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Whole Systems Design
Autumn 1999
Integrative Self-Assessment 1

I tend to view *all* my experiences in an integrative way, so that, for example, it is difficult for me to make clear distinctions between 'education' and 'work' and 'life.' All these seemingly disparate activities are, for me, synthesized into a single, coherent motion; at least that's what it has evolved into. So when asked to draw specific conclusions about my most recent educational experiences, I cannot separate those from the context of my life within which those experiences took place, as well as the contributions those experiences have provided to my ongoing work. Combined, the seemingly disparate experiences of education, work, and life this past quarter have fused together into one, whole, integrated learning experience.

And what a learning experience it was! Life provided me with many serious, protracted challenges during the course of this quarter, including: being absolutely penniless for the first two-and-a-half weeks; feeling alone, alienated, even prejudiced toward – and separate from those I love and with whom I find acceptance; living out of my van in an unfriendly city environment, requiring me to practice invisibility, hiding, and non-locality techniques, maintaining an impenetrable boundary; a resurgence of alcoholism and tobacco addiction, as a reflex to the alienation and as a strategy to desensitize in an uncomfortable living situation; a determined effort by my advisor to alter my original intentions for my program, forcing me to re-evaluate my current path and the necessity for a graduate degree; and then, of course, the climactic challenge of being on the front lines in the Battle of Seattle, meeting head-on the confrontation between the people and institutionalized authority. Truly, these challenges embodied the context within which the learning experiences of the quarter took place. They all were really just parts of a greater challenge: learning how to maintain my independence, rectitude, and self-direction with minimal support in an often hostile environment. The continual, ongoing attention and focusing of *will* required to successfully meet these challenges has left me exhausted.

And it was well worth it! I feel like I have been involved in an extended, intensive discovery-uncovery of my Core Self. (Despite previous study, acceptance, and integration of the core tenets of Jungian psychology, I am becoming dissatisfied with using the term 'Self,' and am exploring the use of phrases to replace it, such as 'autonomously focusing' and 'centering reference'). I have learned a tremendous amount about mySelf during the past quarter, and the projection-reflections that constitute the nature of my relationships with the greater world.

At intermittent moments throughout the quarter, Life provided me with buoyant, sometimes joyful, colorful feedback: high amplitude spikes against a general background of gray survival drone. These positive feedback moments encouraged and

inspired me to trudge forth with my original vision; they revealed to me that my core 'centering reference' is basically good and wholesome, but my projected personality and accumulated acquired habit patterns are in need of fundamental transformation. The Autumn quarter of 1999 clearly demonstrated to me that my life has grown into an entirely new context, with new opportunities and challenges, demanding adjustments in my relationship with and to the world.

Somehow, now that the smoke has cleared and I can go home soon, I am experiencing a new lease on life. I am more determined than ever to strengthen those aspects of life that provide me with joy, meaning, and comfort, and to eliminate attitudes and behaviors that detract from this nourishment. In short, I have an overwhelming desire now to create a salubriously secure 'home' for myself and my family. This desire or life-direction could not have presented itself with such force, and with the responding alacrity on my part, without the serious unrelenting challenges I experienced during the Autumn quarter of 1999.

Within this greater context, I experienced immersion in Whole Systems Design at Antioch University Seattle. At first, I was not quite sure if this was the social context within which I wanted to be 'immersed.' I was convinced that a Master's degree fit in with my long-term goals, but the prevailing attitude of people at 'graduate school' didn't seem to align with my experientially-developed, organically-cherished value system. Would full participation in 'graduate school' require me to compromise my value system and become a yuppie to find acceptance in this new social context? I decided to completely abstain from any judgment reflexes and to accept people on their own merit, as influenced by their own unique background. I decided to completely press the 'individualized' component of the individualized program, for as long as it exists – in much the same way that the peaceful protesters in the Battle for Seattle decided to completely press their First Amendment rights, for as long as they exist. I became convinced that my bodily presence at 'graduate school' would be a temporary affair, most especially since the school was positioned in an urban core. I resolved myself to creating, as best I could, meaningful productive relationships with individuals at 'graduate school in the city' so that the potential for long-term beneficial relationships would not be overlooked. Still, I yearned to return home and be with my own people.

As Immersion in Whole Systems Design progressed, I perceived that the individuals in our Immersion class were indeed greater bodily extension-inclusions of mySelf, and I was sure we were all brought together for a good reason. Somehow, the sense of identification with my 'core group' within Immersion – as well as the more-inclusive Whole Systems Design constituency – did not extend to include the greater generic 'graduate school.' My boundaries of identification were extended even further, however, by my discovering the Environment and Community program at AUS. I believe now that there is the potential for an ongoing, productive relationship between me and AUS, even with my limited bodily presence. AUS would encourage even more

productive, beneficial relationships among its constituents if it relocated out of an urban core and into a park-like setting.

And of course, I learned a lot about Whole Systems Design as well. I had the habit of reading in coffee shops in the morning, tending to business in the afternoons, and then writing in pubs at night – almost every night. I was glad to be exposed to such a wide range of ‘systems’ material through the ‘reader’ that was provided for us. This allowed me the opportunity to gain a comprehensive overview of systems thinking and to discover ‘factions’ I am aligned with. It also provided me with many new leads for authors, books, and organizations to seek out in the future.

I feel very privileged to be in the Whole Systems Design Individualized Program. There is a tiny minority of people in the world who are given the time and space to pursue their dreams and work on bringing them into reality. I thank my lucky stars for that.

As to the specific things I learned – well I’ve been writing them down all quarter. Now I’m done writing for awhile; I’m going home...

Action Plan (Abbreviated)

Winter Quarter 2000

- 1) Divergence – 3 credits – Doing all those things necessary to form the Design Committee and have our first meeting.
- 2) Immersion in Living Systems Theory – 3 credits – This is the fundamental basis for my work at Antioch: I want to be able to describe, design, speak and write about Ecovillages as Living Systems. I want to be an expert in this field. I have begun collecting books on this subject; the study will be centered upon reading Miller’s 900-page *Living Systems*.
- 3) Cognition Theories – 3 credits – Investigating the cognition theories of Maturana, Varela, Bateson, and Whitehead. This will include reading: *The Tree of Knowledge*, *The Embodied Mind*, *Mind and Nature*, and *Process and Reality*. These theories are intuited to encompass the educational approach of an eventual “Gaia University.”

Spring Quarter 2000

- 1) Teach “Ecovillage Design” course at Fairhaven College – 5 credits – This will be my first chance to present my accumulated knowledge as/in an actual college course. I will write up a complete syllabus, develop course contents, present fundamental principles of “Ecovillage Design,” and then take students through the design process of designing an “Ecovillage Demonstration Site,” complete with Learning Center, to add to the university’s current pool of possibilities for

proposed land use at Fairhaven College's outdoor learning center. I am presenting this in the Spring because there are a group of students who have already expressed interest in this course who will be graduating soon. The teaching of "Ecovillage Design" eventually will become my profession.

- 2) Immersion in Biology – 4 credits – The paradigm shift underway can be explained as a shift away from a science of 'matter' to a science of 'life.' I want to have a firm grasp on the fundamental principles and languaging of the (new) Life Sciences, including: physical characteristics, properties and processes of the cell; RNA, DNA, and the double-helix pattern; evolutionary biology; etc. I want to be fluent in the use of biological metaphors and I want to identify biological structures and processes that can be modeled in human systems. I have accumulated many books in this area and will augment my study by auditing a "Biology of Evolution" class at Western Washington University.