Dream Sociodrama

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An outgrowth of Moreno's sociodrama and sociometry and the AQAL (all quadrants, all lines, all levels, all states, and all styles) model of Ken Wilber, dream sociodrama is one methodology of a multiperspective, integral life practice called integral deep listening (IntegralDeepListening.com). A playful excursion into constructive absurdity, dream sociodrama asks the protagonist to choose three life issues and then tell a dream or nightmare or share a waking drama. Alternatively, the protagonist may choose a sociocultural crisis or a historical or fictional event, or the group can present a shared issue, such as a work problem. Several group members take one role in the drama and answer scripted questions designed to generate transformations, often surprising and cosmically humorous, followed by the protagonist doing the same. All develop action plans based on recommendations elicited by the interviewing process.

KEYWORDS: Dreaming, integral; AQAL; encounter; psychodrama; sociodrama, dream sociodrama; integral deep listening; dream sociometry.

How can group process accelerate both individual and group integration at the same time? How can the projective elements of interpretation be reduced? How can we best help each other find our own unique way forward into the fulfillment of our potentials? Dream sociodrama is a playful and creative methodology that can support these processes.

WHAT IS DREAM SOCIODRAMA?

"Sociodrama" is a term coined by Moreno (1953) that means, "A dramatic play in which several individuals act out assigned roles for the purpose of studying and remedying problems in group or collective relationships." "Drama" can refer to theatrical, therapeutic, or intensely emotional, reactive, and delusional behavior. While Moreno applies drama in the first and second usages, integral deep listening (IDL) emphasizes the second and third, with dream sociodrama referring to a therapeutic application of dramatic forms, while the "Drama Triangle," a term

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ISSN 0731-1273

derived from transactional analysis, refers to the third usage.[2] This distinction is important, because it recognizes that drama can be entertaining, therapeutic, or destructive, depending on how it is used.

Although dream sociodrama shares similarities with Moreno's psychodrama, constellation therapy, voice dialogue, Gestalt, and even Tibetan Deity Yoga, it is not derived from them and is only very indirectly related to them.[3] While such methodologies may use group processes to help an individual explore and resolve some internal psychological issue, dream sociodrama asks participants to share in the growth of a subject into one or more central potentials of life that are attempting to emerge or be born within them. By so doing, group members are increasingly guided by organic factors and states that are negentropic (building up; the opposite of "entropic"), evolutionary, and sacred.[4] Dream sociodrama is derived from "dream sociometry," which is itself an application of Moreno's sociometric methods to the interviewing of dream characters and objects (Dillard, 2016a).

We commonly assume we are awake, aware, and conscious when in fact we are more or less asleep, dreaming, and sleepwalking our way through our lives. "Dream" in dream sociodrama is meant to refer to the dreamlike, delusional, contextually based nature of human identity and perception. It is not meant to imply idealism—that is, a philosophy or worldview that denies or reduces objective reality to our perception of it. To point out the dreamlike nature of waking life is not meant to deny or minimize the reality or importance of those things that are empirically not self. IDL views life very much as J. L. Moreno did; life is creative and wants to be expressed through playful expression and living, not through life-denying withdrawal.

"Socio" is meant to both include and transcend common meanings of the prefix "psycho." Psycho refers to those issues and qualities internal to the individual, such as thoughts, feelings, and level of consciousness. Psychological approaches therefore treat dream characters and objects of psychodramatic or Gestalt interviews as self-aspects. Everything can be reduced to subjective perception, meaning that objectivity and "others" are projections to be reincorporated through the taking of responsibility for how we perceive and treat them. In its inclusive sense, socio refers to the multiple perspectives that inform thoughts and feelings as the internalized culture or microcosm of the individual.

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[2] IDL expands on the traditional understanding of the Drama Triangle to include patterns of thought and nighttime dreams in addition to interpersonal relationships (see Dillard, 2016b).

[3] For comparisons to Gestalt therapy, see http://integraldeeplistening.com/perls-gestalt-therapy-and-dream-yoga/. For voice dialogue, see http://www.dreamyoga.com/voice-dialogue-hal-and-sidra-stone. For Tibetan Deity Yoga, see http://integraldeeplistening.com/tibetan-dream-yoga/.

