

**Enacting an Integral Revolution:
How Can We Have Truly Radical Conversations in a Time of Global Crisis?**

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Abstract

This paper begins by setting forth the basic facts of our current world crisis and the injunction this crisis implicitly sets before each and all of us to change our lives and ways of relating to one another, explaining how this has inspired recent innovations in my dialogic praxis—an emergent form of ragged truth-telling and inquiry. It begins by defining “rhetoric” as the effective communication of a knowable message to others, and “trans-rhetorical praxis” as a form of inquiry that uses but also goes beyond rhetoric to get to the end of what is known and explore what is unknown to the participants in the dialog. Doing this in passionate service of breaking through into effectively addressing our shared urgent challenges *now* is what I call here “*Integral Trans-Rhetorical Praxis*”. This approach to discourse intends to *uplift* rather than *persuade*. It is co-enacted by all participants (rather than enacted upon some by others) and crosses perspectival boundaries (I, We, It), even integrating types of discourse (parrhesiastic, prophetic, sagistic, and technical), while raising “truth-listening” to co-equal status with “truth-telling.” This paper describes how integral trans-rhetorical praxis has emerged, notes its philosophical and practical antecedents, clarifies the form and art of its practice, and identifies some features of the nature of its “community of the adequate”. Next, it discusses how integral trans-rhetorical praxis relates to various dialogue, intersubjective and “We-Space” practices. It then describes the highest experiments in integral trans-rhetorical praxis that have thus emerged, and speculates about what might potentially emerge from artful community engagement of this praxis. Finally, it calls on the reader to take the implications of this to heart directly.

For some years, I have engaged a deep contemplation of the moral, existential, and creative challenges and opportunities presented by our turbulent times: a historical and evolutionary moment in which a “perfect storm” of unprecedented global crises seems to be brewing. Seven billion of us *homo sapiens* are on the planet, and many of us are newly aware of, but fumbling in our attempts to respond to, the enormously devastating and accelerating impacts we are having on the planet, its atmosphere and weather, its natural environments, and other species (many of which are going extinct at a rate not seen in 65 million years). Most of our credible scientists question whether the human species will be able to survive a planet whose carbon-enriched atmosphere promises to alter global climate and weather, melt polar icecaps, inundate our coasts, desertify vast regions, and worse. Meanwhile, our political, social, economic, financial, cultural, agricultural, and religious dynamics—as well as healthcare, education, media, and other institutions and infrastructure—are all in serious crisis *simultaneously*. A dramatic, positive, transformative, cultural, and evolutionary leap seems necessary if we are to avert catastrophic evolutionary regression into dystopian conditions. Something analogous to the periods of rapid biological evolution visible in the fossil record and noted by Niles Eldridge, Steven Jay Gould and others (the punctuation marks in a pattern of “punctuated equilibrium” (1972)) is required.

The impossible questions posed by this crisis have been a key driver of my own inquiry, philosophical practice, and experiments in rhetorical and trans-rhetorical expression. After all, if I am not a passive observer (or “victim”) but ultimately a co-enactor of this global crisis (which is implicit in integral theory) then there must be unseen opportunities to participate creatively in the process through which human beings can awaken to how we are creating the global crisis and learn to navigate it in a healthy manner. An integral worldview makes it preposterous to defer responsibility for the world crisis to political, corporate, and celebrity “masters of the universe.” No integrally informed individual can legitimately live and operate as if impotent, without the opportunity to creatively engender a transformation of human culture. Where could the opportunity and responsibility for a turnaround lie, if not-- at least to some tiny degree-- with each of us, including you and me? If I take my responsibility seriously, then, I must

live with the question of how to enact it more effectively, finding leverage points for positive systemic changes. That inquiry will only keep evolving and deepening, and is vital and existential. Even though I am fundamentally optimistic, it is an engaged optimism, suffused with a sense of possibility and responsibility, in no way overconfident or blasé. The crisis presses upon me subjectively, and it presses upon us all collectively, whether we know it or not. It demands change. It is the single inquiry that brings coherence to a fragmented post-modern human world. As Peter Sloterdijk (2013) eloquently expressed it:

The only authority that is still in a position to say ‘You must change your life!’ is the global crisis, which, as everyone has been noticing for some time, has begun to send out its apostles. Its authority is real because it is based on something unimaginable of which it is the harbinger: the global catastrophe. One need not be religiously musical to understand why the Great Catastrophe had to become the goddess of the century. As it possesses the aura of the monstrous, it bears the primary traits that were previously ascribed to the transcendent powers: it remains concealed, but makes itself known in signs; it is on the way, yet already authentically present in its portents; it reveals itself to individual intelligences in penetrating visions, yet also surpasses human understanding; it takes certain individuals into its service and makes prophets of them; its delegates turn to the people around them in its name, but are fended off as nuisances by most. On the whole, its fate is much like that of the God of monotheism when He entered the stage scarcely three thousand years ago: His mere message was already too great for the world, and only the few were prepared to begin a different life for His sake. In both cases, however, the refusal of the many increases the tension affecting the human collective. Since the global catastrophe began its partial unveiling, a new manifestation of the absolute imperative has come into the world, one that directs itself at everyone and nobody in the form of a sharp admonition: ‘Change your life! Otherwise its complete disclosure will demonstrate to you, sooner or later, what you failed to do during the time of portents!’ (p.444)

Accordingly, this has been the primary focus of my work for some time. Ten years ago, I was in the midst of researching and writing a deep analysis and contemplation of these issues, *The Terrible Truth and the Wonderful Secret: Answering the Call of Our Evolutionary Emergency* (Patten, 2004). Since then, I convened an online teleseminar series, *Beyond Awakening: The Future of Spiritual Practice*, in which I have conducted over 75 public conversations with leading intellectuals, spiritual teachers, and thought leaders, and asked the question: “Exactly how can higher consciousness enable the human species to rise to meet the unique challenges of our time?” I have also begun work with Marco Morelli on a new book (an evolution of *The Terrible Truth*) entitled *The Integral Revolution: The Future of Consciousness, Culture, and Society in the Planetary Age*. The first public expression of that effort was a blog post, *Occupy Integral!*, that called for the integral movement to “really, really change the world.” (Patten & Morelli, 2012) All these writings have been co-generated and informed by parallel “outer work” as an environmental and political activist (in various projects including some of my own initiatives like *Integral in Iran* and *Integral Obama*). Additionally, I have given a series of public talks and seminars on this topic, some of which gave rise to the rhetorical (or rather *trans*-rhetorical) experiments that are the subject of this paper.

In the process, I have again and again (often publicly) re-examined the assumptions in the preceding paragraphs, asking myself fundamental questions to open up my relationship to this enormous topic. For example, it is not unanimous that our time is unique. In public dialogues on my *Beyond Awakening* series, A.H. Almaas (2011) challenged the very idea that we are facing an unprecedented crisis, pointing out that humanity has always faced critical life-and-death challenges, unwilling to grant that overpopulation and the disruption of atmospheric balance represent challenges of a radically new magnitude. Roger Walsh (2011) and Byron Katie (2011) “turned the interview around,” asking me to look at my passion about this topic and whether my care might be based on unexamined assumptions, such as an inability to fully accept the prospect of evolutionary regression into dystopia or even human extinction, or perhaps an insistence on presuming that I, or we, can do anything at all about it, that these enormous

processes may not be “my business” but rather “God’s business.” Ram Dass (2010) suggested that the only way to account for the world crisis is simply to “be love,” saying something parallel to the message of radical awakening expressed by Adyashanti (2010), Gangaji (2010), and other spiritual teachers. In many private and public conversations, I’ve deeply combined myself with Jeff Salzman’s eloquent and spirited affirmations of faith in the power and positive directionality of cultural evolution (and similar expressions from other integralists such as Ken Wilber, Michael Zimmerman, and Steve McIntosh).

I have been served by these challenges and moderating influences; through them, my understanding has been tempered and has become far nuanced. My disposition has deepened, becoming simultaneously more joyful, free, and lighthearted on one hand, and more sober, serious, and committed on the other. Nevertheless, key facts remain. Even though I endeavor to bring epistemic humility to this discussion, and see clearly that reality exceeds and eludes all our modeling and languaging, the crisis that seems to loom (at least in my view, assessed and measured as realistically and empirically as possible) is overwhelmingly likely to be real, and demands to be taken very seriously.

