spiritual practice, somatic psychology, world becoming.

Introduction

What is intriguing to me about the integral philosophy of Sri Aurobindo and Haridas Chaudhuri is that in it, being *becomes*. Birthings, histories and multiple realizations in time matter. For both Aurobindo and Chaudhuri there is an image of World Spirit becoming. Identification with the creative is central to their practice.

In this philosophy, consciousness and knowing do not suffice. What is crucial is participation and presence. We come to realize ourselves as world becoming itself as we participate in the multiple, intersecting, and radiating worlds with which we create and manifest realities. This world making is central to the integral enterprise; and it is this aspect of integral thought that I will develop here.

I begin by turning to language from Haridas Chaudhuri, founder of CIIS, who came to San Francisco from India after a request by several local scholars to the Aurobindo Ashram to send a teacher of integral philosophy and yoga. In his book *The Evolution of Integral Consciousness* Chaudhuri (1977) notes:

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An individual may experience the joy of boundless self-expansion by realizing his oneness with the cosmic whole, but transcendence must be further transcended. For wholeness of being one must appreciate the unique value of his individuality as a creative spark, as a set of dynamic potentials to be actualized for the good of society. (p. 64)

“Transcendence itself must be transcended” means that there is real work to be done in time and space, in the immanent becoming of the world. Aurobindo, it will be remembered, was initially involved in the Indian liberation movement.

In this there is, as Chaudhuri notes in other places, the work of both the conscious and the unconscious aspects of our experience. There is the often-chaotic clash of disparate and contradictory elements as well as transcendent calm.

When we meditate, or act in the world, or engage in other kinds of spiritual practices, we directly, concretely, change the ground of our being. We are changed in the flesh and energetic and fluid substance that we are.

There is a creative spiral. Changes in breath, changes in activity, become changes in consciousness. How we interact, do work, have feeling, changes us, as does our reflection upon them. According to Chaudhuri (1977),

When we understand this, another thing follows. Another feature of creative meditation is what I may call transformation. If your goal is dynamic union with Being in the sphere of human relations and social transactions, then your entire being becomes very precious. Your body, your sense, your ‘I-sense’, even the unconscious impulses, instinctual drives. All these become important. They are the means of action. (p. 123)

Our craft becomes the working of a triad of function that includes consciousness, the unconscious, and practice in the world in which world spirit becomes manifest in its cosmic play. The making of the world is an art in which there is a continual round of being/practice/knowing/becoming.

As Mauro Ceruti (2008) notes with regard to the philosophies of Charles Hartshorne and Freeman Dyson, “...what unifies cosmologies of this type is an ontological reversal; the only possible “essence” of the universe is its history, in its entirety (including its stases, discontinuities, forms, and processes)” (p. 56).

The world is moving and I am moving. We constantly change, and change each other. I meet particular people and am immersed in specific milieus. I create myself daily in my organizations of self and in my responses to the stimulations and attractions of the surround around me. I absorb and practice or resist and refuse the gestures and tones and ideas of the people and media images I encounter.

The conditions, practices and tools of the historical era in which we live also shape us. Each epoch has kinds of work and means of travel, specific ways to find out about and interact with the world. In our contemporary world, we can in short order go to Rome or India or go to the

Internet to find out about Pliny or Aeschylus or D.J. Spooky or Rapso. My fate is intertwined with the people of Iraq and Egypt and North Korea, the possibilities for speech or action or privacy negotiated continually in changing sets of ideas and feelings, fears and aspirations.

As I write this, we have just witnessed the change of regime in Egypt. Tweet by tweet, email by email, television coverage and massings of people in the street organizing themselves changing with the changing situation.

I am not the same me and you are not the same you as when we last talked or since our last sentence. This is not a trivial matter.

