

Michael Garfield Interviews Ken Wilber On Integral Art (reprinted from <http://michaelgarfield.gaia.com>)

Part One: Art Beyond Irony

I recently had the immense honor of interviewing author and philosopher Ken Wilber, known worldwide as the premier living philosopher of integral theory and the pioneer of the AQAL Model. For over thirty-five years (his first book, the Freud-and-Buddha-reconciling Spectrum of Consciousness, was published when he was 23), Ken has been cultivating a reconstructive model of human experience and inquiry that cuts through the haze of postmodern confusion and relates art to science, psychology to spirituality, systems theory to cultural anthropology, politics to ecology, and business to medicine. He is also a seasoned meditator, and draws his descriptions of the transpersonal realms of consciousness from personal experience - making him a rare resource, someone whose scholarly musings are informed by his vivid, living experience of enlightened awareness.

Dragging a train of both ardent supporters and vicious critics, Ken's writings have been translated into more languages than any other English-speaking author. He is the founder of the Integral Institute, an international think tank where the extension and application of integral theory to every domain of knowledge and practice is being explored by thousands of people worldwide.

Most of Ken's writings focus on psychology, philosophy, and spirituality - all topics that inform a deeper understanding of art and music. But Ken has written precious little about art, so I jumped on the chance to ask him my most pressing questions about how "integral consciousness" - this next great leap in human evolution - will inform both the artist and the artistic process.

Ken's language is dense and specific, so I have included numerous explanatory notes throughout the interview for those unfamiliar with his work.

Ken Wilber: Hey, it's Ken.

Michael Garfield: Hi!

KW: Hi buddy, how are you?

MG: I'm doing well, how are you?

KW: Good!

MG: Yeah, so how long do you have to speak today?

KW: Um, oh, an hour, hour and a half.

MG: That gives us plenty of time. We tossed some issues around via email, and I guess we can just kinda swim around in those one by one until we run out of time...or attention.

KW: Okay! [Laughs.]

MG: So I kinda figured that the best way to go about this would be to ease into it with a little bit of discussion about, you know, an analytical discussion on music, and how music appears, and how we understand it. And then maybe get into a little bit more of a poetic and artful tone in our discussion.

KW: Uh huh, sure! Sure, absolutely.

MG: Well then, I - kind of my first - well, first of all, you're doing well, right?

[Ken suffers from CFIDS, a chronic RNAI disorder that causes everything from paralysis to seizures.]

KW: Yeah, doing fine, thank you.

MG: And you've got a birthday coming up, too?

[This interview was conducted on 30 January, the day before Ken's 59th birthday.]

KW: I do.

MG: Well, happy birthday.

KW: Thank you!

MG: Well, one of the things that I've been talking about with my friends is something that's kind of central to a lot of people's world right now: the changing role of music in our culture. That there's this technological revolution that we're going through now, it's a revolution of communication, and so the role of communication is expanding - like it tends to, in the middle of a technological revolution.

KW: Right.

MG: And just as someone who's given a lot of thought to what the consequences of new modes of communication and discourse are going to mean, in the 21st Century, how do you see the role of music expanding or changing in the next ten, twenty, fifty, hundred years?

KW: Yeah. Well it depends on how you look at music, in terms of its actual functionality, its actual contours, its actual definition. We sort of begin with pointing out that music is an artifact. So it's something that is created, meaningfully, by human sentient beings. And it has a component of it that can be looked at as just purely

expressive, which is something in a sense that an artist can theoretically just do alone, but then it also has a communicative aspect. Something that is meant to be conveyed to another sentient being. And that then opens the artifact to being interpreted at the altitude that it's created at.

[Ken's uses the word "altitude" to mean a particular station along the continuum of psychological development. The more developed you are, the higher your altitude.]

And this then leaves music's self-expressive and communicative capacity coming from a particular altitude. And different types of music, or even within types of music, individuals and different artists in specific types of music can pretty much span almost an entire spectrum. And so what we're looking at is a range of signifiers [signals] that are both self-expressive and communicative. And particularly in the communicative mode, it's a system or pattern of signifiers that's going to go through a particular medium, and the medium itself can be an important part of the message, but it goes through a particular medium and then is decoded as a signified [the signal's meaning] in a human or a group of human beings.

And so that essentially means several things, in terms of the role of music, what music is doing, and so on. And one is that you can look at the actual content of music, its actual altitude, and whether it's evoking a sort of second or third chakra rock and roll beat -

[The chakras of the body's subtle energy system are roughly equivalent to the stages of human psychological development - chakras two and three are correlated with the emergence of the ego and personal power.]

- or whether it's more cerebral, and Bach-classical music sort of sixth or seventh chakra [the nexuses of intuitive insight and divine union, respectively]. And you can look at it in terms of that kind of altitude evoking, and that refers essentially to the structure of music, and the structural altitude that music fits into as a signifier - and, again, whether it's aiming at lower chakras or intermediate chakras or higher chakras - but you can also look at music as its capacity to evoke states of consciousness. And this is probably one of the most important aspects of music as a spiritual transmission. Because music at any level can start out as a third-person artifact, and then can actually end up as a first-person identification. A person can actually end up feeling one with the art in a nondual flow state [in which the boundary between self and other is completely dissolved]. And if not a flow state, then as a pure witness, a contemplation of the art as being so beautiful or so arresting or so provoking that one is thrust into a causal witness state.

[The witnessing state is a state of pure awareness, unidentified with any of the objects of consciousness - the featureless self of this state is "causal" in the sense that all things arise within its spaciousness, and so there can be no prior origin.]

And if that deepens or intensifies, it will go from that third- or second-person into a first-person identification, and one gets into a flow state, one loses one's self in the art. The art evokes and pulls forth a capacity for causal or nondual Spirit. And this can happen at,

again, virtually any altitude, just as states, peak experiences can occur at any altitude. But looking at the state transition itself is one of the really important aspects of looking at art, because at whatever level a society is at, art is one of its primary means of transmitting causal and nondual Spirit.