It still seems to me that it is fundamentally different to face an existential threat to one’s tribe, nation, or race (which has happened throughout human history) than to face such a threat to a significant proportion of existing species, including our own, and even to the supportive conditions of our planet and biosphere. We still face a unique new opportunity and challenge to adapt tremendously sophisticated interconnected systems and meta-systems, which have never previously existed, to these crisis conditions. We can, and will, bring sophisticated, contemporary, scientifically-informed foresight to our responses to these evolutionary crises and pressures; Doing such is an act of “conscious evolution,” which I have argued, elsewhere, represents a momentous “phase change” in human evolution¹. And even though I relate to our crises optimistically, as a “birth” rather than a “death” process, I regard optimism as a moral imperative rather than as a

¹ Please see Patten & Hubbard’s (2010), *The Integral Implications of Conscious* for more information.

rational assessment and prediction.

Many scientists today are sounding the alarm, and their data asks us to contemplate a level of planetary devastation (to human-friendly conditions) that is so disorienting as to evoke reflexive denial and avoidance. Thus, it is my assessment that denial is a pervasive response (perhaps even healthy in some respects) that is nearly universally socially reinforced by our consensus to attend to “business as usual.” It is likewise my assessment that most “optimism” masks underlying denial. I have arrived at a radically positive orientation to awakening, activism, and cultural transformation. However, there is an important distinction between grounded, soberly realistic optimism and optimism that defends against a deeper existential confrontation with the disorienting dilemma of being alive in a time of global threats to human civilization and our biosphere, and I intuit that only the former is equal to the task before us.

In the face of that imminent enormity (even though it does not eclipse or diminish the innate joy and freedom granted by the even greater immanent and transcendental enormity) I am compelled to change my own life, certainly, and to risk making myself a nuisance attempting insight and action catalyzing a breakthrough enabling us to change *our* lives on every scale and in every arena where I sense real possibility. The times present us all with a series of impossible questions that we, and I, cannot ignore. Like a *Zen koan*, this mega- and meta-question must be *lived* as an ongoing inquiry with sincerity and authenticity and fierceness and surrender, and with no escape. This may yield insight and even acceptable partial “answers” at times, but its greatest power, here as in the monastery, is that it can exert a transformational pressure and pull upon our consciousness, behavior, and relations.

I must relate to this *koan* seriously, presuming that it can transform everything. And since I share this koan with everyone alive now, I must join with others who also recognize and pay attention to this same *genjokoan* (a koan presented by everyday life) because it can only *begin to be* answered individually; this global *genjokoan* presses us, each and all, toward a seemingly impossible level of collective and cooperative coherence and behavior change.

The Limits of Rhetoric

To participate in enacting an integral revolution, this paper asserts that I, and we, must “pull out all the stops” in how we relate to this transformation of culture and talk about it—and life—with one another. It is not a problem we can simply “figure out” from a position of presumed objectivity. Contributions can be made in that mode, certainly. However, taking the position of dispassionate observer (although it is a necessary and valuable mode of consideration) rather than facilitating a clear and engaged form of seeing, often tends to engender an attitude of abstracted disconnected immunity. But this is an existential challenge, and it asks for a level of discourse that can shift not only our conceptions but our very ground, our whole way of being in the world. If we take our crisis seriously, the self-indulgence of “objective” immunity reveals itself as morally indefensible, because it abstracts the consideration, neutering its existential impact on us, and removing us from exactly what it primarily calls for—real participation. Relating to the world crisis in that fashion prevents it from shifting our ground and very *way* of being, which is the first step of any response sufficiently grounded to effectively address both the exterior and interior dynamics that must be addressed. This is a holistic dynamic, not one that can be fixed by employing new and better tools. It implicates and requires transformation of the *tool-user*. So the kind of discourse appropriate to the crisis must speak from and reach into the hearts, guts, feet, minds, and ground of each and every participant.

The *koan* we face will not be fulfilled until we co-enact communications and behaviors that adequately account for interior and exterior dynamics in individuals and groups, and in natural and human systems on local, regional, national, global, and personal scales in the midst of a rapidly-changing multidimensional and unprecedented global crisis. We are called to “wrap our heads” (and whole embodied beings) around quite a lot!

This paper describes my attempt to do this. It has been by its nature challenging and disorienting; it is not an insignificant feat of complex thinking, but doubly difficult because it must be engaged in defiance of the “consensus trance” that tends to draw all people toward sleep and disconnection, and which patterns most people’s consciousness

and many of our conversations (and all popular media and cultural communications) and thus tends to shape my consciousness (since I am, like everyone else, a social creature whose interior reality and behavior tend to be strongly influenced by how I, and the world, are seen by others). So, like any other practitioner, it has not been easy for me to continually generate the vigor, humor, verve, and penetrating clarity this inquiry requires. It's a very tall order!

Harder, by its very nature, is the fact that the integrated implications this feat of complex thinking *must* be shared. And that presents an equally challenging task to everyone with whom one might hope to share it, each of whom is unique, and at a different moment in the process of authentically reckoning with the larger *koans* of our existential and cultural moment. That is why human beings have, for the most part, been unable to join together to address these challenges effectively, despite their extreme urgency and importance.

Since our crisis is demanding large-scale *collective* behavior changes, and since there are severe limits to what can be accomplished via top-down political processes on a public scale, and via abstract technocratic analysis and policy, part of what is called for is that human beings come to *want* to change, and to want to change *together*, coherently. Since we will undoubtedly be culturally, typologically, and developmentally diverse, and thus will understand the process in a range of different ways, there will need to be at least a critical mass of people co-operating coherently at a higher order of consciousness. That means many of us will need to become capable of a remarkable kind of enlightened intimacy, authenticity, vulnerability and shared passion. That would be an existential breakthrough, individually and intersubjectively. Toward that end, even the smallest experiments toward a new level of enlightened commitment, openness, intimacy, and authenticity are worthwhile and perhaps significant. To the degree they succeed, they have the potential to transform individuals who will share them with others, such that this kind of experiment in praxis, as a meme, will tend to spread, joining with other related experiments to inform the collective interiors of this critical inflection point in the evolution of human culture.

Rhetoric & Trans-Rhetorical Communication

William Torbert famously identified four kinds of speech: framing, advocating, illustrating, and inquiring (Torbert, 2004, pp 27-37). The first three of these, and sometimes the fourth, are *rhetorical*² in nature. That is, they are kinds of speech that begins with the clear intention to communicate something as effectively (and perhaps persuasively) as possible. Most human communications are rhetorical. Some communications, even though rhetorical, are especially sophisticated and even noble. They are intended to *uplift* the listener and proceed with deep respect. This contrasts with conventionally rhetorical speech that intends merely to *persuade* the listener to the speaker's point of view. Some are *meta*-communications, the teaching of distinctions, of pattern-languages, and of methodologies of communication and personal and social change. Although the word rhetoric today is most often used pejoratively to mean "language that is elaborate, pretentious, insincere, or intellectually vacuous," in its classical sense, rhetoric is necessary and pervasive, and spans a spectrum of communications from among the most base to the most noble and high. Even so, and even though it is by far the most common kind of speech, not all speech is merely rhetorical. *As I use the term here, rhetorical speech has the purpose of effectively communicating a defined message, directly or indirectly.* Many conversational expressions are empathic and affiliative rather than rhetorical. Others express shared inquiry. More germane to this paper, one *must* speak *trans-rhetorically* to investigate the unknown, especially to collaboratively engage in inquiry, particularly an open-ended inquiry that will deepen stage by stage to an unknown depth and height.

Ken Wilber's all-quadrant, all-level (AQAL) Integral Theory (IT) presents a powerful "theory of everything," including the attempt at a comprehensive accounting for the key interior and exterior structures of our multi-dimensional reality, at least in outline form. One aspect of its genius is the *rhetoric* implicit in it. In the context of Wilber's remarkably large and detailed oeuvre, AQAL Integral Theory sets forth a very clear and memorable set of powerful distinctions, or memes, each of which reveals dimensional

² Classically, *rhetoric* has meant "the art or study of using language effectively and persuasively" which is the sense in which rhetoric is examined here (The American Heritage Online Dictionary).

insights, and which, when combined, offer a psychoactive glimpse and a vocabulary for describing, mapping, and making sense of the otherwise bewildering plethora of perspectives that appear in an evolving panentheistic Kosmos of interiors and exteriors. This constitutes a *rhetoric*, whose power is demonstrated by the tens of thousands of educated intelligent people worldwide who use the vocabulary of AQAL (along with additional distinctions contributed by many other integral philosophers including, just to name a few, Beck, Cohen, Edwards, Esbjörn-Hargens, Forman, McIntosh, Murphy, Torbert, Ucik, Walsh, and Zimmerman) to understand and describe the world, and the fact that it has been used at the highest levels of private and government organizations worldwide. In this sense, rhetoric is a very good thing. As the eminent historian of philosophy Pierre Hadot (1995) succinctly put it, this has tremendous “persuasive force...[and] psychological efficacy...which...enable the philosopher to orient himself in the world” (p.216).