[4] Rather than making alignment with one's life compass or "individual awakening" the province of the protagonist, as is normally the case with psychodrama and its various derivatives such as Gestalt and constellation therapy, dream sociodrama makes these aims the work of all group members as they take part in or identify with what has been turned into a collective "dream."

These form the worldview, frame of reference, hidden assumptions, groupthink, or context within which an individual is immersed. Our worldview is generally so broad that we are unaware of it, presumably as a fish is of the water through which it swims or our normal lack of awareness of the air between our eyes and these words that we are now reading. Our worldview contains socially internalized scripting and injunctions, typically associated with conscience, intuition, *dharma*, natural and divine law, and concepts such as destiny, karma, and fate.

The second, transcendent context that socio refers to is broader. It includes all four realms of our sense of self: the psychological, cultural, social, and behavioral. A more appropriate word for this context is *holon*. As explained by Wilber (2001), a holon points to the fact that no parts exist that are not contained within some greater whole and that no wholes exist that do not have parts. Accordingly, dream sociodrama could also accurately be called "holonic drama" or "holondrama" (Wilber, 2001).[5] Socio in this transcending sense refers to telic or emerging potentials that do not belong to us but to life, and that are attempting to be born within our awareness. Sociodrama interviews—or asks questions of—characters and objects, that personify perspectives that are emergent, that is, aspects of larger contexts that are striving to generate higher orders of integration in the psychological, cultural, social, and behavioral realms of our identity. This is no more or less mystical than the pattern of an oak existing as an emergent potential within an acorn.

Socio, unlike psycho, intentionally refers to macrocosmic issues and qualities that are external to the individual, as they define themselves. Dreaming provides a helpful analogy in that it contains a social environment that is "not self," as defined by our perspective when we are dreaming. Later, when we awaken we say, "Oh! That was me scaring myself! Oh! I must have created that dream setting with its scenery!" However, during the dream, unless we become lucid, we are surrounded by an external social reality that is not self, just as in real life. It is reductionistic to say that others are *really* aspects of self and just like dreams; if we

[5] "Holon" is a term originated by Arthur Koestler and elaborated by Ken Wilber that means "part-whole." It notes that there is nothing, including the concept of nothing itself, which is not a part of something greater (in the case of nothing, it is a part of the set that contains nothing and all things), and there is no whole that does not contain parts. Wilber further divides holons into the four above-mentioned quadrants by noting that just as there is no collective that does not have individual members, so there is no exterior that does not have an interior. It is important to note that the opposite is also equally true—that there are no individual members who are not part of some larger collective and that there are no interiors that do not have exteriors. Take a moment and contemplate this. Can you think of any exceptions to the above principles?

The interior individual quadrant of a holon is private and personal—the realm of psychology in the sense of thoughts, feelings, and states of consciousness. The exterior individual quadrant is public but personal—the realm of the observed actions of cells, atoms, animals, people, and galaxies. The exterior social quadrant is public and collective—the realm of social psychology, human interaction, and systems, from physiology to cosmology. The interior collective quadrant is private and collective—the realm of values, culture, interpretations and worldviews (see Wilber, 2001).

will just wake up, we will realize it. IDL says there are noumena that really exist as not self and are therefore not reducible to either self-aspects or denizens of the psychological realm. However, this view does not grant these noumena independent ontology, meaning that they viewed as real, as shamans view totem animals from vision quests, or as we normally assume our dream images to be while we are asleep and dreaming (see http://integraldeeplistening.com/tibetan-dream-yoga/). Rather, socio in sociodrama refers to the intrasocial realm, a space where both objectivity and subjectivity are interdependent and ontology or beingness is conditioned and indefinite, which is accessed through character identification.

HOW A DREAM SOCIODRAMA IS CONDUCTED

As in psychodrama, a group is formed and a "subject," called a "protagonist," is selected. This individual shares three life issues that are important to him or her at this point in his life. The issues might be related to health, work, or relationship. They could be immediate, such as what to do in the group, or they could be distant and broad, involving life goals or existential questions about war and peace. Issues do not have to be problems or conflicts in search of resolution.

Next, a context is chosen for the dream sociodrama. This could be a dream, personal life issue, group problem, contemporary world crisis, historical event, fairy tale, fiction, or myth. Strangely enough, it does not have to have anything to do with the life issues. It can be something whimsical, like Daniela Simmons' (personal communication, 2016) use of *Alice in Wonderland*, or some sociocultural crisis, like 9/11. There are advantages and disadvantages to each way of framing the dream sociodrama.

