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Turning the Developmental Ladder on its Head and Dropping it in the Pond

Just what is it that develops? Is it consciousness? Is it some sense of identity? If so, who am I that moves through these various waves of identification? Are these waves, or is this more a bottomless well of self? Is the field of development really just an inquiry into the essential nature of evolution? What is the nature of that pattern we call development?

Perhaps more practically, what is the value of understanding development? Where in our everyday lives can we apply this evolving understanding to increase our chances and opportunities to experience peace, harmony, and well-being?

How is the developmental dialogue unfolding? What can we learn by looking back over our history with this construct of meaning and inquiry? What are the emerging fundamentals of developmental understanding that transcend the wide variety of models and theories?

What can we understand about our own human existence? Where are we now as a species? Where might we be going and what insights might we use to get there?

This document, and the accompanying workshop of the same title, will contextualize four basic movements in the unfolding of development. These movements, Receptive/Active/Reciprocal/Interpenetrative (RARI), we suggest offer profound insight into the questions above.

Nature (*receptive*)

The constructs of these four movements (RARI) as we present them here come from Terri O'Fallon's work on the STAGES model of development. This model is a re-visioning of existing wisdom in the field adapted through Ken Wilber's four quadrants and eight zones lens. Receptive, Active, Reciprocal and Interpenetration are the terms she applies to what she describes as "God's rocking chair," an essential back and forth movement from receptivity to activity.

Taking this basic oscillation from an individual perspective, to a collective perspective she pluralizes these terms to "Reciprocal" (collective receptive) and "Interpenetrative" (collective active). As the three earlier movements come together as one interpenetrative active expression, the stage is set for that new union to become receptive and the cycle begins again.

God's rocking chair is not original to O'Fallon's work; we see the same oscillating expression described with different terms by many other practitioners and researchers in the field before her: Jean Piaget — assimilation and accommodation (1920's?), Erik Erikson — crisis and resolution (1959), Jane Lovenger — integration and differentiation (1970), Robert Kegan — subject and object

(1982). In fact, we can even see early expressions of RARI in the work of Sullivan — Impulsive, Conformist, Conscientious, and Autonomous (1958).

In each of these cases, this rocking chair movement is the essential developmental inquiry, or driver if you will, of the evolutionary expression.

The study of development, from this perspective, can be seen as the study of patterns that endure. These patterns take on different content given the subject, time, and context. **This content is valuable to understand, yet it is the underlying patterns – in this case RARI – that provide the real leverage in applying these understandings.**

Value (*active*)

Given this perspective, we can conceive our lives as essentially swimming in the pool of these patterns. If RARI is everywhere in our experience and is available to all, how can we use this insight to reduce suffering and bring value into our lives?

Traditional linear and spiral based models of development honor something very important – namely our death, and the finite nature of the gift of a lifetime. This recognizes the very real aspect of an evolving capacity for appreciation and perspective taking. The most basic opportunity of a lifetime, we might say, is to fill it with the appreciation of beauty. Each successive moment in a linear unfolding represents the next opportunity to see, appreciate, and experience some greater expression of beauty which accumulates as our felt experience of the value of life.

The capacity to appreciate life from the perspective of limits cannot be overstated in its value. When we focus on a trajectory that draws our attention out and beyond, the developmental story becomes one of evolutionary possibility. The linear/spiral perspective on development foregrounds valuable evolving content, offering us the opportunity to pursue an ever greater vision.

It also carries the risk of drawing us out of honest and immediate connection with ourselves, those around us, and our contexts as we seek something higher or greater. If we explore this developmental story also as describing a nested and holographic cycle (RARI), we can begin to appreciate the wisdom and insight of developmental inquiry in new ways. By foregrounding an ever present cyclical pattern, RARI reveals our capacity to deepen any moment to a unified, liberated state of inherent well-being.

When we look at the world around us for expressions of this ever present cyclical pattern, they are visible everywhere:

A seed receives moisture and time in the soil before the sprout bursts forth, actively pushing its way up into the light of day where it will begin its reciprocal dance with the atmosphere and the sunlight... Finding its home there, this once possible life form fully interpenetrates with its ecosystem, becoming a part of the collective evolutionary expression.

Two people meet, simply receiving the presence of one another on a subway. They talk and actively decide to continue their connection. They begin introducing one another to their friends, families, and communities, and reciprocity emerges. Finally,

the two become a couple, start a family or some other form of life together, and can be recognized as one interpenetrated expression of human relationship.

Some field of study emerges as a handful of seekers begin to recognize (to receive) an identification with some construct of meaning. Actively these seekers engage with the field of inquiry, playing in parallel to one another, gradually building a body of insight. The insights of this emerging field cohere and begin to touch and be touched by other fields of study and inquiry. Finally, these insights integrate and become the ground on which new fields are discovered...

This pattern of movement is everywhere, and when we begin to notice this we can also postulate that each moment is an expression of interpenetration. The usefulness in this is sublime in its simplicity. When we are suffering, either some pain, or some challenge to integrate, we can begin to ask some simple questions.

What are the receptive notes in this song? What are the active flavors? Where is the dance of reciprocity? How well are each of these pieces working, and what might be missing?

The necessity of adjusting content may simply fall away as the inquiries above enlighten us to the nature of the interpenetration we are facing in the moment. Seeing the nature of a moment by its constituent parts invites us into a quality of understanding that liberates our capacity to be creative, fluid, and to keep moving with this moment.