What I’m calling “Integral Trans-Rhetorical Praxis” arises in the context of the powerful rhetorical foundation provided by Integral Theory. Integral Theory offers not only theory but also points to practice, and offers a set of orienting generalizations about that practice (embodied in *Integral Life Practice*, a book I co-authored with Wilber). This praxis³ arises in the context of an international community of practice that has been made possible by the power of the rhetoric of Integral Theory.

That said, Integral Trans-Rhetorical Practice arises in the context of an effort to transcend the limits of what can be accomplished through even the most powerful rhetorical communication. The deepest ancient purpose of philosophy was, in the words of Socrates, one of the founders of Western philosophy, “the cultivation of virtue.” His philosophy was “a way of life.” Pierre Hadot (1995), the eminent historian of philosophy, asserts that the greatest ancient and modern philosophy consists not primarily of abstract theories (although they certainly have a complementary function) but of “spiritual exercises” directed at transforming the philosopher’s worldview, personality, and very

³ Here “integral praxis” is used to mean a methodology for accomplishing anything that is undertaken with the intention that both the methodology and the tool-user will be subject to ongoing cycles of reflection through which they will undergo change and transformation.

way of being. Socratic dialogue, seen thus, was the original quintessential philosophical practice. Hadot (1995) goes on to say,

There is a great deal more philosophy in spiritual exercises like Socrates' dialogues than in the construction of a philosophical system. The task of dialogue consists essentially in pointing out the limits of language, and its inability to communicate moral and existential experience. Yet the dialogue itself, qua event and spiritual activity, already constitutes a moral and existential experience, for Socratic philosophy is not the solitary elaboration of a system, but the awakening of consciousness, and accession to a level of being which can only be reached in a person-to-person relationship. (p. 163)

This effort is accounted for and can even said to be implied by AQAL integral theory: To be a fully conscious and creative participant in a four-quadrant Kosmos, in which all interiors and exteriors are evolving, animated and propelled by inherently creative *entelechy*, or *Eros*, we must ourselves evolve progressively into more adequate structures and states of consciousness. And we must participate, too; the integral scholar is a co-creative co-enactor of whatever s/he studies, inseparable, rather than "objective" and immune. S/he must be a scholar-*practitioner*, not merely a scholar. The practice of the integral scholar, being integral, includes all of life: every dimension of life and every moment. It implies a global lifelong practice of personal self-transcendence and self-transformation⁴.

That transformation is not a solitary individual project; it's one that can only be completely fulfilled by finding expression in all four quadrants. This implies (LL) *intersubjective* development, a participation in the ongoing transformation of the quality of our relationships with others, our very way of relating, and ultimately of our subculture(s), culture and society. Ultimately, it even implies (LR) the creative intention to extend evolution into the ongoing transformation of our social, economic, and political

⁴ Please see Wilber, Patten, Leonard & Morelli. (2008) *Integral Life Practice* for more information.

systems and infrastructure⁵.

This is a grand vision that offers a powerful theoretical rationale for a revolutionary transformation of consciousness, culture, and society. It is widely appreciated among integral scholar-practitioners that the theory offers important clarifying insights into the clashes of civilizations, culture wars, breakdowns of discourse, and political gridlock that seem to be creating an “inversion layer” preventing the rapid cultural transformation that is obviously so urgently needed. Integral philosophy has spawned, and continues to spawn, an international community of highly-evolved and sophisticated practitioners and projects, including a significant number of truly inspiring initiatives.

Even so, the rapid growth of the integral community that took place in the early 2000s has slowed in the 2010s. Meanwhile our world crises and political and cultural deadlocks are only intensifying. I, like many other leaders of the international integral community, live with the frustrating awareness that we seem to be “playing a game of miles and yet are seeing progress only in inches and feet.”

A shadow of the power of the rhetoric of Integral Theory can be seen in the tendency of integral scholar-practitioners to express themselves in Wilber’s rhetorical mode — using Wilber’s vocabulary as the basis for insightfully noticing key abstract distinctions and setting forth orienting generalizations that clarify a big-picture “30,000 foot” view of the territory. Thus, the attention of some integral thinkers tends to zoom back to grasp “the big picture.” Integral theory points to the challenging fact that this vital inquiry will not be understood and discussed in the same terms by everyone who must necessarily agree or at least cooperate in order to enact it. The inquiry itself was already profoundly disorienting and demanding. The job of translating it across so many “languages” complexifies it tremendously. The tremendous explanatory power of Integral Theory easily seems to provide an excuse to bypass the transformative existential confrontation in a flight to abstraction: “Aha! We have an amazingly comprehensive key to help with the needed translations! Let’s consider the messages that need to be

⁵ Please see Patten and Morelli’s (2012) *Occupy Integral* for more information.

fashioned and targeted!” The best-developed response of integral scholar-practitioners to the world crisis has been the technical and strategic designing of communications. In the process we have joined in the popular and predominant bypass of the foundational process—our ongoing deep authentic existential confrontation—and the transformational fire and efficacy of the *koan* is bypassed even by us. This exponential leap in the quality of our tools can distract us from the more immediate task, the existential transformation of the tool-*user(s)*.

Let’s not forget that Integral theory asserts the value of *all* perspectives. The mouse-eye view sees and hears and sniffs out realities that can’t be perceived by the eagle. First-person and second-person expressions are no less valid than third-person. And large-scale abstractions, however valuable, are not the only or even the most powerful and necessary perceptual and communicative modality. No rhetorical communication, no matter how skillful or powerful, can convey what is unknown to the speaker. When one wants to explore the unknown or unknowable, mere rhetoric can’t help. True inquiry requires a different mode of discourse, what I call here a “trans-rhetorical praxis.” I call it “trans-rhetorical” because it has a purpose, like rhetoric, and it builds upon rhetorical foundations; that is, a conversation can begin with framing and illustration and even advocacy, but then in order to go further it must go beyond rhetorical expression into a profound inquiry.

My Experiments with Integral Trans-Rhetorical Practice

Since the world crisis and the limits of rhetoric ask for a different kind of discourse, my public lectures began to shift gears. I felt called to be creative not just in terms of the content of my discourse but even in terms of its modality. So, it is in this context that my exploration of new forms of dialogue, dialectic, and rhetoric that what I am here calling “trans-rhetorical praxis” first emerged. The origins of this paper and my articulation of integral trans-rhetorical praxis date to July 2012, when Terri O’Fallon suggested that I was embodying some innovations in my praxis of communication and encouraged me to identify them directly and make them available to others.

In the midst of teaching objective facts and ideas via third-person discourse, I

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found myself feeling compelled to shift gears, and to break the stream of the discourse to speak directly, passionately and vulnerably to the audience. I was speaking in a confessional mode, in a daring and self-revealing fashion, disclosing my own feelings about the perspectives and facts I had been teaching and illustrating in third-person mode a few minutes before. This is something many speakers do, but I found myself pushing it further than I had ever seen it done before, disclosing not just the questions I am asking, and the deepening of my inquiry, but even my struggles and existential anguish, not as something I had already experienced and resolved, but illuminating the living inquiry alive in me, even narrating the voices inside me debating how to relate to those facts and feelings—not apologetically, but as an invitation to my listeners to join me in their own version of a similarly passionate inquiry. This had a dramatic effect on my audience or conversation partners, and even to our shared intersubjective field. Although I was not a performer in a play, the effect was almost like that of “breaking the fourth wall”⁶ and exposing us to each other in the room, each of us involved nakedly in our own version of the existential confrontation I was revealing and dramatizing. This simple shift broke through a certain detachment and immunity that had previously prevented the discourse from implicating us and catalyzing a living transformational confrontation. No amount of third-person discourse could have accomplished this breakthrough.