For example, some contexts are personal, like dreams, nightmares, and life issues, whereas others are collective, such as shared group problems and contemporary world crises. Personal issues are most relevant for the protagonist, whereas collective framings may draw in more members of the group at greater depth. Personal contexts contain more pathos, personal drama, angst, and catharsis, whereas others, such as fairy tales and fiction, are lighter and more fun. Some choices have implications mostly for personal growth, and others have powerful global implications. However, any and all of these contexts can produce impressive results for both the individual and the group.

In general, the most effective themes are those that interest and motivate the group as a whole. Much of the time a context will be volunteered by the protagonist or be a pre-appointed topic that the group wants to work on, like a group work task or an unresolved interpersonal issue with a coworker. For maximum group engagement, the director attempts to choose contexts that are magical, mystifying, playful, challenging, and interesting to the members.

Once the context is chosen, the protagonist is asked to tell the group what it means to him or her. What is an interpretation of the dream? Why did he or she pick this life issue, fairy tale, or historical event? The sharing of the protagonist's interpretations surfaces personal biases, prejudices, and presuppositions so that these are less likely to color the process.

Sharing initial assumptions informs the director and the group of these biases, which will inform and thereby expand their own assumptions about the dream or life drama. It serves as a pretest by which everyone can later judge the effectiveness of the dream sociodrama. Did it confirm the interpretation of the dreamer? Did it produce new interpretations? Did it generate concrete, useful, and operational recommendations? This is important, because one way we maintain our psychological geocentrism is by telling ourselves, "I knew that all the time!" Of course this is true, because we are listening to internal perspectives. The pretest provides a way of asking after the interview, "If I knew this all the time, why was it not part of my initial interpretation?"

Next a character from the dream, personal life issue, group problem, contemporary world crisis, historical event, fairy tale, fiction, or myth is chosen to interview. Which is best? How does one choose? The protagonist will usually make a choice based on the characters available within the dream or life issue she is relating; however, some guidelines are helpful as the director steers the group in making a good choice.

We are most likely to project our own identities, beliefs, assumptions, expectations, and desires onto human and humanoid characters. Of these, love partners, newly deceased children, and parents are the most difficult. . . . Because our internalized script injunctions are so entangled with intimates, it is unrealistic that we will approach our intimates with any objectivity.

At the other extreme are things one has never interviewed before and would never think of interviewing, such as a meerkat, pogo stick, or gob of spit. Inanimate objects (a rock), vegetation (a rhododendron), human artifact (chair), or environmental realm (the sky) are good choices because they provide relative objectivity. The basic continuum at work here is between emotional investment and objective detachment.

The more emotional investment the protagonist has in a character the less likely she is to get into role and instead make the character a surrogate for pronouncing personal preferences. The less emotional investment the protagonist has in a character the more likely she is to allow it to speak. However, there is an important drawback. Great objectivity means emotional and experiential remoteness, resulting in reduced likelihood that the protagonist will identify with its concerns—precisely because it is distinct or remote from the dramas from which most of us draw our identities.

For many first-timers working with life issues, animals represent a good balance between emotional investment and objective detachment for several reasons. All of us have an innate ability to identify with animals; as children our dreams were full of them. There is a sense of emotional identification, either positive or negative, with most animals, that supports the identification. Most of us have never imagined we were an oyster, squid, or aardvark before, so we have relatively few preconceptions to bring to the role.

The group members who volunteer as auxiliaries to take up the chosen role and answer the scripted series of questions in the IDL interviewing protocol will provide emotional identification and plenty of amusement. Listening to the various embodiments of the chosen object or character adds emotional coloration

and meanings that are as unsuspected as they are relevant. These reframe for the protagonist not only the function of the character or object in the dream or drama, but also make available multiple alternative ways of approaching the entire issue under consideration. Before taking the role, the protagonist has already witnessed multiple presentations of the character or object as played by the auxiliaries. This process helps to deepen the protagonist's emotional identification with the character.