Integral Education and Therapy

I now turn to some images of how we might incorporate, literally, this integral perspective in education and therapy. What might a psychology based on what we are talking about look like? How might it describe the difficulties of people and sketch means for changed engagement with self, other, and the world? What educational means would be important to foster imagination, creativity, and participation in the creative emergence in the world? What tools can be given that would be useful to this daily practice of self and world becoming.

In an integral Psychology as outlined here one might first come to valorize all aspects of one's experience and explore their meanings experientially. In several passages in *The Evolution of Integral Consciousness* Chaudhuri (1977) follows this line in suggesting that body, psyche, emotion, interaction, and the formation of institutional practice are all sites of integral practice:

...the physical, the instinctual and the mental are no less important components of the total self than the spiritual and the transcendental. Transcendental consciousness may be more fundamental, more luminous, more revelatory of the structure of reality, but it certainly is not the only reality or the only value that counts. Physical consciousness or body awareness, instinctual drives, reason, and the I-sense (i.e., the sense of individuality), freedom of choice, participation in the creativity of life, etc., are equally real constituents of the total self. There can be no perfect self-realization without the actualization of the physical, emotional, intellectual, social and spiritual potentialities of man[kind]. (p. 62)

He goes on to say that "The methodology of integral psychology can best be described as integral experientialism" (p. 70). He elaborates what he means in another set of statements.

Integral experientialism is therefore a blueprint for thorough investigation of all forms and phases of human experience. It includes in its scope dream experiences as well as waking experiences, drug-induced hallucinatory experiences as well as meditatively acquired ontological insights, dreamless sleep experience as well as transcendental experiences. (p. 71)

Integral psychology is based upon experiences and insights affirming the multi-dimensional richness and indivisible wholeness of the human personality. It is founded

upon the concept of man's total self as the integral unity of uniqueness, relatedness, and transcendence, as the indivisible unity of the experiential and the transcendental. (p. 58)

Integral practice here does not mean striving for a consciousness that excludes not knowing, confusion, difficulty, and the creative, and problematic, workings of the unconscious. There is a creative magma of living experience in which we embody together with other bodies a polylectic of qualities, shapes, meanings and outpourings. We create embodied textures and contours of experience and the possibility of experience. Ideas, images, sounds are tools then for our embodied becoming. Architecture, music, modes of work, and beliefs all shape us and create the experience of our ongoing humanity.

In *Modes of Thought*, Alfred North Whitehead (1938/1958) writes:

There is no reason to hold that confusion is less fundamental than order. Our task is to evolve a general concept that allows room for both... My suggestion is that we start from the notion of two aspects of the Universe. It includes a factor of unity, involving in its essence the connexity [sic] of things, unity of purpose, and unity of enjoyment. ...There is also equally fundamental in the Universe, a factor of multiplicity. There are many actualities, each with its own experience, enjoying individually, and yet requiring each other. (p. 70)

The Caribbean notions of “I and I” and “All of We is one” echoes this double vision. “I and I” is a Rastafarian name of Jah, the Supreme Deity. It is a place of two subjectivities coming together. “All of We is One,” a phrase from C.L.R. James’ novel *Minty Alley* (1997) points to the connected aspect of Universe that Whitehead talks about.

This leads to a couple of other grounds for an integral psychology and education. First, Aurobindo and Chaudhuri both valorized the social, the political, the sense of Institutions and Institutional change. They were concerned with the cultural and cultural variation in experience seeing this diversity as crucial in world becoming. Through cultural exchange the enrichment of creative tools occurs. Chaudhuri (1977) says:

We are living in the twentieth century and we are citizens of the world. It is for us to be able to draw on the limitless wisdom of east and West and North and South. That is the great privilege of modern man. The cultural heritage of the entire human race is open to him. Wherever there is truth, wherever there is wisdom, we can freely draw upon it and bring it together in a grand synthesis. (p. 43)

Chaudhuri (1977, p. 84) also suggests that there is a need for a global education that would include the following points:

1. Promotion of intercultural, interracial, and interreligious understanding;
2. Acceptance of ideological diversity within the global unity of humankind;
3. Affirmation of the intrinsic dignity of all individuals, men and women, everywhere in the world;
4. The essential equality of all races, and peoples, and nations of the world;

5. Interdisciplinary coordination and synthesis;
6. Education for the whole person in his/her multidimensional richness;
7. Comparative studies East and West;
8. Physical fitness and sports;
9. Opportunity for esthetic refinement and creative self expression.

