

Intervolutionary Learning

Reflecting and Experimenting Transformations through Synergetic Interforming

The Origin of this Paper

Since I reflect and experiment forms of evolutionary and involutionary learning I am always questioned by students and researchers in German universities and by residents and educators in Auroville, a universal township in South India. The first wonder how I can introduce spiritual forms of consciousness in a university that is dedicated to the mental rational sphere of science or what I could bring in as broader and deeper research in the human and educational sciences. The second wonder how I can be in the research of 'higher' forms of consciousness and still remain strongly attached to mental and secular paths and what I could offer to Auroville's education and spiritual evolution.

But before it could be useful to mention rapidly my trajectory through a succession of different forms of integral learning which is in some sense preceding my own practice of evolutionary/involutionary, i.e. intervolutionary learning. As a student in schools and universities I already have been rather rebelling against pure academic deliveries of knowledge and claimed permanently experiential forms of learning. A student of theology I left the Jesuits and went to French worker priests hoping that the sterile religion of the first could be revitalized by the earth to earth spirituality of the latter. As teacher in Africa, shortly after independence, I promoted the ruralization of education and functional literacy: instead of teaching academic knowledge generally the children should appropriate specifically the functional skills that link the world of knowledge to the world of action (and survival or development). Back in Germany I was invited to build up a huge reform in the secondary degree of the educational system, i.e. the integration of general and vocational training. As professor in the German university I accompany nearly every week schools and classes in which students with different capacities – handicapped and non-handicapped, immigrants and autochthons have to be integrated. In the same time I often address myself to the researcher or 'wisdom' in the students who dwell behind the learner or 'knower' to a more subtle self that tries to recognize compassion, awareness, consciousness, beauty, peace...

This latter is partly due to the fact that since I am married to a woman with Indian origin, I am permanently exposed to Asian, mostly Indian concepts of evolution and spirituality that go beyond our mental habits of comparison and categorization. As forms of religion have been alienated by church institutions so vital forms of science have become often so overlaid with extraneous matter that their essence is threatened to become obscured by it. To a large extent, I fear, their deeper meaning and capacity is no longer recognized and their transformative power lost.

This paper in its present form is originated in the first part in response to questions asked by students and researchers, mentioned above, and so I have kept the question- and answer-format. The second part relates directly to processes of intervolutionary transformation that we experimented inside and outside seminars, workshops and journeys.

1. Theory: Reflecting the search of Intervolutionary learning

1.1 Why Intervolutionary learning?

As stated in the introduction I have for a long time been involved in all sorts of integral learning. Integral learning, however, has become a rotten magic, a funny educational alternative for not rightly ticking middle class people. Most of the time these approaches seem to have failed to come across with the challenge of the surrounding society, its formal school system and with the needs of parents and students.

This might be true at least for the ‘horizontal’ approaches that try to bring together body and mind or heart, head and hand (Pestalozzi) or try to link the individual with the social environment (Dewey’s progressive education). Always the modern drift to functional differentiation in the society and to disciplinary separation in the school leave the free school and its students often in a sort of void, unless they were powerfully subventioned by governmental or non-governmental organizations, like the Laboratory School in Chicago and in Bielefeld or Summerhill in England and Glocksee in Germany. Integral learning structures often seem to be outdated as a pre-modern romantic aspiration that can no longer fit with the modern exigencies of evolution through differentiation and through concentration in specific matters.

But it may be true for vertical forms of integral learning, too: The structure of the disciplines mostly won over the developmental logic that armies of psychologists (since Piaget and Kohlberg) try to prove and educators try to implement.