Taking the role, fully and completely, is the heart of the process of dream sociodrama, just as it is with psychodrama. However, there are important distinctions. In psychodrama, there are multiple roles at the same time, represented by different auxiliaries, one being mother, another being the pet dog, another the mortgage payment, and so forth. In both psychodrama and dream sociodrama, more than one auxiliary can take the same role that the protagonist takes. However, in dream sociodrama, instead of different individuals playing multiple roles, several individuals are playing the same role. The protagonist interviews three or four different versions of the same dream chair, mortgage payment, or demon. While it is indeed possible to interview more than one character from the dream or life issue at the same time in dream sociodrama, with several group members choosing to become one or the other, it is recommended that you first get well-grounded in the process of having multiple group members focus on one role. This is essentially to reduce complexity and to focus on quality of identification and respectful deep listening rather than to risk defusing both with quantity. One character, due to the likelihood of multiple transformations, is likely to supply more than enough provocation, absurdity, and information to keep the group processing for some time thereafter.

With the assistance of the director and other group members, the protagonist throws out questions to the characters that follow the structure of the IDL interviewing protocol but may elaborate on it or challenge answers given. The randomness of who answers is part of the fun of the process, which is supposed to be light, fun, and chaotic. The interviewing protocol divides questions into a sequential progression of role identification, role disclosure, invitation to transform, self-ratings of core qualities associated with emerging potentials, desired life changes, and life recommendations. In both psychodrama and dream sociodrama, auxiliaries speak for the characters they embody, with multiple auxiliaries often providing multiple responses to the same question.

In response to the question, "How would you live the waking life of this dreamer if you were in charge?," characters answer referencing the life of the *auxiliary*, not the protagonist. The same occurs with the recommendations about the life issues, even though such issues may have nothing to do with the life concerns facing a particular auxiliary. Therefore, recommendations directed at auxiliaries, not at the protagonist, are forthcoming at this point. Transformations are multiple as well. The room may end up being full of skunks, angels, giant squids, and turds. God may even show up.

This process is then repeated by the protagonist becoming the chosen character and responding to the same scripted questioning protocol. She is asked the scripted questions by the director and various group members. The

protagonist as character or object explains who and what she is, how she views the life issue and what, if anything she wants to do about it *as the character*. Does she want to transform? If so, how? Why? How does she score herself in the six core qualities? How would she live the protagonist's life differently if she were in charge? How would she handle the life issues? Group members are free to act as auxiliaries or to mirror. Again, the director keeps the answers coming quickly with no pauses. The protagonist then returns to her normal waking identity and states what she has heard herself say and what she wants to take away from the interview/group process.

In dream sociodrama an important part of the group process is helping the protagonist operationalize recommendations in order to set up a process of accountability to the group on whatever she chooses to do with the interview. At this point, other group members can say what, if anything, they want to commit to doing differently as a result of the dream sociodrama, because they have themselves received recommendations from it. Subsequently, there is a sense of collective reliance and nurturing in growth that comes out of the process.

DIFFERENCES FROM PSYCHODRAMA

Both psychodrama and dream sociodrama involve the group in the depiction of the drama of some dream or life circumstance of the protagonist, but in different ways (for a listing of the differences between psychodrama, sociometry, and dream sociodrama, see Table 1). With dream sociodrama the dream or life issue is told and, instead of different group members playing different parts in the drama, two or more take the same part, say Genghis Kahn, a bookshelf, toilet brush, or snapdragon. The more people who want to take on the persona of the identified character, the merrier. These supportive group members are not meant, in the first part of the dream sociodrama, to serve as traditional psychodrama auxiliaries, portraying the protagonist's own experience, but rather are to forget about the protagonist and her issue and speak authentically, giving voice to whatever character has been chosen, as they deeply identify with this or that role, whether it is a cucumber, radio, or orc. However, they are still auxiliaries, in that they are in part responding to the life issues and context of the protagonist. Their response to questions about the life issues raised by the protagonist may be two-fold. On the one hand, it may be advice for the auxiliary in their own life. On the other, it may be advice for the protagonist "channeled" by the muse, shamanic totem, spirit guide, or Flying Spaghetti Monster. In any case, the major responsibility of an auxiliary is to answer spontaneously as if they were the character, forgetting, shelving, or ignoring their own point of view, opinions, expectations, and assumptions for the moment. This is equally true for the protagonist when her turn comes. If there is a pause in answering, that is an indication that the waking identity of the group member or protagonist is acting as censor, trying to figure out the "right" answer or worried that it is going to be stupid or wrong. But there is no right answer in dream sociodramas, and it is impossible to be too stupid or too wrong. Neither IDL interviewing nor dream sociometry involve a search for the Truth or The Solution.