In a possible integral psychology and education, then, it could be recognized that the primary difficulties from which we suffer are:

- Our inability to be part of the process of creative emergence; our getting stuck in old patterns;
- our inability to navigate between and with inner and outer realities;
- our devaluations of aspects of our experience, our desire, and our meaning-making;
- our fixations of self enactment, alone and with others;
- our inability to form patterns of embodied self-reflection; our snarly responses to individual, cultural difference;
- our lack of training in creativity, both personal, interactive, and social; and
- our devaluation of life, body, vitality in ourselves, others, and the world itself.

From these, images of practice flow: We need practice in loving and compassion as well as in the abilities to think and feel and act in multiple ways. We need practice in collaboration and collective action, practice in the plowing and seeding and production of the imagination. We need practice in reflecting upon our living, enacted values. So the means of promoting integral transformation both individual and cultural would be developing psychological and educational practices that directly give tools by which to address all these concerns.

Similarly, Montuori (2005) notes six kinds of learning that are crucial in this epoch: education for pluralism; education for complexity; education for media literacy and the psychology of mass manipulation; education toward co-existence; education that addresses the whole person in terms of reason, emotion, and the capacity for self-deception; education for creativity.

What is common here, and crucial, is that we shape education practices that enable us to better participate in the shaping of the world.

Body

And the forces of speech give way to the language beyond speech — Robert Duncan

As a Professor of Somatic Psychology I, of course, think that the cultivation of bodily approaches to meaning making is a crucial ground of integral psychology and education. For me, the insistence on continually naming experience ‘body’ is a way of giving emphasis to the role of the immediately felt and lived aspects of our totality. In this regard I have adopted for many years what I have called a methodological monist position that holds for a multiplicity of bodily experiences. It is ‘methodological’ in the sense that it is provisional.

In this view dreaming, thinking, sensing, passion, loving, and feeling are all part of a differentiated unity that we are. They can all be experienced as embodied. By emphasizing body, by experiencing the embodied qualities by which we construct our realities, we can come to use what we call bodily experience in an artful way. Our participation in the world changes when we ground our experience in the actual, experienced occasions of our breath, our movements, our rhythms, and our feeling.

Integral practice is practice of body whether body be considered breath or brain, movement or mantra. Becoming is the goal (a goal without an end) and conceptual knowing is station on the way. There is a continual round of knowing/becoming always embodied always imbued with that which is larger than the localization we call us but contained within it as us, as it, as well.

Whatever we practice bodily we become. In an article entitled “*Increased Cortical Representation of the fingers of the left hand in string players*”, Ebert et. al. (1995) demonstrated that violin practice changed brain representations of violinists’ fingers. These players use the fingers of the left hand to change the tones of the strings they are playing. The area of the motor cortex devoted to these fingers was up to five times larger in violinists than non-violinists. Through use there was a structural change in an area of the brain. Similarly, of course, yoga, weight lifting, and martial arts change tissue state, hormonal function and neural structure.

In psychology and education we can learn about how to explore what we have become as body in action in the world. We practice and become kinds of emotional bodies, feeling bodies, acting and moving bodies. We make meaning of loving, of feeling, of music and dance as bodies becoming. We enact ways of being together and being alone, create values of affect and sexuality, kinds of work and kinds of play—all bodily.

