



Extended Abstract

Choice Words: An Integral Exploration of Signifiers Referencing Global Interconnectedness

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Introduction

Language—the words we inherit and those we coin, are arguable one of the primary means through which we define, not only ourselves, but our cultures, civilizations, and supporting mythos. [1, 2] This research examines some of the words, or signifiers, that have been used, and/or are currently being used, to reference the totality of our interconnectedness with information and communication technologies (ICTs) and the co-emergent global consciousness arising with/in it. Some of these signifiers include: noosphere, global brain, superorganism, worldwide network, Gaia, collective intelligence, and planetary consciousness. [3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9]

Rationale

The purpose of the research is to explore the implications and potential consequences of the choice/s we make in the use of signifiers on our unfolding global consciousness and the cultures, civilizations, mythos, and possible futures, co-arising with it. Do the current signifiers, for example, expand or limit our thinking, and/or that of future generations? Although pioneering theorists, Teilhard de Chardin [3, 4] and Peter Russell, [5] included higher forms of human consciousness and/or spirituality, as integral to their work (and Russell himself coined the term “global brain”), the term “brain” represents an exterior, objective structure, and as such, does not speak to interior, subjective processes. [10, 11] The term, “global” speaks to a collective objective reality, rather than a collective intersubjective reality. As words are the primary means through which we co-create, share, and transmit reality, through continuing to use (and thus promote) the term “global brain,” for example, are we inadvertently diminishing humanity’s potential to enlarge, grow, and/or expand its capacity for

collective compassion and/or other higher values? (The latter are subjective and intersubjective realities with objective and interobjective consequence.) Can we reduce Chardin's noosphere or the Greek νοῦς (nous "mind") to the brain? Does such a reduction not inadvertently perpetuate outdated reductionistic frameworks that demoted and/or stymied intuitive, emotional, and compassionate forms of knowing in the first place? There is a poignancy in this inquiry that arises from the fact that many theorists using the term do not adhere to reductionist philosophies, but rather are pioneers of more embracing/holistic philosophies. [12]

The intention of the inquiry is thus to highlight the importance of recognizing the power of word choice on the evolution of consciousness (global, planetary, or otherwise). If we doubt that words have such power or that they can readily lose their original meanings and associations, we can look to Bohm [2], who points out that current Western use of the word "measure" is a debased form of its original meaning. He reminds us that the term "right measure" once referenced "inner measure."

In this regard, measure was not looked on in its modern sense as being primarily some sort of comparison of an object with an external standard or unit. Rather, this latter procedure was regarded as a kind of outward display or appearance of a deep 'inner measure', which played an essential role in everything. When something went beyond its proper measure, this meant not merely that it was not conforming to some external standard of what was right, but much more, that it was inwardly out of harmony, so that it was bound to lose its integrity and break up into fragments. [2]

Bohm demonstrates that even when a word is coined to include subjective and/or intersubjective ways of knowing, such meaning can be lost.

Method

The transdisciplinary method of Integral Methodological Pluralism is used to explore a selection of signifiers used to reference the emergent interconnected consciousness: global brain, worldwide network, superorganism, noosphere, Gaia, collective intelligence, and planetary consciousness. Integral Methodological Pluralism (IMP) is a methodology that identifies multiple perspectives that must be taken into account and integrated if any phenomena are to be properly understood.[10] IMP is designed to shed light on perspectives that are often overlooked, particularly in the sciences. In the first stage of the exploration the words/signifiers are located in one or more of four quadrants of the IMP model. The four-quadrant model has axes: the inner world and outer world as compared with the individual and collective realms. [10] The figure below illustrates the basic distinctions. With the exception of Gaia, all the signifiers, including noosphere are terms (composed of two words) and many of the terms are composed of compound words.