Before long, I saw that this breakthrough had opened up new intersubjective possibilities, so I took it another step. I began speaking directly, in second-person mode, to the nature of our shared experience in that potentized field. For example, I directly spoke to the awkwardness I sensed many of those in the room felt, and that I too felt, as we held various paradoxical tensions and injunctions and inquiries, and as we were becoming more existentially exposed to one another. I described how uncomfortable and

⁶ The **fourth wall** is the imaginary "wall" at the front of the stage in a traditional three-walled box set in a proscenium theatre, through which the audience sees the action in the world of the play. [1][2] The idea of the fourth wall was made explicit by philosopher and critic Denis Diderot and spread in 19th-century theatre with the advent of theatrical realism. [3] which extended the idea to the imaginary boundary between any fictional work and its audience. Speaking directly to or otherwise acknowledging the audience through the camera in a film or television program, or through this imaginary wall in a play, is referred to as "breaking the fourth wall" and is considered a technique of metafiction, as it penetrates the boundaries normally set up by works of fiction." And citing this website accessed 4.30.2013: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fourth_wall (Wikipedia online Encyclopedia).

alive it is to do that “in full view” of one another, and how intimate it could potentially enable us to be, and how it suggests a new kind of praxis and responsibility. I invited them to acknowledge their own experience, and on occasions some confessed similar perceptions, experiences, and feelings. This sometimes opened up a deep well in which powerful, apparently contradictory passions surge—including fierce protective love, deep grief and anguish, dark suicidal despair, fierce determination, ferocious rage, and a noble, sacrificial willingness to ride into battle with a sense of transcendent commitment and joyous abandon. I sometimes even pointed out that it is a practice for each of us to allow and participate in this level of discourse and intimacy with each other, and how different that was from the level of discourse, intimacy, and vulnerability to which we were accustomed, and how that implied a developmental trajectory with plenty of room for growth for all of us. So I invited people to notice an injunction of individual *and* intersubjective practice, helping us all to notice our inhibitions and the potential for deeper communication and radically greater intimacy.

Essentially, I looked people in the eye, and said something to the effect of, “Even if we can’t see how, we must presume that we can redeem the cliché and actually *be* the change that unlocks the stuck game in which we’re all co-creating this horrific global crisis. And there must be some way that we can shift right now that can more authentically enact that change; it’s right here in this room between us. We usually don’t believe this and almost always act as though that’s not true, but it is; logically it *must be—do you see this too?* If so, how can we show up more authentically right now?” By doing this I invited people into unknown potentially richly creative territory. It can help the dialog transform into a daring, edgy living experiment, with the potential for generative creative novelty. It is certainly a risky move, and I have not always pulled it off successfully. But magic happened the first time I attempted it, and subsequent experiments have met with some level of success more often than not. When people have responded, this has profoundly deepened and further intensified the catalytic challenge and activation experienced by each participant and the subtle energetic shift in the intersubjective space of the group.

I described this kind of dialog with some friends and colleagues, and invited them

into it, and in a few of these one-on-one conversations we replicated the process and both of us entered into significantly more intimate and powerful high states of insight, intimacy, passion, and activation. (This was possible, of course, because these people were already deep practitioners, willing to relax defensive and compensatory patterns, and in touch with profound existential depth, high and low, and capable of taking sophisticated perspectives. Participants must be “adequate” in their development for any praxis to be possible.) For both my dialog partners and for me, something remarkable occurred; a dramatic subtle energetic phenomenon manifested, which I will go on to describe and discuss in more detail below.

“Dialog,” Integral “We-Space” and Other Streams of Trans-Rhetorical Praxis

I am hardly the first to engage trans-rhetorical experiments. Communicating wonder and inquiring into the unknown are among the most basic natural ways we speak to one another when rested intimately in our existential ground. Elements of inquiry and shared feeling (communicated trans-rhetorically) have permeated the history of spirituality, philosophy, and the practice of prayer. Emile Durkheim (1915) famously asserted that religion originally arose as a way for people to experience themselves as bigger and more alive in the intersubjective field of a group entering into higher states of consciousness. Open-ended inquiry is particularly evident in celebrated communities of “scenius” (Kelly 2008) such as the French *philosophes*, the early Romantics, the American transcendentalists, the salons of Paris, and the Algonquin roundtable. (Currently, trans-rhetorical “We-Space” explorations have become a popular focus of practice and excitement within the Integral community. In the following section I’ll offer a summary of those explorations and their roots⁷.

Ever since David Bohm’s first dialog with Jiddu Krishnamurti in 1965, and especially since essays Bohm wrote in the 1970s began to circulate (and more so after the publication in 1991 of *Dialog—A Proposal* by David Bohm, Donald Factor and Peter

⁷ For the sake of brevity this summary generalizes shamelessly, offering imperfect generalizations that I think will be helpful to the reader, but which fail to make explicit or even blur many important distinctions and which do not point to or explore significant and relevant related issues.

Garrett) a *field* of dialog study has emerged and developed rapidly. It interacted with the group facilitation practices that had emerged from encounter groups and group therapy practices dating back to the 1950s, and then with other communication practices and techniques. This field has a significant literature, leading practitioners, specialists, learnable methodologies and schools, communities of particular practice (e.g., World Café, Open Space Technology, Collective Intelligence, Dynamic Facilitation, Theory U, among many others) each with its own *praxes*—facilitation (or not), ground rules, numbers of participants, procedures, positive and negative injunctions and guidance. Some engage open-ended inquiry, like Bohmian dialog, while others adapt the practices so groups can achieve agreements and results. This field is alive and evolving rapidly in many segments of contemporary culture.

It is quite significant that Bohm originally framed what he called “dialogue” as a way to address the very overarching problem that has driven my experimentation—the world crisis. He viewed war, systemic injustice and dysfunction, unsustainable practices and environmental degradation as expressions of incoherence and fragmentation *at the level of thought*. In a radical move that parallels that of the non-dual enlightenment traditions critiqued by his conversation partner, Jiddu Krishnamurti, Bohm even critiqued the presumption at the center of thought, that of a “central entity” or “self” and mechanisms to protect it, including judgments and opinions and fixed points of view. According to him, this fragmentation of thought prevented authentic shared meaning, and “shared meaning is really the cement that holds society together and you could say that the present society has very poor quality cement...a very incoherent set of meanings” (Bohm, 1996, p. ix). This tends to prevent human beings from really communicating with each other in a way that is adequate to our situation, which is inherently paradoxical. Instead, our fragmented thought tends to approach paradoxes as if they were problems and attempt to solve them. However, what is required is “sustained attention to the paradox itself” (Bohm, 1996 p. xxiii-xxiv). For this, he proposed “dialog” which requires an environment of free inquiry not directed at making any group decisions, in which participants suspend assumptions and opinions and judgments, and yet participate as honestly and transparently as possible, and attempt to respond to and build upon others’

contributions to the dialog process. He saw dialog as having a potential for “transforming culture and freeing it of destructive misinformation, so that creativity can be liberated.” Thus, Bohm’s *ends* were transformational and even radical (and thus of special relevance to the thrust of this paper), but his *means* have been so highly influential that they’ve almost overshadowed his ultimate purposes. His injunctions to *suspend assumptions, opinions and judgments, to participate honestly and transparently, and to stay connected to others’ participation* are the foundation practices that make possible the “higher intersubjectivity” and “We-Space” phenomena that are now becoming popular in the integral community (especially as elaborated by Scharmer and Varela, as cited and described most usefully by Olen Gunnlaugson in several key papers and presentations). In his two interviews with Otto Scharmer, Francisco Varela summarized three “gestures for becoming aware”: “(1) Suspension, (2) Redirection, and (3) Letting Go (and Letting Come)”. In Scharmer’s *Presencing and Generative Dialog* they are codified as a methodology. The individual is directed (1) to **suspend** thoughts, emotions and judgments as they arise with the intention of seeing through the tendency to live from past associations and previous knowledge to enhance the ability to connect in the present with what is, and (2) to continually **redirect** attention back into the present moment, paying attention “to the source rather than the object,” thus redirecting the place of listening from within oneself as a separate individual to subtly participating in co-enacting a group field, and (3) **Letting Go** of resistance and loosening the grip of the familiar self-sense, thus changing one’s quality of attention from “looking for” to “letting come” (Scharmer, 2000).” More recently, Gunnlaugson and Moze (2012) distilled what is perhaps the essence of this practice, “surrendering into witnessing.”