From a somatic psychology point of view, we can look at how various aspects of the psyche talked about in say, drive theory, or object relations theory, or relational, Jungian, and transpersonal approaches, can be experienced in their bodily manifestations. We see that the organization of self, and self-with-other, occur through bodily means. We look at how culture and social institutions value, encourage, and reward or punish particular forms of embodied expression, and certain strivings for embodied meaning. We hold that the lived body is both symbol of the past and the making of the future. It is the place where values and meanings are lived.

Chaudhuri (1977) says:

An insight of modern psychology as well as ancient sages is that we are in for trouble if we set up a civil war between the different aspects of our nature. The intelligent thing to do is get to know our own nature—the basic drives, motivations, and fundamental impulses—and have a program of organized fulfillment of them. (p. 117)

In somatic psychology we explore all this and explore it by looking at how it is organized bodily. In doing this we look at the histories of emotion making in the family as the negotiation and creation of shapes of initiation and response. We each get angry, feel loving, feel nothing even through bodily means. As you are reading this text, you can begin to explore literally how

you are doing the listening and from that develop a history of your coming to pay attention in this particular way.

In the clinical work I practice, we look at our embodied past and how we live it currently. I also look at how we can begin to make new worlds, leave old habits behind, and make new possibilities. One practice that I use in teaching psychotherapy praxis is called “body-felt reflection.” In this practice we feel how we have come to enact various values, interactions, interchanges. We literally explore the way breath, movement, tissue state have been and are continuing to be shaped in the moment. We look at, and name the values we have embodied as we feel how we are doing them.

The hope of this practice is learning both what we have done so we can alter it and finding ways to begin the liberation processes by which we can both explore and change what we have done. We can learn here to return to the process of self and other creation and find how we make meaning and values in the practice of the flesh. We can here include the learning from various psychodynamic understandings of the unconscious, cognitive understandings, and spiritual learning about the organization of aspects of consciousness.

We use the means of body-felt reflection to explore how we have structured ourselves in the past and to begin to discern the creative practices we have practiced all our lives in the making and co-creating of the human world. We can also practice new ways of being with others or our selves in our movements, gestures, feelings and expressions. It is like being in art school. Here it is the art of embodied living that is being practiced. Qualities of self-becoming and becoming-with-others are practiced. We use language, poetry song, movement, and mantra. We dream and use our dreams to create the ground of dreaming.

In the education of future therapists in the Somatic Psychology program at CIIS, these same means are used to ground students in their experience of themselves. The idea of art school is even more applicable. Students learn to work the ground of their own being so that they are enabled to be with another or others in practiced and help them come to deep embodied exploration as well. They do embodied dream work, embodied work with representations from the past, work with the embodied creation of new possibility in movement, breath, and emotional interactive range. Theory becomes practice and practice, theory. They learn to sit with, feel, and be compassionate toward the pain, conflict, and ecstasy of human life.

Our experiential work becomes guide and question. What are we doing and how is it being done? What kinds of humanity are we creating in our practice and in what we encourage in our clinical and social practices? What kinds of emotional, interpersonal, creative practices are we encouraging in our clients and why are we encouraging them?

And finally, we teach that the body is the place of creation, of the making of humanity, of the enactment of actual lived values. It is here that the franticness or ease of daily life is practiced, here that the actual qualities of loving, creation, and world becoming are lived.

Creative Emergence

In a collection of papers published by Haridas Chaudhuri and Frederick Spiegelberg (1960) titled *The Integral Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo: A Commemorative Symposium*, N.A. Nikam wrote a now obscure paper “The Problem of Creation: Concepts of Maya and Lila in Sri Aurobindo.” Nikam says: “It is the merit of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy to treat the problem of 'creation' as a problem of the *nature* of existence. Why is there 'creation'? is a question which is a question about: *what* is the nature of reality, of existence?” (Nikam, 1960, p. 143).

In this Nikam seems to echo the question Heidegger and others raised: “Why is there anything at all rather than nothing?” (Heidegger, 1961, p. 1). But Nikam, from an integral perspective, shifts the question.