There may be only two approaches that could contradict this massive experience of failure: Montessori and Sri Aurobindo. Both have ‘discovered’ and described processes of learning that often are at the same time evolutionary and involutionary. *Evolutionary* are learning processes when they ‘go upward’ from the body (physical) to the emotions (vital) and reason (mental) and then far beyond the formal or post-conventional stages of western psychology, i.e. aspire to ‘higher’ or ‘deeper’ manifestations of cosmic consciousness or spiritual wisdom: ‘integral’ is thought here as an evolutionary, transmental or superconscious, holistic mode to link inner experiences (higher consciousness) with outer experiences of the material and mental world. On the other side, learning processes are *involutionary* when these more subtle, sublime and wise forms of consciousness ‘go downward’ and unfold in their ‘light’ (enlighten) the potentials that, without it, could not become more mature; for example discovery or searching in the mental, love and compassion in the vital, beauty and grace in the physical.

1.2 What is exactly the benefit of this Intervolutionary concept, compared to the developmental logic in (western) human sciences?

The benefit evidently is that Sri Aurobindo and others¹ have completed the developmental ladder. Freud had opened our mind for the subconsciousness². Sri Aurobindo opens our mind on the other side, to something that he (and others before him³) called superconsciousness.

¹ From Gebser, Teilhard de Chardin to Ken Wilber and Michael Murphy

² Nevertheless even a sceptical Freud had described the virtualities of an ongoing civilization that could replace aggression by eros.

³ Besides many thinkers in the East, we can mention for the Western mind in the 19th century Schopenhauer and Nietzsche.

While Freud described the neurotic processes of schizophrenia that the modern transformation of the society (differentiation between state and religion, science and belief, institutions and communities) imposed upon human beings, Sri Aurobindo revealed to a mankind the beauty of just being, of quietness, void, compassion – forms of existence that, too, got to be obscured by extraneous matter. And to a Western especially a German society in which the dream of enlightenment was practically burnt in the fires of Auschwitz and Hiroshima he awoke this ideal of further evolution of the human species to a new life. He did not just do this out of pure speculation but on the grounds of the modern evolutionary research. The process of evolution was thought by him as the development from and in unconscious matter of a subconscious and then a conscious life, of conscious mind first in animal life and then finally in conscious and thinking man. Now it is in the logic of the self-organizing evolution that a still further step will arise. As told in the old Indian scriptures of Veda, Upanishad “a being of knowledge is stated to be the next step above the mental being into that the soul has to rise and through it to attain the perfect bliss of spiritual existence.”⁴

While Buddha eventually escaped in his lonely enlightenment Sri Aurobindo goes back to the material and contributes in return to the perfection of the mind (science, research), the vital (habits and feeling) and the body (beauty and energy). “There can be, too, the descent of the spirit and its powers into the world and that would justify the existence of the material world also, give a meaning, a divine purpose to the creation.”

1.3 So much about evolution and involution – what about learning?

About learning we learn first that more than ten thousand years are already bound in us with all the genes and memes that history and cultures transmitted. And we learn second that interevolutionary learning is only emerging when we contemplate our life experience as a whole: when we discover, for example, the different stages or phases of our development as parts of a more integral or holistic evolution and involution. Learning is not just the reception of information through interaction or the modification of behaviour through experience. In the good German sense of *Bildung* it reaches its full and rich signification from the moment when we interpret our experiences. And when we do not only interpret but also intervene in our learning process then we come to a sort of *Bildungsgang*⁵ in which the involution of an idea of actualisation meets the evolution of a material self-realization: the Indian word for this could be *Dharma*. This word is in India mostly thought as a code of conduct to adopt the ‘right path’ to the ‘true divine’. But in the scriptures Dharma is clearly stated as the struggle to exceed ourselves and to outgrow our limitations and incapacities.