Those widespread and foundational practices have been complemented by another stream of practice injunctions directed towards evoking a “higher intersubjectivity” which dates to July 30, 2001. On that day, after a period of intense, demanding, dramatic and highly controversial (Yenner, 2008) effort and practice, requiring that students “dig deep” with “humility, courage, and conviction...see through...delusions, abandon... defenses, accept the stark but true facts, and... embrace... greater freedom and responsibility” (Phipps 2001), a dramatic “intersubjective enlightenment” event was

reported among a group of Andrew Cohen's close students. This was described a "collective, volcanic surge of spiritual illumination that carried with it, above all else, an overwhelming sense of evolutionary urgency. While it could hardly have been called "enlightenment" in the traditional sense, it contained the freedom, bliss, and release we normally associate with that term, and it lifted everyone who was present into a remarkable state of higher consciousness" (*EnlightenNext 2030*) Participants reported that the very impulse of evolution became palpable and naturally began to speak through one, then another, then another person in this group of practitioners, all of whom co-created or co-channeled this higher intelligence. This event became an ongoing practice as Cohen and his community refined protocols and injunctions for communicating and replicating at least some of the important dimensions of this intersubjective awakening, and they have since taught and practiced them in a series of influential retreats. Cohen said he had been "single-pointedly" pursuing this evolutionary enlightenment for some time, having "lost interest in the spiritual experience of the individual alone outside of the context of a much larger endeavor—the evolution of consciousness and culture."

This distinct and influential stream of practices directed toward evoking "higher intersubjectivity" has been taught and facilitated by many of Cohen's students and former students, particularly widely in the USA by Craig Hamilton and Jeff Carreira, and in Germany by Tom Steininger, and also by others. This methodology has varied expressions, but most primarily involve participants relaxing and transcending their habitual identification with the point of view of their individual self and body-mind, and identifying instead with the awareness itself ("the ground of being") and then, especially, *the impulse of evolution itself*. With all the members of a small group resting attention in the shared intersubjective field, identifying with the self-transcending priorities of that larger impulse, they allow that larger impulse to be present and to speak through them coherently and thus to arrive and express itself more fully in the world.

Neither David Bohm nor Andrew Cohen were fascinated by intersubjectivity in itself; for them both, it was a powerful instrument toward an overarching intention—effectively addressing the root causes of the world crisis (Bohm) or advancing the leading edge of the evolution of consciousness and culture (Cohen). The trans-rhetorical

experiments described in this paper were inspired by both motivations, seeing them as inextricably intertwined. However, as mentioned above, Bohm's *means* have perhaps spawned something even more influential than his *ends*, and the integral community's exploration of a "higher 'We'" often takes place without any explicit reference to the urgency of the world crisis or the evolution of culture. In fact, higher states of intersubjectivity are cultivated and valued in themselves, as intrinsically self-validating, growth-producing, creative, fun and healthy. It is usually tacitly assumed or explicitly asserted that these practices represent something culturally innovative, but with everyone's attention returning again and again to the present moment, higher purposes are not the focus, but are instead allowed to be fulfilled as a natural byproduct of the inherently attractive deepening of intersubjective immediacy, emergence and depth.

"Intersubjectivity," "culture," "the domain of shared meaning," and "the 'We'" have long featured prominently in AQAL Integral Theory, as one of the "four quadrants" of human existence. Wilber has for years spoken often about the "miracle of 'We'" and innovative facilitation of intersubjective processes, many of which have been informed by the dialog field spawned by Bohm's work, has been a vital dimensions of integral community events, most of which have been facilitated by psychologists, psychotherapists, and organizational consultants, ever since Integral Institute Seminars began in early 2004. This was powerfully catalyzed by Genpo Roshi's "Big Mind" process (especially as facilitated by the talented Diane Musho Hamilton) which uses voice dialog processes to evoke experiences of personal, transpersonal and nondual states, which have been shared and experienced as a powerful intersubjective field⁸. After the "integral" and "evolutionary" communities interconnected more fully, starting in 2007 or 2008, "intersubjective" or "evolutionary enlightenment" began to influence and inform integral practices of intersubjectivity. In 2009 Olen Gunnlaugson's efforts to distill inherent principles, and Stephan and Miriam Martineau's Integral Community seminars, further advanced the state of community praxis. The integral community discovered that something very *interesting* happens when small groups of highly-

⁸ Full disclosure: I've been a creative co-participant and/or facilitator in most of the intersubjective explorations described in this paragraph.)

developed integrally-informed practitioners enter into sincere transparent contact with one another, returning attention again and again into the present moment, surrendering into witnessing, and intending to open to a higher intelligence or collective field that they presume to be “ours” (intersubjective) rather than “mine” (subjective).

By 2010, additional streams of intersubjective practice began to enrich the shared intersubjective experimentation in the Integral community. One such stream, particularly effective in catalyzing interpersonal intimacy, has been brought by Decker Cunov, whose career began by teaching men how to understand and connect with women, but soon developed ingeniously skillful techniques for guiding dyads and small groups that he calls “Intersubjective Meditation” and “Circling.” People are instructed to rest attention on their present moment experience of one another and to report it, offering an uncensored narration of their actual feeling experience of one another as it fluctuates and evolves in present time. These practices are very effective in bringing alive the unpredictable, dynamic and erotic quality of the intersubjective field. Additionally, they provide challenging and growth-inducing reflection that has helped people “make subject object.” Especially since he and Robert MacNaughton began operating the Integral Center in Boulder at the beginning of 2012, their practices have proliferated into the culture of the Integral community.

In 2010 I interviewed Thomas Hübl in my *Beyond Awakening* series, and in 2011 he began a series of influential teaching visits to the USA. He teaches another stream of intersubjective practices, “Transparent Communication,” that have significantly expanded and enriched these trans-rhetorical communication experiments. “Transparent Communication” begins with personal practices in which each individual learns to open his or her attention beyond the usual personal mental-emotional focus and to relax into the spontaneous flow of the emergence of the present moment, and trust and activate higher intuitive faculties that can access subtle and causal information fields. Although directed at developing personal capacities, most of the practices are done in dyads and triads. And as these intuitive capacities awaken, people learn to feel and read the subtle and causal patterns out of which their and others’ gross experience emerges. This can open up, shift, and deepen the quality of the intersubjective field of communication. Hübl

instructs people to see below “symptoms” into the subtle or causal roots of personal shadow and other problems, and demonstrates what he is suggesting using his own considerable intuitive capacities. This opens up the subtle field of the group. He is interested in provoking what he often calls “a higher We,” by which he means a group “which is not just a collection of “I’s”, but “a We without a Them.””⁹

Dustin DiPerna explored all these streams of practice and drew on them to shape the “WEpractice Groups” he began to co-lead with Christina Sophie and Bill McCart starting in January 2011 (and later expanded and elaborated with collaborators Julie Flaherty, Michael Stern, Sam Bernier and others). Based on his experiments, DiPerna has theorized “A ‘We’ Line of Development” in which “the self-reflective conscious awareness of the We” progresses through “Conventional, Personal, Impersonal, Interpersonal, Transformational, Awakened, Evolutionary and Kosmic” levels (DiPerna et al, 2013 p 209-212). Earlier this year, commenting on all this experimentation, and asking “What’s all the excitement about?”, Tom Murray wrote an important blog/essay entitled, “Meta-Sangha, Infra-Sangha: Or, Who is this ‘We’ Kimo Sabe?” in which he pointed out that discussions of “We-Space” phenomena are often sloppy and imprecise, and he raised important questions and critiques, and offered a few helpful distinctions to bring rigor to the discussion. He pointed out that these “Higher We” practices and phenomena sometimes refer to (1) *feelings*, (2) *shared meaning*, (3) *state experiences*, (4) *an emergent collective entity*, and (5) *collective action*. (Murray 2013).

Even though I have been an active participant in many of these experiments in higher intersubjectivity, and I’m sure elements of this “trans-rhetorical” praxis were indirectly informed by them, the original experiments described here began emerging in my lectures and in private discussions with individuals and small groups—that is, as an extension of explicitly *rhetorical* discourse. It seemed important to go beyond rhetorical expression in order to further a passionate shared inquiry into unknown territory. I had to expose my own existential confrontation and speak directly to others, inviting them into a deeper intimacy in the face of the profound disorienting paradoxes of our common

⁹ I have been deeply involved with many of these experiments, and even as I write this I am co-teaching a year-long program with Thomas Hübl, entitled “Birthing a New We.”

situation. Because my focus was on catalyzing a personal and shared existential confrontation (with the world crisis/opportunity) not on deepening the quality of our intersubjective field, I did not consciously connect these experiments to these other streams of intersubjective praxis (which I was separately facilitating and experimenting with) until I began to engage the more careful and systematic thinking that has gone into the writing of this paper in April-May 2013.