In Sri Aurobindo's treatment of the problem there are two points to be noted: a) Why the Infinite becomes the finite is a wrong question because we do not understand the true meaning of the word “infinite.” The Infinite is that in which “all possibilities are inherent in its Infinity,” as Sri Aurobindo says, and so, the “delight” of its existence “lies precisely in the variable realization of its possibilities.” b) The variable realization of its possibilities is a movement in which the Infinite “looses” itself as Sri Aurobindo says, by “concealment” in that which seems to be its opposite; so in another sense, “creation” is a process of evolution in which the absoluteness of conscious existence, or Saccidanada, has to “emerge.” All creation or Becoming is nothing but this self-manifestation. (Nikam, 1960, p. 146)

He goes on to say that:

...the world, according to Sri Aurobindo, is not *maya* but *lila*: i.e., a play, a and joy of play, wherever this is found: “the child's joy, the poet's joy, the actor's joy, the mechanician's joy...;” the cause and purpose of play is: being ever busy with its own innumerable self-representations. When the discovery of self-delight of being is really made—this is possible for everyone—then we have mastered the great art of living. (p. 147)

In the integral practice Chaudhuri outlines, we align ourselves with the creative aspect of World Spirit becoming. We live from, act toward a creative emergence in which valorization, meaning, and, above all, delight in world play continually manifest. We come to know ourselves as World Spirit in its imaginal becomings. We create, in history, social worlds, material worlds, and even the natural worlds as well.

In our practice we can come to identify with the creative outflow into the world: the making of world becoming. It is like the prescription in the alchemical treatise *The Emerald Tablet of Hermes Trismegistus*:

Separate the earth from the fire, the subtle from the gross,
It ascends from the earth to the heaven, and again descends to the earth,
And thereby gathers the strength of all things above, and of

All things below,
 Thus was the world created and
 Hence shall wonderful adaptations be achieved, of which the means is here.
 (quoted in Smith, 1997, p. 7)

In the alchemical work described in the Emerald Tablet there is a rising up, a separation of Spirit and Matter, and a being born again. This is followed by a descent back into the world, a third birth in which Spirit and Matter are again seen and experienced as whole and creatively potent. We then, as it is said, hold the power of all things.

In another alchemical text, *Atalanta Fugiens*, written by Michael Maier (1617/1989), there are pictures, epigrams, and poems that indicate aspects of the alchemical process. One image shows the Philosopher's stone as existing everywhere to be developed. Others show the process of pain, dissolution, and joy accompanying the work of making the world.

Chaudhuri says:

The imperative of life is to focus on the living present, to concentrate on a reasonable span in the present life with all its challenges and opportunities, with all its glories and frustrations, with all its rights and responsibilities, with all its dark nights of despair and bright days of creative achievement. Active participation in the living present creatively advances into a glorious future. (Chaudhuri, 1977, p. 58)

Aurobindo's integral vision was born in the struggle to go past colonialism, past the split between the spiritual and the material, and past varying traditional senses of self. It de-centers the self and the other and inherited histories as well. Integral practice includes working with the sick and the poor, working with the dispossessed, working in history toward change. It is ongoing manifestation and creation in immediate and transcendent presence.

We practice embodied manifestations. I think here of the Jewish Kabbalist Abraham Abulafia (1976) whose practice was the combination of the names of God. In integral practice each thing of the world, as in the alchemical image from *Atalanta Fugiens* talked about earlier, comes to be seen in its divine manifestation. These multifarious manifestations are combined in embodied thought, practice, art, and interactions with others. In this creative dance we join with, become, world becoming.

I end here with several lines from the poet Robert Duncan:

First there is the power; and in the power
 Is the tone or tune,
 So that all of creation moves with a music;
 the sound having its open doors in the mind;
 but in the heart lieth its fountain.
 (Duncan, 1977, p. 127)

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