1.4 Do you want to convert us for a learning of the ‘life divine’ as Sri Aurobindo stated?

I personally am more or less ‘mentally challenged’ and not so much supermentally or superconsciously challenged. This means I cannot ‘surrender’ to a ‘divine’ being in which the mind-disease stands still. Nevertheless it seems to me that it is necessary to go further with our research and consciousness capacities. I do not identify with the scientific mind limits although its categories and theories are part of my professional life. Sri Aurobindo already did his best to develop an original synthesis between the belief in a personal God (like in the monotheistic religions) and the complete letting down of any transcendental fundament (Buddha’s cessation of researching for fundaments, the nirvana). This supermental being lives

⁴ Sri Aurobindo: A Message to America, 11.8.1949

⁵ H. Kordes: Entwicklungsaufgabe und Bildungsgang. Münster, 1996, Lit.

in full unity, fusion and peace letting behind all dual splittings differences and separations that are bound in the unrestful acting feeling and thinking. My tortuous mind has not (yet) come to such height. I am still bound to secular observable, nevertheless extremely rich, creative, aware and subtle experiences, but I never could or would discover non-dual psychic beings I always deciphered in the contrary a maximum of *integrity*, of being in touch, of interacting, for example in experiences of love, of research or of developmental tasks (flow). If there is fusion and unity then we/I get only glimpses, better: short intervals of this love, compassion or flow. Even the main medium of the transmental of transpersonal consciousness the meditation operates by building up a distance between the observer and the observed: between thought and the reality, between the thinker and his object. Mediation in itself creates already a gap between mind and no-mind. What is the most important for me, is the emergence of an *Interspace* between no-thing and something between silence and noise, between separation and interconnectedness. In this interspace can emerge the quiet, the silent that we would not perceive in the day-to-day life – as much as we do not see the billions of interspaces out of which a film is made. What intervolutionary learning can reach altogether are states of *interbeing*⁶ that cannot be fixed in a final divine unity and not be reduced in secular clashes.

What are evolutionary and involutionary processes all about? They are produced by the interactions of contraries, firstly by the interactions of body, habit and mind, being.

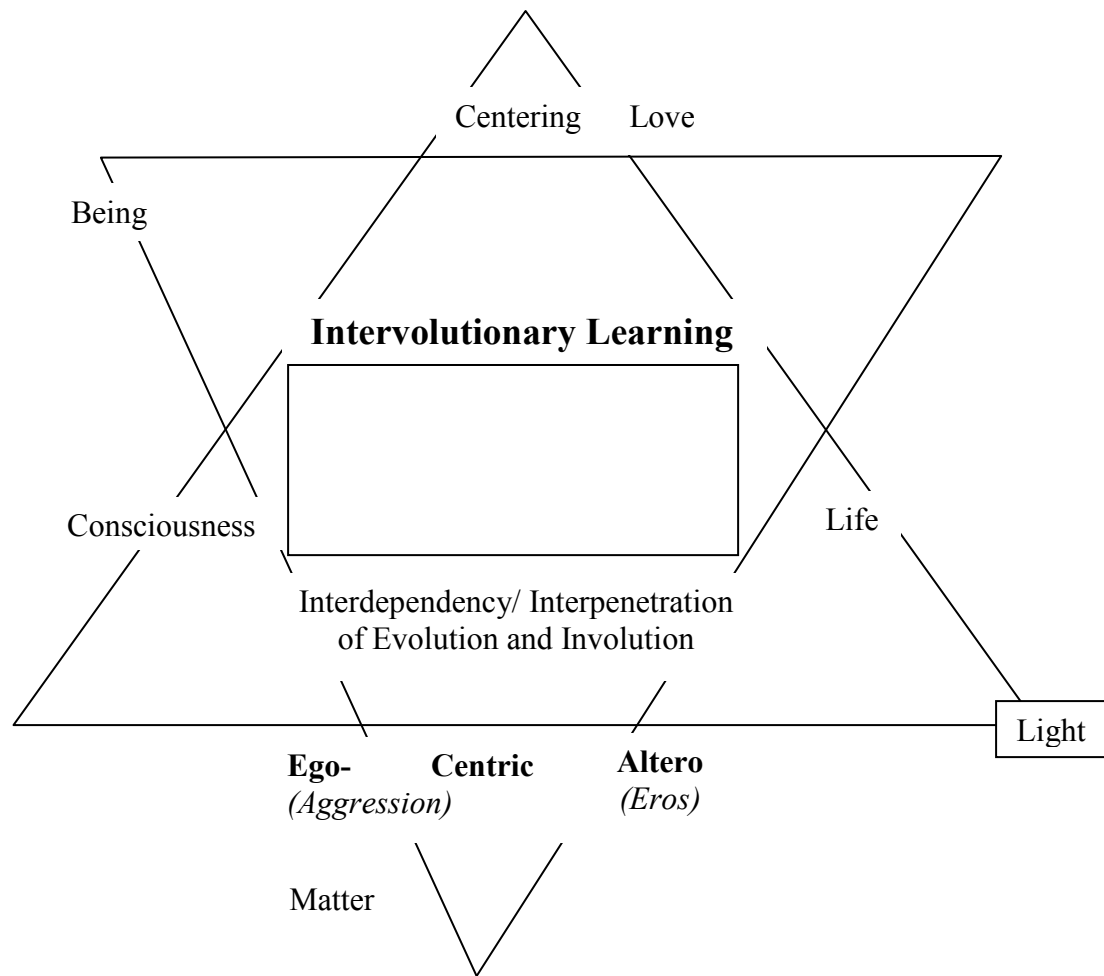
In this context I differ from the very repetitive old gramophone records of developmental and evolutionary science that have been playing now for decades in our head. Instead of stating, for example, that a development or evolution will overcome the ego, I can prove through my research, that the ego would ever remain as one of the evolutionary energies but that it can and will obtain in each significant change a more and more subtle form of egocentrism, culminating perhaps in forms of self-love that is a precondition to the love of others, for compassion. And of course I take strongly into account our experiences about the dialectics of enlightenment (Adorno/Horkheimer), may it come from West or East or from globalization or fundamentalism. Every progression and evolution will not only bring new constructive technologies, transformations and actions, but also new congenital destructive potentials.