And you had some questions about environment and in the modern world, as artists are the primary spiritual speakers - one way to put it - and in a sense, that's true. So what we're looking at are two different scales of what art does. One is the altitude that the signifiers of art are flying at, and that's a developmental altitude, it's an altitude of complexity, an altitude that is put into the artwork by the consciousness of its maker, by the artist, and will then tend to evoke the same level - in viewers or readers or listeners - the same level of signifieds as the level of signifier. And so in the modern, in the coming world, art does two things - one, it has a world of higher signifiers open to it, it has a world of integral or second-tier, in some cases, third-tier altitude open that it can resonate from.

["Second-tier" refers to the altitudes at which all previous altitudes are recognized as essential elements of one's own being, and less-developed individuals are treated compassionately and appropriately according to their own development. "Third-tier" refers to the altitudes beyond second-tier at which the self/other boundary begins to unravel - not merely as a temporary peak experience, but as a permanent feature of one's identity.]

And whether it's in music, or painting, or literature, it can transmit that second-tier evocation, that integral transmission. And then another is its capacity for states, and in this capacity, as in the past, art has a possibility of evoking state experiences in the viewer, listener, or reader. And these can be subtle states, of just emotional intensity, but it can be spiritual states of causal contemplation and nondual flow. And it was nondual flow, for example, that Schopenhauer had in mind when he talked about art transmitting spiritual awareness, where subject and object become one in the viewer, and that's a nondual flow state. So, sort of two parts - and that's just an analytical, third-person answer to the question.

There's also first-person answers to the question, which are just more aesthetic responses to what aesthetics is. But that's kind of an overview, a third-person view, of where art is and that it's opening up on a frontier now of a second-tier transmission as well as being able to transmit and evoke states of consciousness. And those are essentially similar in the past, except that they are going to be interpreted. If somebody comes out of a nondual flow state, and somebody happens to be at turquoise -

[Ken uses a color-coding scheme to refer to specific altitudes. "Turquoise" refers to a mature and stable realization of so-called "integral" or "second-tier" consciousness.]

- and the art itself was composed by a turquoise mind, then if you asked the person, the listener/hearer/viewer to explain the artwork, they will explain it from an integral vantage point. They'll explain it from a turquoise vantage point, in terms of just the effect it has

on them. And whether that's music, and it just somehow "makes me feel whole," and whether it's literature, and there's a consistent writing from a second-tier perspective that's taken and conveyed and evoked in the narrative itself, or whether any sort of art in its communicative form now has signifiers that are available at second-tier. And this is basically, this is a fairly novel breakthrough. And certain great artists of the past have had a chance to push into second-tier cognitively and relate that aesthetically, but we're coming to a point now where there are a large number of everyday individuals that are at that - they're advanced everyday individuals, but it's somewhere upwards of five percent of the population, so that adds a mix to art that was not present before.

And the last thing I'll say about is, when it comes to art recognized by art critics, we have basically just about run the course of postmodern art, and that's art that has green-altitude signifiers [conveying an awareness of the social construction of the ego and systematically "deconstructing" it by illuminating its reliance on cultural context] and is heavily invested with normative judgments [declarations of right and wrong]. So art basically has been politicized, which is not really its function, but that's what green postmodern artists and critics have done with it. But we have about run that course, and so what's new is signifiers coming from integral. Signifiers coming from post-postmodern. And whether that's just in music composed by individuals at second-tier, kind of a certain resonance that comes across in that, or whether its actual narrative forms that convey these second-tier perspectives either explicitly by talking about integrative material or implicitly by coming from that altitude - however the form that they are, it has the capacity to use signifiers, and it is going to start using signifiers, that are post-postmodern. And that's going to be kind of huge. We're waiting to see how it breaks out, waiting to see what form it takes, waiting to see what narrative form it takes and particularly what visual arts do in the face of integral.

So that's all right on the horizon, and that's why it's a very exciting time in the art world, we're watching the death of a huge movement and the birth of what will be a huge movement, and we're right on that cusp.

MG: So, talking about the specific signifiers that are freshly being communicated by integral consciousness, I was in a discussion with my friend, the painter David Titterington, and he was telling me that [the early integral philosopher] Jean Gebser has a discussion of just that. In one of his books, he says, he's asking the question, is the integral music structurally new music, or is it merely novel? And he gives three basic criteria for what integral music would attempt to do, those criteria being: "to resolve in its own way the time problem temporally" - to communicate this atemporal, post-temporal reality in a temporal way, and then also "to escape dualism," and "to attain an arational mode of expression." He said that "the new music is in a position to abolish previous time forms." So do you agree with him on that?

KW: Not exactly. What Gebser was doing was brilliantly tracing large epochs of development and not really understanding that individual holons -

["Holon" is a term coined by Arthur Koestler to signify anything with both a body and mind. That includes you!]

- go through necessary stages, whereas social holons do not go through mandatory stages
-

[Ken maintains that societies have no central organizing mind, and so follow a slightly different set of rules than individuals.]

- and also understanding that an individual holon has a dominant monad [a central nexus of consciousness and agency], and a social holon that has a dominant mode of discourse [for example, the magical meaning systems and tribal economic structures of indigenous peoples, in contrast with the rational meaning systems and industrial economic structures of modernity]. So he analyzed the dominant modes of discourse in major epochs that human beings have developed through, right up to sort of the leading edge of the epoch that he was in when he was writing - which was rational. And he got those essentially right, although you can slice development in an infinite number of ways. The way he did it captures very well large aspects of the worldviews of these epochs, and they were, of course, archaic, magic, mythic, rational - rational being the first of the mental - and integral-aperspectival. And his "integral-aperspectival" is basically a mixture of green [postmodern], and teal [emergent integral], and turquoise [mature integral], and nondual states. And it's just because he didn't have a model that more clearly separated these different dimensions, and so he tended to get right on the edge of what art was doing in his time, and look at any of the art beyond that, and think that was coming from the next structure. Whereas a lot of the art beyond that was coming from states of consciousness, for example, some from very high states, nondual states. And so he mistakenly imported a radical overcoming of duality in the integral-aperspectival structure. And it doesn't overcome radical subject-object duality, that's still present. It can do it in temporary states, in nondual states. So I don't exactly agree with Gebser's analysis of that.