Developmental Dialogue (*reciprocal*)

Right now the different models of development are operating largely in ideological silos, much like our modern world. This creates a rich plethora of distinct ideas and identities. However, once these individual distinctions reach a certain robustness we begin to feel the evolutionary tension we are in today. It is our everyday experience to feel tension with each other, as we identify with and struggle to integrate different perspectives of our human existence, and how we should live it.

This very tension might suggest that we are – both in the field of development as well as much of the world – engaging from an individual active place in this underlying pattern. In other words, if we look at our dialogues, our field, and our overall global engagement, we see many differences. We see ourselves acting on these differences, in a sort of parallel play. While a legitimate step in our development as a species, this kind of parallel play eventually wreaks havoc on our resources and the possibility for sustained well-being for all sentient beings.

Moving into a reciprocal engagement with each other, where collaboration and sharing and vulnerability are fore fronted on a global scale, is thankfully starting to emerge. It's nascency asks for significant support, if it is to address our current situation.

What we are offering here is a movement to foreground the importance of the underlying patterns in perspectives of developmental unfoldment. By granting more weight to these fundamental patterns of expression, we gain a greater presence to a common ground shared by all the various models and perspectives. Seeing clearly the common ground we share, we can more effectively integrate the wisdom that this field seeks to uncover.

This is the wisdom the world needs now. The world needs conscious vulnerability, collaboration, and sharing to invite another capacity to the table. We believe this new capacity is the reciprocal space. We as developmental specialists can see this. And we can see it early, because we can see these underlying patterns. It might be that foregrounding patterns like RARI can unite, and move us out of an archaic view of competition into a more effective whole field collaboration. This is what we want for our world. And we can prototype this movement to a reciprocal dialogue here, in the developmental field.

Let's notice the tensionⁱ in our active expressions and start to further explore loosening those boundaries, making ourselves vulnerable and more transparent to one another in this larger conversation. Where can we begin to find the common ground, the heart connection with one another, as we explore moving the field of development further into the treasure store of human collective value?

Where are we? (*interpenetrative*)

The term "holon"ⁱⁱ was coined by Arthur Koestler in his book *The Ghost in the Machine* (1967). This term describes that which is simultaneously both whole and a part. A parallel term, or synonym might be "perspective." Might it be possible that RARI describes something more nuanced about these very constructs of holon and perspective?

How might we use these insights to better understand the nature of our existence and our place in the cosmos? As a species, where might we find ourselves today in some larger expression of a RARI cycle? What challenges might it be helpful for us to understand or to anticipate, to meet in order to maximize our vitality in the space in which we find ourselves?

Certainly there is no shortage of experience to suggest we could do very well to more fully grasp the nature and process of our collective condition as it stands today. Human influenced dramatic climate shifts, massive ideological tensions across the board, wider than ever discrepancies in economic empowerment, and these are just the big rocks... What if we could understand something more about the nature of how these conditions have risen, and what they might be inviting?

What if we view the very early days of humanity as a receptive space for the species? Our rudimentary human consciousness awash in a sea of receiving the experience of our natural environment. Our only action, impulsive reaction with little to no subtle direction.

What if we consider the dawn of civilization as a movement into an active expression of our collective being? Having received a sense of our condition, perhaps we then moved into a profound creative time within which we developed agriculture, governance, industry, and art...

This active expression of our species has been with us for just a few tens of thousands of years now. What if we conceive of our current large-scale "challenges" as being opportunities to discover what it might mean for our species to explore a more reciprocal territory with our larger contexts? How do our ideological tribes of hundreds of millions get along with one another? How do we continue to thrive materially while arriving at some reciprocal balance with our natural environment? How, as a species, do we balance our own internal resource circulation so as not to starve parts of our collective body to feed others?

What are the qualities of our shared receptive nature and are shared active capacities that we might nurture in order to fulfill more robust expression of our reciprocal invitation to the larger cosmos? How might we conceive of that invitation drawing us closer to some cosmic expression of interpenetration?

How can we explore these questions together today? What other questions might be drawn to this inquiry? How receptive do you feel in this moment? What activity might you feel called to? What dance would you like to invite of the rest of us, and what vision of unity would you like to shareⁱⁱⁱ?

Endnotes

ⁱ Examples of this evolutionary tension, are everywhere. We were drawn to recall this even as we worked on this offering.

Here at Open Field Awakening, we noticed our initial impulse to foreground RARI in an active way – evidenced in part of the wording of our title "and dropping it in the pond," implying perhaps that foregrounding this pattern was the better or more true way to understand development. This being a beautiful example of an individual active movement. As we worked, and inquired, and wrote however, we found ourselves moving into a more reciprocal appreciation for the way development has been held. Were we to re-word our title now, it might sound something like...?

At this point we feel we are making more of an invitation to influence and be influenced by the rich field of perspectives available in the larger conversation.

ⁱⁱ Evolution, the very essence of development, begins with a spark — if it begins at all – which is to say, if there is any such thing as "beginning." The very next moment is the movement of that spark receiving the conditions of the nature of the context into which it begins to emerge.

"Sensing" or experiencing those conditions, this spark manifests an active presence of actually taking up space in the construct of that into which it has emerged.

Perhaps in the same instant yet just a moment behind, the force of context and the new expression of spark begin to change and to shape one another in a reciprocal dance of becoming.

The final act of this expression is a union of interpenetration where the old (context) self and the new (spark) emerge as one and the process begins again.

ⁱⁱⁱ Just exploring a thought here, what if we imagine the linear expression of development – one stage following the next – as more of a gaze into a developmental vitality of ever-expanding wholeness. What if the later stages are not burdened with bringing along the earlier, but rather are conceived as the lineage children held in the sacred womb of those spheres of inquiry that had come before?

What new expression might be born from such a womb?