1.5 Then your representation of evolution or development must be quite different?

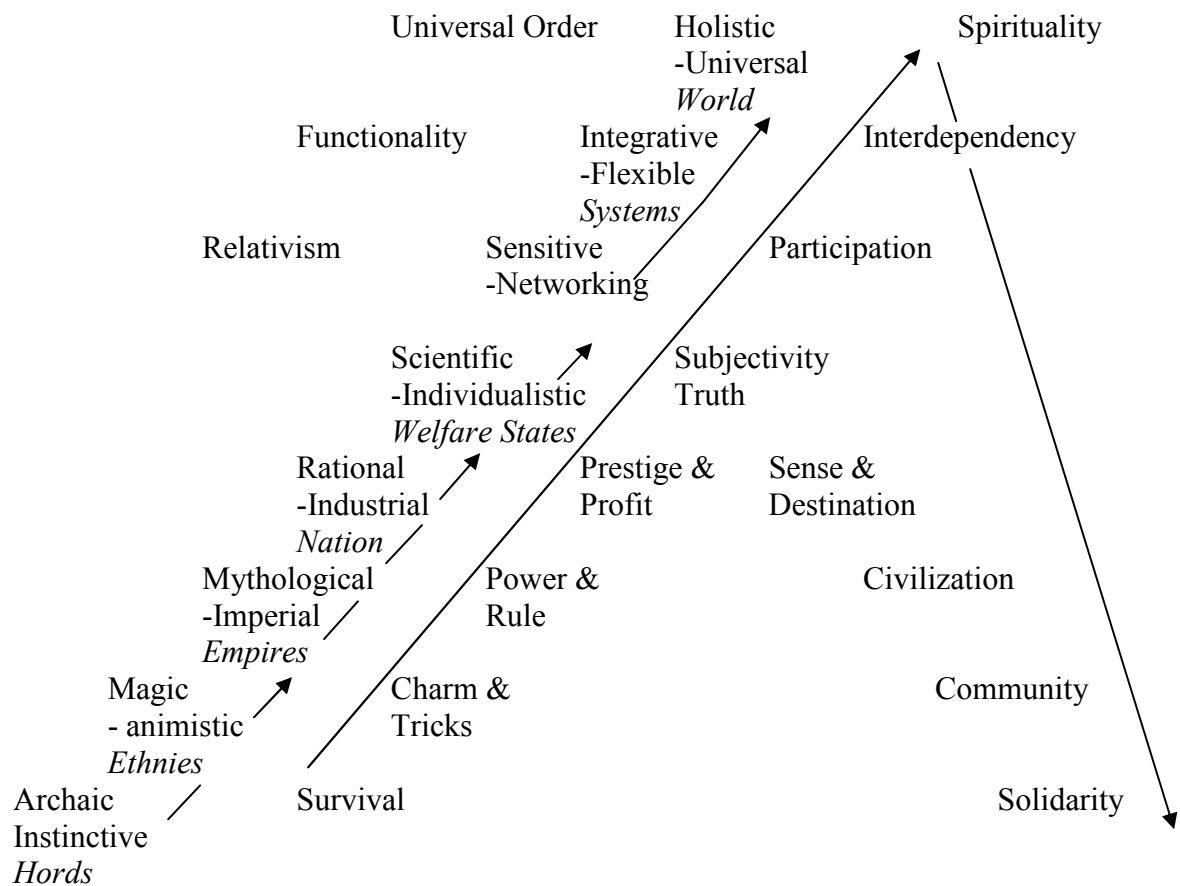
Yes. First I recognize more clearly the permanent existence of contradictions or antagonisms as part of evolution energies and of moments of development. I speak of *moment* because I have too many doubts about the so-called stages, phases or stadiums that seem to me much too rough or too academic. These developmental structures are moreover dynamics that intervene more or less in the whole spiral of up and down, side and forward movements. With *moment* I mean more precisely the capacity of individuals to integrate their retrospective and prospective visions in a more or less deep being here and now.