What I see [integral] art doing is overcoming the problem of pluralism and the problem of relativism -

["Pluralism" and "relativism," in their extreme forms, lead to a philosophical conviction that there are no universal common features to humanity or human experience, and so no deeper truths, no way to ultimately understand each other, and no universal standards of goodness or truth or beauty.]

- and finding ways - starting narratively, but moving to visual arts and music - to overcome the performative contradictions of pluralism. [The "performative contradictions of pluralism" center around its claim that there is no universal truth - except that one. Whoops!] And those are really fundamental in that they're problems of self-reflexivity. And the problem of green art, of pluralistic art, is that it's actually self-deconstructing. It starts out and it deconstructs things in the world that need to be deconstructed, but because it does not have access to a universalizing capacity - all it has access to is orange [rational] universals, which are rigid and monolithic and systemic.

[Think about how modernist thought declares "survival of the fittest" to be the best economic model, or a single, final materialist theory to be the achievable end of scientific inquiry, and you know what he means.]

And so green basically is in part a criticism of orange universals. Because it has a perspective on systems, it has a meta-systemic view. And so it sees that different systems can arise in different cultures. And that in many ways, knowledge is socially constructed. But then it takes that way too far, because it's the only tools it has. And so [green] art starts out deconstructing things that need to be deconstructed. It deconstructs the rigid conventions of this world, it deconstructs rigid taboos on virtually anything, any taboo on sex or power or females/males, anything like that. But then it has no ultimate place to stand, because the same principles it uses to deconstruct everything else actually apply to itself, as well. And so you get an entire tension in postmodern art, you get a self-loathing that is deep and pervasive, and is only handled, basically, by irony. And ironic art is art that says, "This is not true." That's what irony is: it's a statement that means the opposite of what it really says. So, you know, irony is like, "Oh, nice tie." And that sort of attitude of "Oh, nice tie" goes through all of [postmodern] art, cuz the only place it can stand is in an ironic, self-denying, ultimately self-loathing stance.

It's a bad time to be an artist, because it's essentially making conscious the self-loathing that it wishes the world to have for itself. A deconstructed world is a world that is self-loathing to the core. And that's the essential core message, hidden performative contradictory message, in postmodern art. And it's because it's the performative contradiction in the green altitude itself. Green is the last major structure before truly integral structure, and so green is two things: it's both trying to be integral, claims that it doesn't marginalize anything, claims that it doesn't exclude anything, except it marginalizes orange [modernism], it marginalizes amber [conventional, ethnocentric consciousness], it marginalizes red [mythic, heroic egotism], it doesn't like any of those, and all of those get attacked. So it says its trying to be integral, but it doesn't reach it, it doesn't really make it. And so it's sort of a half-way step to integral. And as such, it fails on its own desires. And it knows, pre-consciously, that it's failed to deliver the integral goods - and so, again, it slips into self-loathing.

So I don't think that the new art is primarily concerned with the temporal problem, and I don't think it's concerned with the duality problem. I think those are things that Gebser just picked out of the air. And I don't think it's arational. "Integral-aperspectival" is arational, it's aperspectival. And what you get with second-tier is universal-perspectival. You get, in other words, perspectives that hold up as good-enough universals, and show the common patterns that all cultures are following. And these patterns are not given eternally by archetypes; they're given by a common history. So we can still have nothing but history - the claim of postmodernism - but history unfolds in certain common ways around the world. And therefore we have universals. And they're not pre-given universals, but they're historically evolved universals. And that's what second-tier can spot. And artists, as well as writers, that are in that space, have an entirely different relationship to art. Art goes from self-loathing to self-appreciative and self-satisfying and

coming out of a self-abundance. It's one of the first art forms that moves from deficiency needs, which classify all first-tier signifiers, to being needs or super-abundant needs. Or overflowing motivation.

[Abraham Maslow identified a hierarchy of needs, from basic life needs to safety and security, belongingness and love, self-esteem, and then personal growth and fulfillment. Once someone has achieved status, responsibility, and reputation, the only "deficiencies" are experienced as motivations of abundance - the eagerness to explore and contribute.]

And that infects art as well. Art becomes celebratory, not necessarily in an exuberant way, but meaning in a non-self-contradictory way. Art can actually make statements without meaning them ironically. In other words, art can stop lying.

And that's a fundamental change in the artist as well, because the artist becomes solid. Because the artist can speak in one voice, can speak with one mind, with one heart, and can feel it, not feel that, "Oh, I'm just kidding - nice tie." Whereas a postmodern artist, because of the plural nature of the pluralistic structure, kinda rings like a cracked bell. And it's sorta preparatory work - the artist of the postmodern era is basically the artist that comes to reduce everything to equal fragments, including itself, in preparation for all of those fragments being integrated. And that's what art in the coming years can do, is get into art that doesn't solve the temporal problem or the duality problem, but solves the plurality problem, the self-loathing problem, and the lying. The fundamental lying that is at the heart of art in the postmodern era.

Part Two: Complex Coherence

KW: The artist of the postmodern era is basically the artist that comes to reduce everything to equal fragments, including itself, in preparation for all of those fragments being integrated. And that's what art in the coming years can do, is get into art that doesn't solve the temporal problem or the duality problem, but solves the plurality problem, the self-loathing problem, and the lying. The fundamental lying that is at the heart of art in the postmodern era.

And so, again, that can be felt in the artist. The artist goes from feeling like a, ringing like a, cracked bell - because everything they criticize, they know at the bottom of their heart the same criticism applies to their own artwork, and if everything else sucks, their own artwork sucks, it's just as well to be deconstructed, and so nothing has any fundamental meaning in postmodernism and all you're supposed to do, all you can do, is put up stuff for ironic exposure and basically deconstruct anything that's out there. And that's all that postmodern art can do. It cannot offer a positive vision. And so we're coming to the end of that era. And it's a preparatory era, it's sort of John the Baptist, basically. And that's why, again, it's very exciting to be in art at this time, if you have teal or turquoise consciousness. I mean, I can sorta go on about that theme and let me just pause about that cuz part of this is that we were going to sorta have a discussion...