Although the “trans-rhetorical” experiments I am presenting here have most in common with Bohm’s dialog and Cohen’s intersubjective enlightenment, they differ in important ways.

Bohm saw the roots of the world crisis in the fragmented nature of human perception, thought, and communication. The dialog he proposed was intended to cut the root of that confusion and to awaken people from fragmented thinking, and to liberate creativity thereby engendering social change. Although it has been widely influential, Bohm’s dialog has not had its intended impacts on the crisis itself. And there are deeper problems. The critique of “spiritual bypassing” (Welwood, 1983 & 2002, Wilber, 2000 & (2009) makes it evident, however, that this *radical* (“cutting to the root”) approach, though necessary and most profound, is not adequate without tangible action in the conditional affairs of life. To address the world crisis, we certainly must awaken at the level of *consciousness*, but we must also take awakened *action*, which means confronting and grappling with the complex *conditional* challenges of politics, religion, controversy, conflict, communication, culture, education, etc. Many of my trans-rhetorical communications express a meta-perspective that transcends time and dilemma, but many others express intense urgency *in time*, taking most seriously (albeit happily and lightheartedly) the apparent dilemma of the world crisis as something that urgently demands effective pragmatic actions *now*. Awakening from limiting consciousness must express itself virtually simultaneously with taking enlightened, effective action. The key difference in Bohmian dialog is the current historical moment, and therefore the character of the intention. We are not taking the first steps of a journey of investigation that can lead to a destination of clarity in the future that will enable us to penetrate errors of thinking that will eventually, sometime down the road, make possible a transformational

act; instead, we are allowing and insisting that the future express itself through us *now* as understanding, clarity, and action. That passionate insistence animates the radical truth-telling, or *parrhesia*, which I will introduce below.

Andrew Cohen's (2009, personal communication) experiments in intersubjective enlightenment were animated by an extreme sense of urgency, but they were not motivated by an appreciation for the need for a timely response to the unimaginable destructive potentials of the world crisis, but simply by the inherent positive urgency of the evolutionary impulse. And they were scripted significantly by Cohen's teachings of impersonal and evolutionary enlightenment. Participants entered into the experiment on the basis of that context of shared understanding. This radically constrained the *span* of those who can participate, even though it liberated significant intensity and *depth*. This trans-rhetorical praxis is intended to be available to as wide a range of people as possible. Unavoidably, people must be *adequate* to the undertaking (which means they must possess sufficient degrees and levels of clarity, states and stages of personal development, sincerity, transparency, and light-in shadow). This represents an enormous constraint on how widely this can be practiced. Further constraining it to require participants to accept anything extraneous, such as a particular teaching or teacher, constrains adequacy so severely as to frustrate its very purpose. Nonetheless, these experiments most definitely share the spirit of "ecstatic urgency" he describes.

A Trans-Rhetorical Methodology

In my exploration of this trans-rhetorical praxis that followed my initial experiments, I found that the first levels of this phenomenon could reliably be replicated via a specific methodology¹⁰.

(1) It begins with third-person descriptions of significant illuminating truths framing

¹⁰ On the surface, this may seem like nothing new. Doesn't it simply recapitulate the language in the Call for Papers received by all the presenters at this conference to "strike a balance between third-person didactical, second-person dialogical, and first-person experiential components?" Yes and no. Because it's a non strategic practice of passionate parrhesia, integral trans-rhetorical praxis doesn't design the communication intending to "strike a [rhetorical] balance"; each of these perspectival communications must press into a daring inquiry that may make use of useful conventions but whose intent must be to transcend and transform all conventions.)

- vital multidimensional unresolved existential challenges to all of the parties to the conversation, often relating to aspects of, but in no way limited to, the global crisis.
- (2) Then, it transitions into a passionate act of first-person ragged *parrhesiastic* truth-telling and self-disclosure about my own process of inquiring into those challenges. (This looks different each time because it must be done authentically, and thus freshly, in the moment.)
 - (3) Once that has occurred, I engage in direct and disarming truth-speaking to my conversation partner(s), presuming second-person intimacy (as per *sohbet* and *parrhesia*, see below). I also engage in the practice of deep *truth-listening*, which is just as essential to this praxis as unbridled truth-speaking. The conversation deepens dramatically. (In a lecture format, deep truth-listening is implicit and perhaps can be backgrounded, but it is foreground and crucial in one-on-one or small group conversations.)
 - (4) At this stage of the process, the method transforms into art, and a dialogic ‘dance’ becomes possible, in which new insights or information or associations arrive from any of those three (first-, second-, or third-person) domains of experience, and cross-quadrant implications are available to be noticed and spoken, many of which require a deepening of our praxis of existential confrontation with reality. From this follows a consequent uplift of our individual consciousness as well as an intensification of our intersubjective contact with one another and thus a continual uplift of the quality of our intersubjective field. The first three steps make possible this intimate, passionate, “dance of intersecting perspectives,” but it is this fourth step that epitomizes the essence and character of the trans-rhetorical praxis I’m describing here. Engaged over time, this praxis can deepen tremendously. There can be *intersubjective triple-loop learning*. After having learned to enter into this process, and to become a responsible “player” in this intersubjective playground, participants can experience themselves participating as a collective intelligence which is *itself* learning about how to more fully emerge through them, not only to advance into new clarity and presence but to

evolve the very *way* it does so, advancing in its elegance, clarity and grace.

- (5) In especially potent conversations (which I have only experienced so far in one-on-one conversations and in very intimate small groups) the intensity can build to extreme levels. A positive-feedback loop (of intensity begetting more intensity) can build and feed on itself, cascading the illuminative intensity of the state experiences and subtle fields of all the parties involved. I postulate that this engenders a subtle field phenomenon that can function like an antenna or open nerve ending, opening into the larger noosphere and offering itself as a vehicle for the “strange attractor” of yet-unmanifested creative emergents to find their way into form through us.

This integral trans-rhetorical praxis is emergent, requiring much more exploration, experimentation and refinement. The current paper is a prolegomenon to further work rather the explication of a mature practice methodology. It emerged, however, through a specific, describable methodology of radical truth-telling and truth-listening. And certain features of its character are clear.

- Integral trans-rhetorical praxis has a *higher transformational intent*.
- It transcends classical rhetoric’s most narrowly defined purpose of *persuasion* or even *education*. Instead, it gently aims at *mutual uplift* and *deepening*. Communication ceases to be integral to the degree it is co-opted by secondary self-serving or other limiting agendas. It is integral to the degree that it functions in service of the advance into higher states and stages of consciousness, cooperation and enactment, and the cultivation of virtues and higher values (such as Goodness, Truth, and Beauty) in *all* parties to the discourse.
- Thus, although it can be initiated by a single participant (e.g., via a lecture) it ultimately strives toward a *mutual praxis*, which equally implicates all participants and the quality of their relations with one another—including the activity of *listening* as well as *speaking*. In mature expressions of this praxis, participants cease to compete for persuasive dominance but instead begin to function with more and more efficiency and grace as co-inquirers, sharing the

intention of being of benefit—to the quality of the shared inquiry, to each other, to others, and to themselves.

The goal is to further a transpersonal evolutionary process, to offer up our nervous systems and individual and shared subtle energy fields so that they can be the vehicle for new intelligence and clarity to emerge through us. Such inquiry is open-ended; there are no limits to what it can open to. Thus, it can be grounded in direct experience (with no pathological grandiosity) but with an expansive aspiration to ultimately make oneself a vehicle for entirely new knowledge and understanding to enter into human consciousness. New insight has value in itself, whether it is new or not, simply because it is beautiful and true and good. But our fast-paced cultural evolutionary moment and world crisis (the need for dramatic evolutionary advance analogous to “punctuated equilibrium”) create a context in which it is not *pathological* but *noble* to aspire to co-creatively midwife new insight with transformational impact. Thus it is not necessarily delusional to intend to enact conversations that can not only make a difference, but even make *the* difference and enable us and others to do something radically new, and to actually address the world crisis proactively, positively and effectively. In fact, *many* such conversations are needed now.

Paradoxically, this practice asks to be engaged in a happy, grateful, lighthearted, and even playful spirit, notwithstanding the seriousness of the context and the enormity of the aspiration. It rests on an intuition of goodness, truth and beauty, and the ineffable nondual ground of being (which is an unlimited resource of innate joy and creativity, and into which it always opens and deepens). Thus it is fierce and ecstatic and free, even while vulnerable and passionate and as it “lives with” and “inquires into” the deep paradoxes and questions it contemplates.