Table 1. Comparison of differences between psychodrama, sociometry, and dream sociodrama.

Psychodrama	Sociometry	Dream Sociodrama
Enhances subject insight and integration.	Enhances individual performance in groups.	Enhances subject empathy and objectivity.
Provides opportunities for insight and integration for participants/ viewers.	Enhances group cohesion and performance.	Provides opportunities for insight and integration for participants/ viewers.
Constructively reframes dysfunctionality.	Enhances socialization for improved performance.	Reduces drama while increasing alignment with life compass.
Interviews dream or fantasy characters and waking life issues.	Collects and tabulates preferences.	Interviews dream or fantasy characters and waking life issues.
May work on any topic of interest to the protagonist or focus on an issue of common interest to the group.	Interviews students, workers, voters, teachers, etc.	May work on any topic of interest to the protagonist or focus on an issue of common interest to the group.
Group supports and facilitates individual awakening.		Group supports and facilitates individual awakening.
Accesses insight and catharsis.		Accesses emerging potentials.
Provides group support in reframing issues of personal importance.	Provides objectivity regarding group reorganization for integration and improved functioning.	Attempts to align with the priorities of one's life compass.
Questioning is generally unscripted and is secondary to dialog by the various characters within the portrayal of the subject's issue.		Questioning follows a script, although other questions can be spontaneously included.

Table 1. Continued.

Psychodrama	Sociometry	Dream Sociodrama
Questioning is primarily for the benefit of the protagonist.		Questioning initially focuses on group benefit.
Questions are designed to clarify the issue under consideration and the feelings/thoughts the protagonist has about them.		Questions are designed to encourage transformation and practical solutions to pressing life issues.
Doubling occurs.		Doubling occurs.
Auxiliaries speak for the protagonist.		Auxiliaries speak for the interviewed character.
Interpretations tend to be those of the group and the individual.		Interpretations reflect triangulation.
Teaches detachment from drama through absurdity.		Teaches detachment from drama through absurdity.
Emphasizes playfulness.		Emphasizes playfulness.
Uses drama for self-integration.		Uses drama to free oneself from the Drama Triangle, and to access life compass.
Multiple group members can act as auxiliaries for multiple characters.		Multiple group members play the role of one character.

Note. Dream sociometry is not included here. It interviews multiple dream characters or personifications of life issues in order to objectify and reframe the feelings and beliefs that reinforce and validate some "stuck" emotion, belief, attitude, or perception (see Dillard, 2016a).

Questioning and answering should move quickly, randomly, and spontaneously from one version of the character to the next in a playful, quirky, odd, and stupid way that does not need to make sense. When it is the protagonist's turn to play the role, for example of Freud's famous cigar, and she gets stuck repeatedly, ask the cigar, not the protagonist, "Cigar, it appears that your human, by hesitating, is not letting you speak. Is that right? If so, how does that feel?" The cigar is likely to respond by saying something like, "Pretty unfair! She talks all the time! Why can't she shut up for once and listen to me?." Or, it may be that the cigar is persistently uninterested. If it is, ask it if it recommends some other character to interview.

Another important difference from psychodrama is that the different actors inhabiting the same role, in this case the cigar, are asked the same scripted questions. The purpose is for multiple voices to first fully occupy and then amplify one specific role in various ways while the protagonist watches and asks all the same scripted questions.[6] Therefore, to this point, transformations are primarily occurring for the participants, not the protagonist, which is different from psychodrama, which is created primarily for the benefit of the subject, although the group as a whole benefits.

All participants are made aware of the nature and purpose of the scripted questions, and each one is given a copy to refer to as a guideline for questioning and to help the process stay on track. A character whose role is being portrayed, like the cigar, can also speak up and tell the subject questions they wish to be asked. Other group members not in role, as well as the director, can chime in with additional questions as long as they amplify instead of deviating widely from the purpose of the scripted questions. The job of the director here is to keep questioning on track and moving along rapidly.