[We both laugh.]

MG: Well this - yeah, thank you. In this kind of a context, then, when Gebser says that the new music is in a position to abolish previous time forms, he's actually speaking to the music of green deconstructionism.

KW: Yes, he's speaking of that, and -

MG: Of this digestive layer.

KW: Yes. Yes, he's confusing it with that, and he also, in some of the positive aspects of that, he means a nondual state. Cuz that does abolish time.

MG: Yeah. And then, just kind of moving from that point, at which we're starting to reassemble things and bring a tender appreciation of the partiality of our perspectives -

KW: Right.

MG: And, you know, a recognition of deeper universals -

KW: Right.

MG: How do you see - and let's stay on this topic for just one more question, because time is so fundamental to musical expression - as you described in your work, each altitude of development is aware of, and expresses artistically, a new mode of temporal

experience. I've been really fascinated by the work of Arvo Pärt recently, and he describes his music as an expression of "the wing-beat of time," which is this tension between the linear time of rational awareness and this timeless space that we seem to start to push into when we recognize that the time that we experience from any perspective is a constructed notion, and we - I'm a little wary to say this, but it's almost like time-as-a-spatial-matrix.

KW: Yeah.

MG: And so, I'm just curious, given that you have spoken with so many integral musicians, and have explored that notion of time as it emerges in this integral vision-logic awareness, how do you see that being experienced and communicated in integral music?

KW: Well, I certainly agree with the gentlemen you quoted about music certainly can be two-winged, one floating on timelessness and one floating on whatever the constructed nature of time is at any given level. And I think that is where we actually start to talk about sort of the two different dimensions of what art can do. And one, again, is structural - its altitude, what actually is the altitude resonating in the signifier of the artwork. And that means that if you do music, primarily from a red altitude, then in ways we don't fully understand, red signifiers will be transmitted along some sort of conducive medium, and be picked up in another sentient being. If the other sentient being has the same essential bodily structure as you do, then that sentient being will resonate with the same altitude, it will resonate with red, if it has emerged, in their own case.

So in part, then, there's a vertical judgment about what art is doing. And that is that it is coming from a particular altitude. If it's an altitude that's lower than the present center of gravity [the average level of development] of the culture they're in, then it can be because it's trying to remind us of something that we've forgotten, or it can be pre-conventional [too immature to understand rules and laws] adolescence rebelling a conventional world, fight the system, you know, all the sort of...protest music that is actually pre-conventional, and is protesting the imposition of a [n] amber conventional structure on top of their red impulsive desires and intentionalities. If it's higher than the average center of gravity, then it's the call of the future, it's Art From Tomorrow. Art on a signifier that the general culture is not yet embodying, and therefore it actually carries content and a transformative pull to these higher structures.

And so as the Renaissance was emerging, you would see visual painting go from grand mythic schemes, with actual men as heroic and as semi-divine, and a sort of very powerful mythic background, to a painting that was reflective and coming from an orange rational, perspectival space. So all of a sudden you get three-dimensional perspective for the first time. Which is astonishing, that people actually don't see three dimensions, until they get to orange rational structure. And it didn't get depicted in art until that time. And so even standing in visual art with three dimensions was a transformative pull on consciousness. It's actually art as transformation, as cultural transformation. And then often what was depicted in those paintings was just an individual person. Just portraiture.

And because individual egos are the nature of orange society, as opposed to mythic roles and rule-roles in the mythic society.

[Examples: the good son or daughter, a man of the faith, an honorable husband or wife - these things are not defined by the values of the individual, but how the person's behaviors match an external and supposedly eternal concept of the rules and roles of the world.]

And so just looking at this artwork would have the effect of taking someone at amber and pulling them up, pulling them up to orange. And the same thing happened as the postmodern revolution hit art, and you had Marcel Duchamp's urinal just put out there and presented as a piece of art. That artwork is still consistently - I saw another voting where it was voted the most important artwork of the 20th Century. And it's because of what it did - that is, announce that there's an entirely different form of art. It's an art that is self-exposing and self-deconstructing of the present society. And that self-deconstruction became a transformative pull for people at orange to move into green. And of course, all the problems of green, and all the self-contradictions in it. Nonetheless, it's a higher altitude.

And so art can perform that transformative function. But then art can also - and that's sort of a vertical function, if you will. But art can also perform kind of a, what you can think of as a horizontal function of states, and that's not transformative as much as transmuting. And that means that no matter what altitude you're at, art can evoke these states. And beyond just sort of subtle emotional states, which good art tends to do in any event, there is what we could call, sort of, spiritual art. And spiritual art, no matter what its content, pulls people into the causal witnessing contemplative states or into nondual flow states, and that actually moves them from a third person to a second person to a first person.

So art starts out as a third person, as just something that you listen to as an object. But then if it really has impact on you, people will start to say, "I really hear that music." Or, "The art is speaking to me." And that's cuz it's moved into a second-person relationship with that artifact. And then if that sort of deep connection continues, the person will move into a first-person identification, then a nondual flow state with that artwork. And so that is a transmuting and a liberating force of art.

So the first one is more of a transformative and a communicating and a working with fullness, and the second one is working with freedom, is actually helping you in a sense disidentify with any particular manifest thing and simply move into a role of witnessing contemplation. Or, then, nondual unification. And so, these two different dimensions that art is working on. And the second dimension of moving into causal or nondual spaces, that's indeed working with the timeless, that's working with an actual eternity, that's working with an actual abyss, a vast openness or presence or emptiness from which each thing emerges moment to moment.

And ultimately, we are that vast openness that is our own Big Mind. The witness in each of us right now that's listening to these words and sees an environment around it, is aware of thoughts moving through its mind, is aware of sensations. The witness of all of those is pure spirit. And art can evoke that realization as a peak experience. And at that point, it's a very real emptiness. It's a pure, absolute, ultimate Spirit. And art is one of the forms that immediately can tap into that dimension and can find ways to transmit it. And that is indeed one of the important functions of art.