Let’s look at two key traditional precedents that illuminate key elements of the disposition of this praxis.

The Soul of a Trans-Rhetorical Practice: *Sohbet* and *Parrhesia*

The vulnerability of this kind of discourse has an intimate and sacred quality, suggesting the Sufi spiritual practice of “sohbet,” or ecstatic conversation, famously

exemplified by Rumi's mystical intimate conversation with Shams Tabriz, which Rumi described as the highest spiritual exercise, even higher than prayer and meditation (Barks, 2005, p.xxv). This is mystical discourse, or the direct meeting of sincere souls, hearts and minds. This occurs in the context of mystical communion. In that sacred encounter, the truth can and must be told directly and radically, without any attempt at rhetorical persuasion. The boundaries of self, other, and the Divine begin to dissolve. In this kind of speaking and listening there is only a deep meeting and loving inquiry. There can be no distortion of the communicative field by strategic agendas. This includes not only selfish and provincial motives but also idealistic and utopian ones. To practice this one has to be able to:

access the primary, pre-reflective meanings, arising from within...deployed by the innermost substance of consciousness within the Heart, and, with the proper positioning of awareness, receptivity, and the environment of safety, they can be linked to speech ...[which] requires great self-presence, inner listening, and discrimination between primary and secondary thoughts¹¹ (Louchakova, n.d).

This Sufi practice, suffused with the spirit of Hindu *Satsang*¹² and *brahmodya*¹³ and yet directed at deep sharing, epitomizes the praxis of sacred intersubjectivity. A true trans-rhetorical praxis must be informed by the practice of inner and sacred sensitivity and depth (like the Quaker practice of listening for “the still small voice”) poetically invoked and taught by mystics of most traditions.

But such sacred speech also freely crosses over into addressing the urgency of the world crisis directly, where its spontaneity and vulnerability expresses itself as unedited creative courage, suggesting “*parrhesia*” (from the Greek: *παρρησία* usually translated “free speech” or “speaking everything” and yet connoting something more like

¹¹ Please see Louchakova's *The experience of Sohbet* at the International Association of Sufism website for more information.

¹² Satsang literally translates as “the company of truth” and refers to the sacred meetings between an enlightened Master and his disciples and especially to the quality of loving illumination suffusing them (Armstrong, 2006, p. 258).

¹³ In ancient vedic India brahmodya was a competition or “dharma combat” in which the intention was to express absolute truth more and more powerfully, and which ended when an utterance left all participants in profound silence (Armstrong, 2006, p. 258).

“unbridled, ragged fierce truth-telling”) which has been advocated as a remedy to the corruption of discourse by philosophers from Plato to Plutarch to Foucault. According to Foucault (1983, Lecture 1), a *parrhesiast* is:

someone who says everything he has in mind: he does not hide anything, but opens his heart and mind completely to other people through his discourse... Whereas rhetoric provides the speaker with technical devices to help him prevail upon the minds of his audience (regardless of the rhetorician's own opinion concerning what he says), in *parrhesia*, the *parrhesiastes* acts on other people's mind by showing them as directly as possible what he actually believes.

He goes on to say:

If there is a kind of "proof" of the sincerity of the *parrhesiastes*, it is his courage. The fact that a speaker says something dangerous – different from what the majority believes – is a strong indication that he is a *parrhesiastes*... *Parrhesia* is a form of criticism, either towards another or towards oneself, but always in a situation where the speaker or confessor is in a position of inferiority with respect to the interlocutor... This is why an ancient Greek would not say that a teacher or father who criticizes a child uses *parrhesia*. But when a philosopher criticizes a tyrant, when a citizen criticizes the majority, when a pupil criticizes his or her teacher, then such speakers may be using *parrhesia* (Foucault, 1983, Lecture 1).

Foucault (1983, Lecture 5) also quotes Socrates' practice of *parrhesia* as described by Nicias in Plato's *Laches (on Courage)*:

whoever ... has any talk with him face to face, is bound to be drawn round and round by him ... and cannot stop until he is led into giving an account of himself, of the manner in which he now spends his days, and of the kind of life he has lived hitherto.... Socrates will never let him go until he has thoroughly and properly put all his ways to the test.

Socrates was not Nicias' inferior, but he took great risks for the sake of bold truth telling, as the conclusion of his life story demonstrates. The exercise of *parrhesia* was regarded as essential to good rule, whether in a democracy or a monarchy, to prevent the abuse of power. It also regarded as an essential practice by the Epicureans, Stoics, and Cynics, one

that had an essential function not only in the life of the community but in small groups and in intimate relationships. This was not a green light for irresponsible blather; *parrhesia* was a discipline.

...the *parrhesiast* reveals to the listener the listener's own truth, the listener's *ethos*, by speaking in such a way that the listener is thrown back on himself. In other words, the *parrhesiast* does not tell the other who he is objectively. Rather, the manner of speaking in *parrhesia* provokes the listener, brings the listener into a new relationship with himself (McGushin, 2006, p. 10).

The transformational art and praxis of radical truth-telling (as well as truth-listening) is at the core of an integral trans-rhetorical praxis. For Foucault, as for Socrates, *parrhesia* was in service of the “care of the soul (or ‘self’).” Plato focused on cultivating the virtue necessary to rule, to responsibly participate in Athenian democracy. For Foucault, the focus was on the purpose of cultivating authenticity and truly creative agency in a postmodern world in which the subject has become an inauthentic fiction without legitimacy. Both tasks have relevance to us today in the context of trans-rhetorical praxis, since we must recover our authenticity if we are to gain the capacity to speak with each other in a way that enables us to function effectively, in this time of crisis, as communities of responsible planetary citizens.

The Existential “Design Specs” for Trans-Rhetorical Praxis

Transcending rhetorical communication is valuable if it makes something new possible—a deeper level of existential encounter and a more profound and effective intersubjective inquiry. The inquiry is radical and existential, not merely a verbal-conceptual question. To the extent that it can be put into words, it goes something like:

What does it take to become the kind of human beings who *can* break through the stuck patterns of human life at this time to engender a rapid, minimally destructive, transformation of human culture, society, and behavior? How can we wake up (whether from ego, fear, confusion, spiritual bypassing or other limiting frames of mind) so that we can be rightly related to the question? How can our ways of being (both with ourselves and with each other) begin to shift right here

and right now? What does that mean for us personally? And what is that for us in relation to one another? What new kinds of cooperation are called for? What is it we can do to fulfill this bewildering responsibility to “change our life” and participate creatively in evolving human culture in this time of global crisis? What does that imply *right here and right now*? How can we take *this very conversation* to a level of awakened illumination and intense insight such that we begin to co-enact an existentially authentic creatively innovative response to the world crisis? This is an impossibly large question and demand. I call it “impossible” because it demands we answer it with both urgency and real *rigor*, which seem mutually exclusive. (After all, if we’re committed to rigor and efficacy, even our very best *immediate* answers will only be provisional.) Still, only by treating them seriously and urgently can we engage them in a spirit that will empower our responses to be sufficiently essential to *evolve into* real adequacy and rigor. Thus, the authenticity of the inquiry requires that it be framed urgently. Engaged with seriousness, it points us to a “true north” that helps us transcend the more limited preoccupations that will otherwise tend to distract us.

Thus, there are many things we can do to help lay foundations for the cultural transformation our crisis implicitly is calling for. Inspired by this vision, my work is a series of such initiatives.

My primary work as of this writing is teaching integral spiritual practice to groups and individuals, something that confers many benefits, among which is cultivating in them foundations for adequacy to engage authentically in this kind of trans-rhetorical experiment. Even so, the inquiry that responds to the existential *koan* of our time is not merely a knowable skill or developmental capacity that can be taught or coached. It rests on existential seriousness, and the capacity to be profoundly self-responsible and vulnerable, and also to dare, vision, risk, and extend into the unknown. So I teach a process that leads to a glorious sanity capable of the level of sincerity, practice, openness, intimacy and authenticity required to participate in this ongoing inquiry, which by its nature must be ongoing, open-ended and paradoxical.