The reason there is a set script for questioning is that the script follows a formula that supports the acquisition of a worldview that is multiperspectival.[7] Its first objective is to make sure that group members get into role authentically and as completely as possible. The primary task of the director is to make sure this occurs. Because the protagonist will have seen multiple group members take the same role they themselves will later occupy, this should desensitize them if they have any reluctance to becoming the cigar or some other character, like a bullfrog or cabbage.

Another objective of the script is to encourage transformation. There are at least three distinct places in the script that invite characters to transform if they so desire. Consequently, the room may fill with parrots, ships, icebergs, deceased relatives, or dogs. However, it is not "better" for a character, even an old, worn out, smelly one, like an old sock on a bathroom floor, to transform. If it does not want to, it wants to be heard, appreciated, and respected for what it is, not turned into a pink cloud or a rainbow. The script also educates about and accesses core

[6] Questions can be asked by anyone or shared by the group as long as group members are familiar with the nature and purposes of the IDL interviewing protocol.

[7] For examples of scripts for dream and life issue interviews, as well as for children, see http://integraldeeplistening.com/idl-resources/questionnaires/

qualities that are building blocks for integrated development. Concrete suggestions regarding resolving the life issue are proposed by the character in its multiple, often transformed, manifestations. The script makes sure that the group members and protagonist appropriately process the interview and come away not only with a concrete action plan but with an accountability strategy to support and monitor their application of those recommendations they have chosen to implement (Dillard, 2012).

Why not simply have the protagonist occupy the role at the same time that the others do? This certainly would shorten the process. Simultaneous responses to questions by the protagonist in the role of the interviewed character are likely to cause the other group members in the role of the object to respond to questions in a way to "help"—that is, rescue—the protagonist by supplying what they think is the "right" or "best" answer for the protagonist. This defeats the purpose of role identification for other group members, and it drains the authenticity out of the process. The protagonist answers last so that she has the benefit of the previous answers. The advantage of having several group members get into role and answer the questions first is that the protagonist will be more likely to get into and stay in role easily if she has seen others play the part. Their answers expand her understanding of what that interviewed character's perspective entails so that when she becomes the cigar, dump truck, or tree sloth the experience is likely to be that much more profound.

If group members want to look like and act like the character they are embodying while they answer the questions, they are certainly encouraged to do so. This adds another degree of frivolity and absurdity to the entire process. A "prop box" is recommended, with masks, noise makers, tools, foam bats and toy weapons, gadgets, as well as art materials to encourage participants to amplify their role with their own creations. Group members should be encouraged to be dramatic, to ham it up, to be stupid, ridiculous, and playful. This sense of playfulness enables participants to lessen the sense of their life dramas as all-important without discounting or minimizing the personal significance.

After questions are answered with fun and chaos by multiple group members in the role of one character, the protagonist then becomes the interviewed object. She is then asked these same questions. The protagonist, who has had the benefit of listening to several group members as the character and has observed their various transformations in those roles, now has a broader understanding of what that character is or can be. Her responses in the role of the character or object are now greatly expanded from what they would have been if only she had been asked the questions from the beginning, with other group members serving as auxiliaries or doubling the protagonist. At this point, group members can double the protagonist as she responds to the interview questions in the role of the character or object.

The end of the questioning process involves the protagonist, once again deciding which of the recommendations she wants to apply, how they will be operationalized, and how she wants to be held accountable. She will have had the advantage of having heard various versions of her object's responses, transformed or not, to how it would handle her life issues and what recommendations it has.

All this not only adds enormous depth to her responses but is more likely to produce a plan that is practical and realistic.

The session concludes with comments from the protagonist regarding her experience of the process as well as what both auxiliaries and other group members want to take away from the process.

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[8] IDL also emphasizes goal setting, behavioral monitoring, and communication skills.

[9] For a description and examples of dream sociometry, dream sociomatrices, and dream sociograms see http://integraldeeplistening.com/examples-of-dream-sociometry/.

[10] While "contexts" is an allusion to postmodernistic perspectives, such as popularized by Heidegger, Derrida, and Foucault, it is more concretely associated with Wilber's integral concept of "holon" as "part-whole" consisting of four quadrants of psychology or consciousness, behavior, social interaction, and culture. The relationship of holons and AQAL (all quadrants, all lines, all levels, all states, and all styles) to IDL is described in Ken Wilber's Integral AQAL and Dream Yoga: http://integraldeeplistening.com/ken-wilbers-integral-aqal-and-dream-yoga/.