So the first is to transmit a certain sort of altitude, a certain space, a certain signified perspective. But the others actually tap into a spiritual dimension, an absolute dimension, a dimension that's eternal and that's timeless and can influence the art simply by going through the mind of the artist on its way to the artwork. And the artifact will pick up as much eternity as the artist can get into it. But being influenced by both of those. So the artist dipping into their own source of creativity, their own vast, open wellspring of creativity, which is itself pure causal Spirit - and out of that comes creative forms. And artists are more attuned, generally speaking, to the emergence of these creative forms. And that's what art is all about, is transmitting those forms that are closest to the timeless, closest to eternity. And so, sort of go back and forth and back and forth between the world of form, and the formless, the world of form, and the formless as the source of creativity, and then that which is created. And that gets transmitted depending on the talent of the artist.

MG: And in this light, where art is - can be - more of a transformative, transmutive technology, the integral artist - the integral painter, or musician, or sculptor, or author - is operating with an immediate awareness of this deeper union beneath the multiplicity. And so is there even - you know, in attempting to communicate anything about the relative world, anything that's contained within this timelessness - is there such a thing as a coherent spatial or temporal message that comes from an integral art, something that we can recognize as a transformative signifier from that altitude? Or is it that the integral artist is so fascinated with and attentive to this honoring of this entire continuum that there is no one single perspective that we're going to be able to recognize as emergent at that level?

KW: Well, I think it's a good question, and I think, though, that there is a signifier - I don't know that I would call it a single signifier, but I would call it maybe a common class of signifiers. And they're signifiers that basically look, touch, and feel vision logic. And basically what that means is a systemic, but a genuinely systemic, acceptance of everything that's arising. And so even though some of the things that are arising can be portrayed in integral art - let's say a red music beat could be included primarily in a piece of turquoise art, let's say - but it's going to be red as it [red] appears in a turquoise space. It's not going to be red as it appears in a red space. So red as it appears in a red space is an impulsive set of signifiers that cannot take the role of other, that simply is in a narcissistic space, and it is in an egocentric, power-driven space. And it has no option but to do that, and it can't even take the role of other, it can't even know how you are resonating to this, except as an extension of itself.

And it's entirely - well, it's half different - from how red appears as it's presented in a turquoise piece of art. Even if it's presented alone in a turquoise piece of art, it's presented without the first-person perspective limitation. So in other words, it's just pure power, or pure intentionality, held in its own right, now taken over by a first-person perspective. So it's just sheer power - but power that is actually held in a turquoise space - it's sheer intentionality, but intentionality held in a turquoise space. So at the very least, that means it's red power looked at in a fifth-person perspective.

[The term "fifth-person" refers to the degree of perspective-taking of which integral consciousness is capable. Egocentric red can only account for its own perspective, and so only offers a first-person view. Ethnocentric amber has become aware of the other members of its community and so can guess at what you are feeling and thinking - awake to a second-person view. Worldcentric orange has recognized the multiplicity of diverse perspectives and how they converge on a single system of reality, enabling it to describe things in objective terms (a third-person view). Deconstructive postmodern green consciousness takes a fourth-person view when it further objectifies even the third-person view, recognizing that there is a meta-perspective on empirical reality that renders all truth relative. Reconstructive integral teal and turquoise takes a perspective on the endless contextualization of green's fourth-person revelation and recognizes a deeper level of historical commonalities - not absolute universals, but simple common features of every other perspective. This is a fifth-person perspective, as Ken means it. More on this in a moment.]

And even though the essential contours of power might look the same, there's going to be a flavor to it, there's going to be an atmosphere to it, there's going to be some sort of turquoise signifier - and again, I don't think there's a single one, I think there's a whole class of common turquoise signifiers that that red is going to be held in. And again, nobody knows how that works. Nobody knows how vibrations of consciousness or how levels of consciousness or how stages of consciousness - nobody knows how consciousness itself gets imprinted in signifiers. But the integral theory is that not only does consciousness inform material artifacts, but the viewer of those artifacts has the same resonance drawn forth in their own being. And there might even be subtle energies involved in this, and that's actually a part of how there's a genuine, concrete transmission. Or it just might be that, you know, birds of a feather flock together. But whatever it is, a turquoise signifier or a turquoise space is recognizable, in the whole feeling of, uh, complex coherence that it communicates. And even if it's communicating something narrow, it will be communicating it in a space of complex coherence. And that will have a feeling to postmodern pluralism as something that is really healing a lot of fractures that postmodernism either induced or exposed. There will be an actual feeling to second tier, in the same way that there is a distinct feeling to orange: three perspectives.

And what we're waiting to see is what the actual structure of those signifiers are. Cuz we can look at them in certain individuals, but turquoise is still being laid down.

[Ken's integral theory is evolutionary, in that it recognizes creation and emergence as ongoing dynamic processes inherent to a self-organizing Kosmos. New levels of

consciousness first appear ill defined - frothy, inexplicable, and nebulous - because their newness means that they are not as rigidly established as habits of the universe. For a more scientific treatment of evolutionary cosmology, see the work of Rupert Sheldrake.]

And there's still any number of actual ways that it could be laid down. But right now the general signifiers are basically complex coherence, and a differentiated and integrated consciousness. And that gets transferred to the artwork, and is there to be decoded from the artwork.

MG: Hmm, yeah. Something that just off the top of my head - when I saw Tool last April, they're working with such...well, you talk about "the red beat," this driving, primal aggressive energy. And yet it was clear from my place in the audience that they were holding it with such even-handedness, and they were allowing the audience to move through these spaces and kind of grapple with this material, with the spaciousness that they themselves were holding for the music.

KW: Yeah, there you go.

MG: Yeah, so that seems to be, that's pretty much what we're getting at, right?

KW: Yeah, exactly. Yeah, that's a good explanation, that's a good description of it, too.

MG: So part of this - you mentioned that part of this is a process of differentiation, part of it's a process of integration -

KW: Right.