Many praxes also cultivate capacities that help build adequacy for participation in a higher level of intersubjective discourse, for co-creating a profound emerging Sangha

through which the “next Buddha” may come into being. Other kinds of spiritual, intellectual, physical, energetic, psychological and integral practice, as well as many of the “We-Space” modalities discussed earlier can help build such a foundation of basic sanity and self-responsibility. It is important to note this last reference to “We-Space” practices. Even seen through the lens applied here, there is tremendous value in the many other less-intense practices and initiatives that directly or indirectly help people build the capacity to co-inquire more powerfully. Thus, there is *tremendous* value in the many intersubjective practices described above that do not themselves directly address the world crisis or cultural evolution. Like Integral Practice, they build adequacy, and further evolution.

Among the components of adequacy for authentic Integral Trans-Rhetorical Praxis are: stage development in the self-related lines to “Exit Orange,” “Exit Green,” “Teal,” or, for higher expressions of the praxis, “Turquoise” or “Indigo” levels, in state-stage growth, the relaxation of strict fixation of attention in the gross “waking state” levels of mind and emotion, a basic inner witnessing capacity, an ability to focus and direct attention and thus to stably rest it on others and the intersubjective field, some insight into shadow dynamics and ongoing sincere non-defensive inquiry into ongoing shadow dynamics, a basic capacity to endure discomfort and delay gratification, the integrity and courage necessary to transcend “looking good” in order to “make subject object” transparently, sufficient existential depth to be capable of remaining self-responsibly grounded while facing the world crisis and taking it seriously, and enough emotional intelligence, health, and compassion for self and others to be able to hold high levels of cognitive and emotional dissonance while remaining present with others in a fundamentally non-problematic manner as a mostly friendly benevolent presence.

Conclusion

Not all experiments with trans-rhetorical conversations are equivalent. In most of my experiments in lecture situations, I have simply described the situation objectively, disclosed the character and content of my own existential confrontation vividly, transmitted it energetically, and invited my listeners into their own existential

confrontation and into intimacy with me as a fellow inquirer (Steps 1-3 of the process as broken down above).

In my deepest private trans-rhetorical conversations, my conversation partners have entered deeply into the discourse, sharing their darkness and light, depth and freedom. A dialogic “dance” has emerged. Personal sharing has sparked empathic resonance which has provoked insights about the nature of the obstacles to a coherent human response to the crisis. This has in turn sparked connections to ideas about engineering social change and sticky memes which have then provoked personal examination, and back and forth, co-creatively uplifting the level of awareness, presence, clarity, care and engagement. The “dance” between perspectives has then begun to feed on its own momentum and is beginning to become more and more coherent. (Step 4 of the process).

On rare occasions this dance between perspectives has even fed upon itself. It is as though the intensity of intuitive freedom, deep existential confrontation, intimacy, and truth-telling has evoked a higher intelligence that began to learn how to replicate and intensify itself. Some intersubjective triple-loop learning took place. It was as if the “higher we” that had come into being began to “get a feel” for how to get better and better at being “OurSelf”—more and more free, intelligent, passionate, and connected to information depth, intimacy, creativity, and ecstatic urgency. (Steps 5 of the process). When this has been most powerful and flowing, there have been occasions when I and my conversation partners have experienced a powerful energetic phenomenon. In these “electric” occasions, it has seemed certain to us (albeit entirely subjectively) that the power of our clarity, depth, authenticity, intimacy, and connection was not just illuminating us but attracting others, who would join and strengthen the field which would then in turn attract still others. It has seemed self-evidently obvious that the field will only intensify and act as a nerve-ending in the “global brain,” an antenna for the “strange attractors” of higher order coherence, new noetic emergents around which higher-order cultural change can re-organize itself.

In these conversations, the intersubjective field is connected with all its most powerful forms of expression. We have access to every kind of speech, and yet they are

integrated into something new. The conversation can cross back and forth between rhetorical and non-rhetorical speech. Third-person expressions provoke to second-person intimacy, evoking deeper first-person existential and spiritual depth, enlivening a dance among insight and illumination in all these quadrvia that builds into something larger and more beautiful. Foucault identified four kinds of speakers: parrhesiasts, prophets, sages, and technical speakers (McGushin 2007 p 9-11). In this trans-rhetorical praxis, *parrhesiastic* truth-telling naturally flows into intuitively illuminated *prophetic* speech, supported by objective insights expressed in *technical* (rhetorical) speech, and transitioning into *sagacious* speech in which the beneficial upwelling of consciousness itself offers the benefits of its radical, penetrating clarity (Robert Richards, personal communication, May 2, 2013). What results breaks through its own forms of discourse with a potent immediacy that can not only pierce the veil but magnetize others in a coherent field.

If the world crisis is indeed telling us “You must change your life,” it is certainly also asking us to change how we relate with each other. If human systems are stuck in patterns that seem to be binding us into a collective sleep-walk into catastrophe, any awake consciousness and voice must call out urgently, “Wake up!,” not unlike the penetrating scream of a parent preventing a sleepy child from wandering into the path of an oncoming truck. Reasonable men and women might respond, “Yes, we too see what you see, but screaming is bad form, and besides, it won’t do any good if you don’t know exactly what to do.” “Screaming” here is a metaphor for summoning not merely a voice but a radical level of seriousness, passion, intensity, clarity, intelligence, freedom, humor, and energy; not as individuals, but together. It’s a metaphor for coming fully alive and bright, connected, and engaged together. If the next Buddha is to be a Sangha, we will need to be able to come together in a way that conduct a higher order of energy and awareness. That is not an abstract problem we can figure out. It is no longer sufficient to “work on it” as though no urgency impinged upon us. It is something to which we are obligated *now*, something we can and must begin to do whenever and wherever our awareness is liberated from the delusions created by the fragmented consciousness, the “consensus trance” David Bohm so wanted, through dialogue, to penetrate.

This paper itself is paradoxical, a performative contradiction. By this time, the alert reader has perhaps begun to smile, noticing that this piece of writing presents itself as an academic paper, but its animating *raison d'être* and subject is communication that *breaks through* the very conventions it is observing as it makes its case! This piece of inherently rhetorical writing advocates for communication that crosses beyond rhetoric, joining with my reader/listener and uplifting us all. This paper would betray what it advocates if it were to end here, only as a tidy academic communication.

Can you sense the nature of the times in which we are living? Do you appreciate the passionate intensity appropriate to it? Do you see me doing my best to open up to that intensity, and how it drives the experiments I describe here? Is something similar alive also in you? Then let the experience of reading this paper inspire and embolden you. Don't hide out in safe familiar territory. When there is an opportunity to make real contact with others, please take inspiration from this example and "color outside the lines." Engage in *parrhesia*. Use all ordinary forms of expression to express something that now attempts to transcend "business as usual." Can you do so animated by and in contact with the formless source of joy, intelligence, love, and creativity that is the nature of every moment's experience? Can you actually make your philosophy your way of life, a spiritual exercise, a living experiment in authenticity and virtue, even in the face of probable futility and overarching absurdity? It seems to me that we must seriously attempt to, especially since it is only thereby that we will learn how.

Life wants to keep living. Evolution wants to keep evolving. We [*plural*] Am [*singular*] the very process of evolution, as it is appearing right here and right now. We Am the raw materials out of which the Sangha that would be the Buddha will have to assemble itself. What do we need to do and be, individually and together, to catalyze that emergent? How can we speak to each other? How can we engage together in a way that brings forth something genuinely new, alive, illumined, grounded, powerful, and adequate to this moment of crisis? Our very way of living must answer this question. It is urgent. Our answers today will inevitably be provisional, and will need to evolve over time, certainly. But our current answers are clearly inadequate. Right now, we need to attempt to enact much better answers to this question than we have been able to do up

until now.

Can we stand in this urgency together in a way that allows it to transform us? Can we thereby be a magnet, pulling through the noosphere, resonating into the unmanifest field out of which the future emerges, calling for the emergence of the new possibilities our continued evolution seems to depend upon? Can we relate to one another in a way that does the work of opening and surrendering into a way of being that by its nature *becomes* better and better answers to the *koan* of our time?

Numbness, apathy, distraction, and quiescent resignation are no longer acceptable. So do you dare to make the attempt? Remember, you will (at least partially) fail (But any failure will only be temporary. It will also be success.) After all, there is no escape from this, no alternative path. Yes, it is true, utter absurdity is the context. Existential disorientation in this time is utterly unavoidable. So trying to avoid this call, or attempting to save face and “look good” under these conditions would be insane in these times, and even morally indefensible. May you and I and we dare to “lose face” and engage one another passionately in ragged truth-telling and truth-listening, stretching beyond the known into the clear light of morning, the limpid, pregnant field of blessedly unlimited potential where life and consciousness have always evolved and emerged. We have no other home.

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