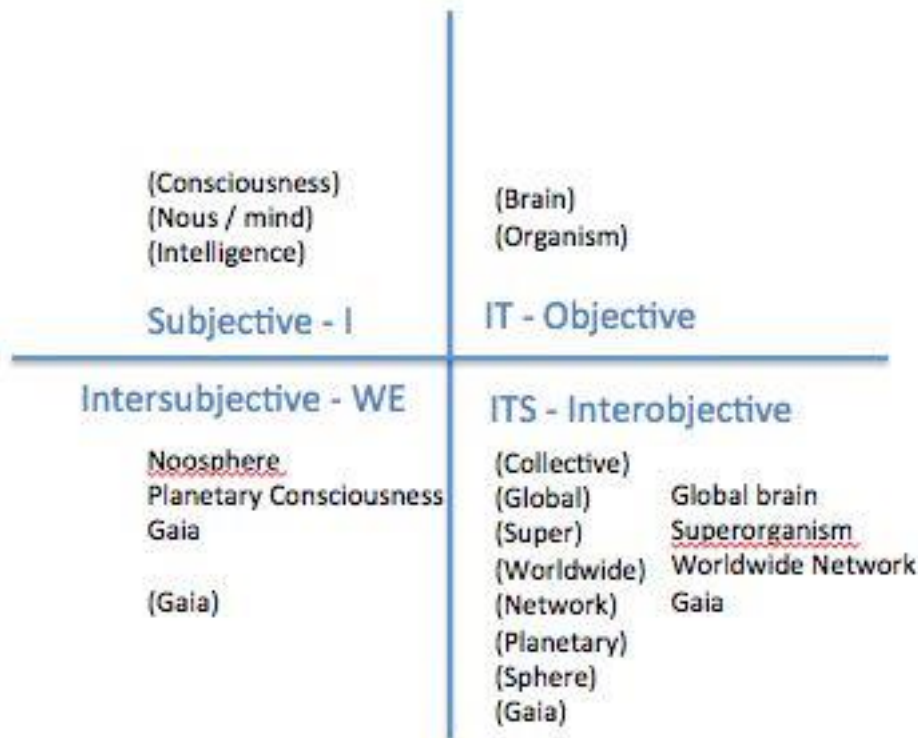


Figure 1. Integral Mapping of Signifiers

Discussion

A preliminary mapping reveals three signifiers that cross the intersubjective-interobjective divide, e.g., Noosphere, Planetary Consciousness, and Gaia.ⁱⁱ If it is our intention to include subjective and/or intersubjective experienceⁱⁱⁱ in the arising global interconnectedness, the use of one of the above words and/or the coining of new signifiers, is warranted. If we continue to use signifiers that do not reflect subjective and intersubjective perspectives, how do we dare hope the original intentions/meanings will survive? If we intend to encourage the adoption of systemic, holistic, integral philosophies capable of enabling human and planetary flourishing, the terms we utilize need to reflect our intention.

When we speak “from the heart,” it is commonly understood that we are speaking honestly—and about that which we gained through personal experience. The “global brain” adequately represents an organ of interobjective knowledge, but it does not speak to intersubjective loving. Will humanity meet the challenges confronting the global community now, and in the future, with a Global Brain, or even Global Intelligence, devoid of a metaphorical organ of compassion?

If the sum total of human history has taught us anything, it is that knowledge without compassion is naught but fuel for the worst crimes in history. It is incumbent upon us to recognize that a self-organizing, learning network that exhibits collective intelligence will only serve our betterment if it has an algorithm of compassion. It may be challenging to come up with such, but through languaging the Global Heart into our collective Future we come nearer. What signifiers might we use to embody the collective interdependent collaborative network of the Global Brain-Global Heart duo such that the future is not limited by our choice? We need intelligence, but we need wisdom all the more. Finally, as we increasingly move toward an image-mediated society, we would do well to imagine our new signifier/s as images—for it is likely one or more of these images will come to symbolize much.

References and Notes

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ⁱ It is beyond the scope of this inquiry to explore all the words and/or terms that are currently being used in this context. The selected words are intended to represent some of the more commonly used terms.

ⁱⁱ The term Gaia is placed in both the Interobjective and Intersubjective quadrants because it has been used to reference the Earth as a physical structure, and to reference a self-regulating, complex system that arises when organisms interact with their inorganic surroundings on Earth, i.e., Gaia theory [8]

ⁱⁱⁱ I am using the singular and plural (subjective and intersubjective as well as objective and interobjective) purposefully to remind that the global entity which we are seeking to name or signify is made up of individuals.