MG: - and that we don't really understand how we charge a work of art with our intent. Suffice to say that there does seem to be a certain balance between being able to hold it in a third person place and to take a perspective on it, but also an ability to enter into it and to, as the artist, live as the work, in its construction. Paul Levy talks a lot about the work being in some sense a projected component of this higher self that's attempting to emerge through you. So what do you see as being common traits among artists who are talented at specifically and consciously communicating a particular vision or state or mode of consciousness? You know - even if we don't know the actual mechanism for this process, as engineers of states of consciousness, what do you see people continuing to find to be useful in their art?

KW: Yeah, and this gets into areas of just how, you know, just where artists themselves come from. Are they born? Are they made? Is it a reincarnation, a rebirth? It'd help explain why somebody like Mozart hits the ground running. Cuz it's certainly hard to explain with normal developmental scales, what some of these individuals are doing. But in terms of just what basically constitutes the artist, there are certainly certain skills in certain of the multiple intelligences. Because there are different kinds of art, there's no single psychograph of, let's say, a second tier artist.

Except there is a capacity, at least intermittently, for second tier cognition. Because that is indeed what is going to be the essential stamping signifier: that fourth or fifth person perspective that gives the feeling, the deep feeling of connectedness and the deep feeling of a complex coherence and the deep feeling of a truly - not the way Gebser meant it - but a truly integral-aperspectival. A truly integral space bringing together any number of different perspectives and showing a common, central feeling to all of those perspectives, the integral universals. And not just the monolithic orange formal-operational universals. And so that cognitive line is going to be the stamp that is certainly one of the foremost things that gets added into the medium and forms, in-forms, the actual structure and the pattern, the flow, the nature of second tier art. And then there's excellence in, and achievement in other multiple intelligences, depending on the nature of art itself. So certain kinds of art will have an excellence in kinesthetic intelligence, others will have an excellence in affective intelligence, others will display an excellence in intra-personal intelligence, and you can sort of go through almost any of the multiple intelligences and find some type of art that makes use of them. And so that kind of gets across the whole point of "What is art?" and "Why do we do art?" and "What's the nature of art itself?"

And to sort of put that aside for a moment to touch on this other question, I'd say that art is the depiction of that which is pleasing. And attractive or beautiful. And in a minute we can come back to that, but human beings - that's the inherent nature of human beings, that's one of the dimensions of human beings, one of the quadrants, in a sense, and so all human beings are artists to some degree. But then some individuals will take that capacity and refine it into really extraordinary pieces of self-expressive and communicative artwork, using almost any number of multiple intelligences.

So one of the things that an integral artist is doing, of course, is firing up second tier cognition. And that means anything that the artist can do to help take the perspective of others, and take the perspective of the perspective of others. And take perspectives on perspectives on perspectives. Cuz even though those sound really kind of abstract and difficult, they're actually straightforward and simple and profound ways that individuals get a view of how other people are viewing what other people are viewing.

But this just comes up, and it's one of the ways that worldviews are integrated. And that second tier automatically integrates the worldview of red, and the worldview of amber, and the worldview of orange, and the worldview of green. And just having even a SENSE of that wholeness comes from one of those higher perspectives. So any sort of practice of perspective-taking, any just putting one's self in the shoes of others, and be able to see not only through one's perspective, but through others, is the fundamental nature of integral cognition.

And then in terms of the states issues, this is where emotional issues of artists get drawn in, because often emotional disorders involve states of consciousness, and many artists taking advantage of that. And of course, it's the whole notion of "There's a fine line between genius and madness," and that line, in this case, is referring to access to states of consciousness, and the ease with which some artists do it, and there's any number of these states. But one's capacity to experience states in a wakeful fashion is an extremely

important part of inculcating artistic capacity and particularly the transmutation capacity of art.

And that's into subtle dimensions, and into causal dimensions, and into nondual. And one of the best ways to do that, of course, is meditation. And contemplation. And then one can do that, though, with any particular aim in mind. One doesn't have to do this change of states with a spiritual nature in mind. Although in a sense, they are spiritual, they don't have, necessarily, content that is religious.

So basically, anything that helps open states of consciousness to artists is something that's really fundamental in terms of their own development, and their own program of excellence, basically. And I think really great art, what it does, is it reaches an extraordinary balance between a sort of transformative art and transmutation art. And that's sort of the two wings that I think terrific art rests on. And so those are two sort of dimensions that artists want to pay attention to. And many of them are born doing this, but a lot of that can be trained.

Part Three: You Have To Be In Love

MG: So, as a musician who wants to communicate a message of love to the world, basically, I have to get two things straight. Which would be that I have to be a skilled communicator, and I need to develop myself in whatever ways are relevant to the medium in which I'm attempting to express that message. But the other is that I actually have to be in love. For it to be a totally authentic message, I actually have to be in a loving state of mind when I'm engaging my work.

And there's something that I've seen so much of, just living up here in Boulder, and there's so much "conscious media" - there's like a node of truly conscious media, and around it there's this vast morass of media that seems to be following the style but not the substance. Alex Grey really railed on modern advertisement in his book, *The Mission of Art*, for painting a glowing aura around a hamburger. And whoring out this spiritual stuff.

KW: And yes, there's a lot of that in Boulder, around so-called "integral."

MG: But there's actually a transformative demand, you're saying here, that's being made on the artist their...whatever, you know, the Muse.

KW: Right.

MG: There's actually a kind of multivalent practice involved, that is a practice of mind and a practice of body that's involved in being a good artist.

KW: Yes, and the key thing to what you're saying is that whatever state of consciousness an artist is in, whether they're conscious of it or not, is going to be whatever informs and impacts the artifact. And that is what will be, that's what is available, that's the impression that it will have on viewers or readers or listeners of the art. And that's a really crucial item in integral theory, is that these artifacts of art are being created by sentient beings, and sentient beings impact those artifacts with essentially the nature of consciousness that is doing the creating. And that that artifact will then evoke a similar state of consciousness in sentient beings viewing or impacting or coming into contact with it.

And so that means that - exactly - you can have artwork about love from someone who is genuinely in love, or is genuinely conveying feelings that they had when they were truly in love - that's still alive for them - that, like it or not, will impact the artifact. And likewise, there's this sort of adulterous, fake, advertising sort of stuff. When a false consciousness creates a piece of art, the dimensions of what is communicated in that art will include the false nature, will include the tinniness, will include the inauthenticness [sic] of it. And a good critic will be able to spot that. And of course, to be a good critic, you have to be integrally alive to all of these dimensions yourself. Somebody who is green can not be an informed critic of turquoise art. All they'll see is how much of those signifiers can get into their altitude. Which is very limited.

But that's a really important point, is that whatever you wish to convey in art is something you genuinely have to be in a state of, yourself. Or have immediate access to it, or certainly a good, genuine recollection of it. And that is what will be conveyed. And you can't really choose some of these factors. And that's what's kind of an important point, is that you can't really choose the altitude that you're in. You can choose to sort of convey the highest that you're possible of, and you can get in the highest states that you're possible of, but that might be for example, um, green. Or it might be orange. Or it might be turquoise, but whatever that altitude is, is the altitude that will come across in the artwork. And that's why we can look at artwork, we can read something - certainly, reading something and you just get the feeling that, "Oh, this person is very, very amber," or "This person is very turquoise, this person is very green." It comes across as a smell, a touch, a feel. Its actual signifiers are embedded in that space, in the artifact.

And so leading edge artists, almost usually even unknowingly, but they do find themselves at a leading edge of transformation, and so their signifiers are coming down [from] a level or two above where the cultural center of gravity is, and is speaking to people in a way that is then actually transformative. And as a secondary issue, it might also - the impact of that transformative art might be doubly increased by having transmutational elements in it as well. And then it comes across as something that carries an extremely timeless and important message.

And so both of those dimensions are ones, though, that cannot be faked. Because your consciousness can fake what you're saying - you can put the glow around the hamburger - but what comes across in the artifact doesn't lie. The artifact tells the truth. And whatever you actually make is the product of the entire being of the maker. And if there's something in there that's false, or crooked, or wrong, it will come out. And we all know artists that have, you know, famously have a particular kind of shadow that just shows up in everything. And that's just one example, but the artwork doesn't lie. The artist might lie, but the artwork doesn't lie.

MG: Hmm. Yeah. So that's an excellent place to jump from that...earlier on, just a few minutes ago, you mentioned why we do art. Because it's an attempt to express or communicate some something beautiful. And you know, I make that expression/communication distinction here, because in any case, it's moving into the signifier and back into someone's first person awareness. And it may be that it's private art, and it may be that you're only making it for yourself, but at the same time, it's still in some sense a communication from your self in one moment to yourself in another moment.

KW: Right.

MG: From one perspective to another perspective.

KW: Right.

MG: So basically at this point, I would kind of like to - with that anchor - kind of flip this conversation a little bit, because we've spent a lot of time analyzing the nature of artwork, and rather than systematizing it in a scientific survey or exploration, I'd like to ask for you to discuss why we do art, why we do music, how we experience music - this cluster of concepts - from more of a poetic place. I know that you write extensively in both an analytical voice and also as more of a spiritual poet. So if we can just step back from integral theory as a heuristic device, and then if I can hear you talk about these things as an artist. Why do we do artwork? Why do we make music?

KW: Right. The fundamental answer to that is that it's basically an essential need of human beings, and it expresses something that - if we're going to talk specifically about an aesthetic view, then we're talking about that judgment that humans make about what is attractive to them. About what's beautiful. And that's essentially something that, I mean, even postmodern art, which certainly sometimes doesn't look beautiful, is nonetheless expressing what postmodernists find attractive. And it's that feeling of what's attractive, the feeling of what's beautiful, and both the sort of self-feeling of that, and the desire to communicate that.

So although all art isn't necessarily this type of communication, most art does have a component that is this, and it's a central part of it. And it's the communication of that which you feel is really beautiful about life. And in my own case, what I find really beautiful is both informed by sort of a second and third tier vision logic and vision, and a causal and nondual state. And both of those point to "what is beautiful" as a vast...wholeness. A harmony. A balance. A universe where, no matter how things appear on the surface, underneath them, they're beautiful. And everything that's arising is exquisitely beautiful. Everything that's arising is a[n] ornament of Spirit, is an absolute, positive manifestation of the ultimate Divine.

And whether it shows up in first-persons or second-persons or third-persons, it's showing up as this exquisite, painful beauty. And that beauty can be expressed at any altitude, and so you can express it in first tier terms, you can express it with second tier terms, you can express it with third tier terms.

It is, in terms of my own writing, because I have selected to write in certain academic circles, then the form of my writing is often constrained by what's accepted in those circles. And that's a kind of third person, analytic, rational, cognitive sort of overview. So even if I'm writing about things that are transrational, I'm giving a rational summary of them. But my work never confuses the two. I, more than anybody, point out that this is just a map; we don't confuse it with the territory. And all of my books have a call for praxis, or practice. And even going back to the first books I wrote, like No Boundary, each chapter is a theoretical discussion about a particular level of consciousness, and then at the end of that chapter, each chapter has dozens of practices that you can do to evoke that level. So it's grounded in a praxis that wants to really evoke, for everybody, this universal beauty. And this universal radiance. And this universe of a splendid ornamentation of the one and only Divine. And that is most immediately expressed in artistic mode, cuz artistic mode is one of the sort of...well, it's just the way I speak, and

it's the way that most human beings celebrate something that they find wonderful, and that they want to share with somebody else. And they want to take that "I" space of beauty and wonderfulness, and make a "We" space out of it. Expand it to as many people as possible. And make that communication to as many people as possible.

And so one of the ways that I do it in my own writing is, after I've written, you know, hundreds of pages of technical stuff, then I'll sort of slip into poetic descriptions, and poetic celebrations, and more artistic modes of celebrating this, um, profound Great Perfection. Entire books have been written by just taking those parts out. The Simple Feeling of Being, for example, is an entire book of just the poetic statements. So, definitely, there's a place for that, and it's a primary place, in terms of my own expression of my own understanding. But, again, it gets curbed when I have to write technical and theoretical, analytical writings. And so I play by those rules. But even then, I try to sneak in a little bit of poetry, because that is a more intimately first-person mode of expression, and less a third-person, dry, analytic mode. And it's certainly not true that I, you know, have some sort of addiction to the cognitive line, or anything like that. It's just "When in Rome," you know?

MG: No more than I do.

KW: Yeah! [Laughs.] So those are a few reflections, in terms of what I do as an artist.

MG: Yeah. So, then, that's what Ken Wilber does as an artist... And what I'm picking up from this whole scope is that from a witnessing or a nondual vantage, that because everything is arising as this beautiful and luminous integrated wholeness, that there is, in some sense, a movement or an effluence from Spirit in which the entire work of the universe is a single artistic act.

KW: Yeah.

MG: So if you could just expound a little bit on that, about the motivation of Spirit to create...[let's say,] this conversation as a work of art.

KW: Right. And that fundamentally comes out of the superabundance of Spirit itself. And what it would be able to do as ultimate, absolute Spirit. And there've been lots of theoretical arguments about this, I mean, going back to Plato and Aristotle. Aristotle argues that the ultimate One, because it's complete in itself, has nothing to do with Manifestation. It wouldn't create anything, cuz that would imply a lack. Plato, on the other hand, says, "Well, wait a minute: A Spirit that can't create is less full than a Spirit that can." [We laugh.] And so, for Plato, there're shadows in the cave, but they're shadows of the Light. And once you discover the Light, you're supposed to embrace the shadows. Well, actually, Plato was a - even though he's branded as a dualist - he really ultimately was a nondualist, and saw ascending and descending as one essential process.

But that's certainly my point of view, is that it's a superabundance of Spirit, and a superabundance of I-AM-ness that causes it - and "cause" is not quite the right word - but

just is why - also not quite the right word [We laugh.] that it overflows. Again, cuz there's no causality here, there's not something in time that pushes Spirit to do something over here. It's a radical timeless superabundance. Once Manifestation is created, then you can talk about time, and then there's temporal unfolding, but all of these things are modifications of Spirit itself. And Spirit itself remains...you can describe it poetically as vast, and full, and omnipotent, and infinite, and eternal, and so on, but those are all, um, metaphors. And the Absolute itself is...the best it can be described is just pure emptiness. Unqualified - including that. But, metaphors then help to talk about it, and that's where you talk about the superabundance of the One. The superabundance just causes an overflowing into the world, and it's a sharing capacity, but it also then creates different viewpoints out of itself.

It's like if you want to play checkers with yourself, as a - kids do this all the time, and they are first learning checkers and they want to play it with themselves, and they play one side, and then they try to play the other side, but then they realize it doesn't work, because they know that the other side's going to do. And so it sort of dawns on you is that the only way you can have a real game is if you take different perspectives, and forget that you're taking the other perspective. Or you won't get a real game going. And so out of this superabundance, in order to get a real game going, Spirit creates all these different perspectives and then forgets Who It Is.

And there is a slow evolving back to a remembering of that - again, sort of metaphorically putting it that way. But individual perspectives can wake up at any time to their fundamental oneness with this absolute, pure I-AM-ness. And that is a...well, a union of the human and the Divine, and an intersection of the eternal timeless and the world of time. All of which, though, is nonetheless a product of the superabundance of this Divine Mystery.

And that's part of what my own writing is tracking, and attempting to give some coherent expression to. Although, it again remains...you know, they're just inscriptions on the...on the face of, uh...stuff that's gone with the wind...and are good stories for this time, because I think they stick, but they're just stories. And just ways of tracking what this superabundance is all about. And I generally write it at a turquoise/indigo level of communication, just cuz that's about the highest you can go at and still have a fair number of people that will understand what you're saying.

MG: If you've got really good news, you see something really beautiful, you've got nobody to share it with...from a mythological perspective, you can say it's like, "Well, you got nobody to share it with, you gotta make somebody."

KW: Right. Basically, that's exactly right. You know, it's no fun having dinner alone. You can't really get into things like sharing, and you can't really get into things like love, in terms of loving-of-another, and so for all of these reasons and lots of other sort of metaphoric reasons, it makes it easy to understand why, even if you are perfect, absolute, infinite One, if you wanted to - just to say again - even have a game, or just have something that was going to surprise you, if you wanted to actually have an adventure,

then you could dream something. But in order for that dream to really work, you'd have to forget during the dream that you're the one doing it. Cuz otherwise, it just doesn't work. So all of these different ways that Spirit starts the world, the different accounts of them, all have some notion of amnesia. Or forgetting. And all have, in terms of the path of realization, some notion of anamnesis. Or remembrance. Or recognition of something that's already true, and not something that has to be created. And that's why the Supreme Realization itself is just a recognition of ever-present Big Mind. The recognition of ever-present True Self. And not something that has to be created or developed.

But in the world itself, that's manifest - that world - in this particular go-round, relates by evolving. And evolution is the one central notion of the manifest universe. And so we track Spirit's unfolding in the manifest universe, which is the universe of itself, and we track that through development and evolution. And that's just sort of one of the stories that sticks best in this particular manifest world. But you can see how all of these stories about manifestation have to do with forgetting who you are in order to get a good game started.

MG: You know, every work of art has multiple interpretations, so even here in the mundane, vividly, there's a progress by which this artist is - in attempting to communicate a single message - actually creating this multiplicity of perspectives, constantly.

KW: Right, yeah. And the more evolved the artist is, the deeper the implicit number of perspectives it will accept. And therefore, there's just a depth to the artwork that is noticeable. There's a presence in the artwork that's noticeable. And that depth is just almost palpable. You can just sort of feel it. And the more developed a person is, the more depth they have. The more it becomes something that you can actually just feel in their presence.

MG: All those other interpretations, right on the other side of perception.

KW: Uh huh!

MG: Well, thank you so much, Ken.

KW: Well, sure!

MG: This is a lovely opportunity, and really, I think I speak on behalf of a lot of people - all my friends who helped me formulate some of these questions, and the Zaadz Visionary Music community, the integral community at large - when I say, thank you for your time today.

KW: Great! Thank you, Michael. This was fun.