In paraphrasing the famous enneagram of Sri Aurobindo I can try to draw a first understanding of intervolutionary learning in this graphic:

⁶ Autor: Interbeing



Evolution understood as a more and more conscious ascent is represented in the upwardly directed triangle. Sri Aurobindo represents this evolution in the succession of light, life, freedom and love. Translated in the rougher language of modern science we could say that *evolution* refers to the transformation of matter in forms of consciousness and finally of 'being'. This transformation arises essentially out of the tension between egocentric (aggression) and alterocentric (Eros) that brings up in the further development more and more differentiated, complex and subtle forms. *Involution* as enlightening and envisioning, awareness bringing descent is characterized in a downward directed triangle. Sri Aurobindo described it in the trias of being, consciousness and matter. What is realized here is the transformation of compassion in more subtle forms of love, of love in more subtle forms of sexuality and of light in more subtle forms of matter (beauty and health). In a more detailed and modern manner I could re-present *intervolutionary learning* in a completion of the famous spiral dynamic:

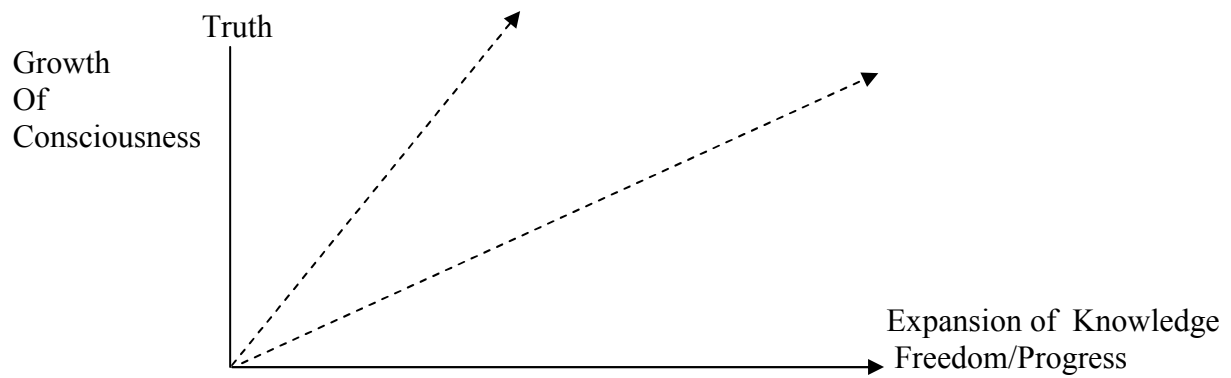


The most important in all these representations is the form of oscillations, of movements of searching and clarifying that are characteristic for human intervolution and hopefully for my own research method. The latter are, hopefully, free of affirmative or dogmatic modes of thinking. There is no question, that my or other models should be transformed in rigid method or 'schools' in which they are reproduced, confirmed and more or less religiously transmitted.

1.6 Evolution and Involution, Bildung and development are they a matter of consciousness?

In this question 'East' and 'West' seem to meet. Since the time of enlightenment the modern sciences have practically given up all further 'transcendental' transitions'. Since Darwin they discovered evolution as a material recreation and laid more stress on the growth of form and species than on the growth of consciousness. Even consciousness has been more and more regarded as an incident and as a matter that is more or less completely directed by the material being. From Marx to the modern neurology the material being determines this spiritual consciousness. Consequently the western sciences distanced from non-measurable doubtful constructions as 'consciousness' or 'divine' or 'soul' and horizontalized in some way their whole efforts: expansion of knowledge, equity, flexibility...

Despite the expansion of the scientific mind, in the 'East' philosophers and scriptures maintained until now a more vertical mode of thinking. Consciousness is not just an incident of evolution "but the whole secret of its meaning...its sense is the growth of the soul through developing successive forms and many lives of the individual to its own highest reality. If there is a conscious being in the form, that being can hardly be a temporary phenomenon of consciousness, it must be a soul fulfilling itself and this fulfilment can only take place if there is a materialization of the soul in many successive lives and bodies." (Sri Aurobindo, p. 300).

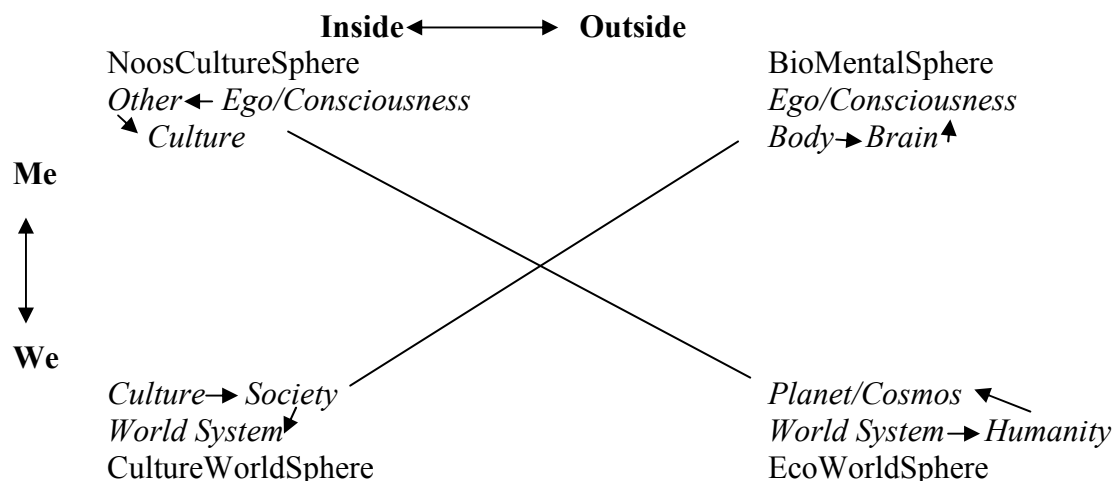


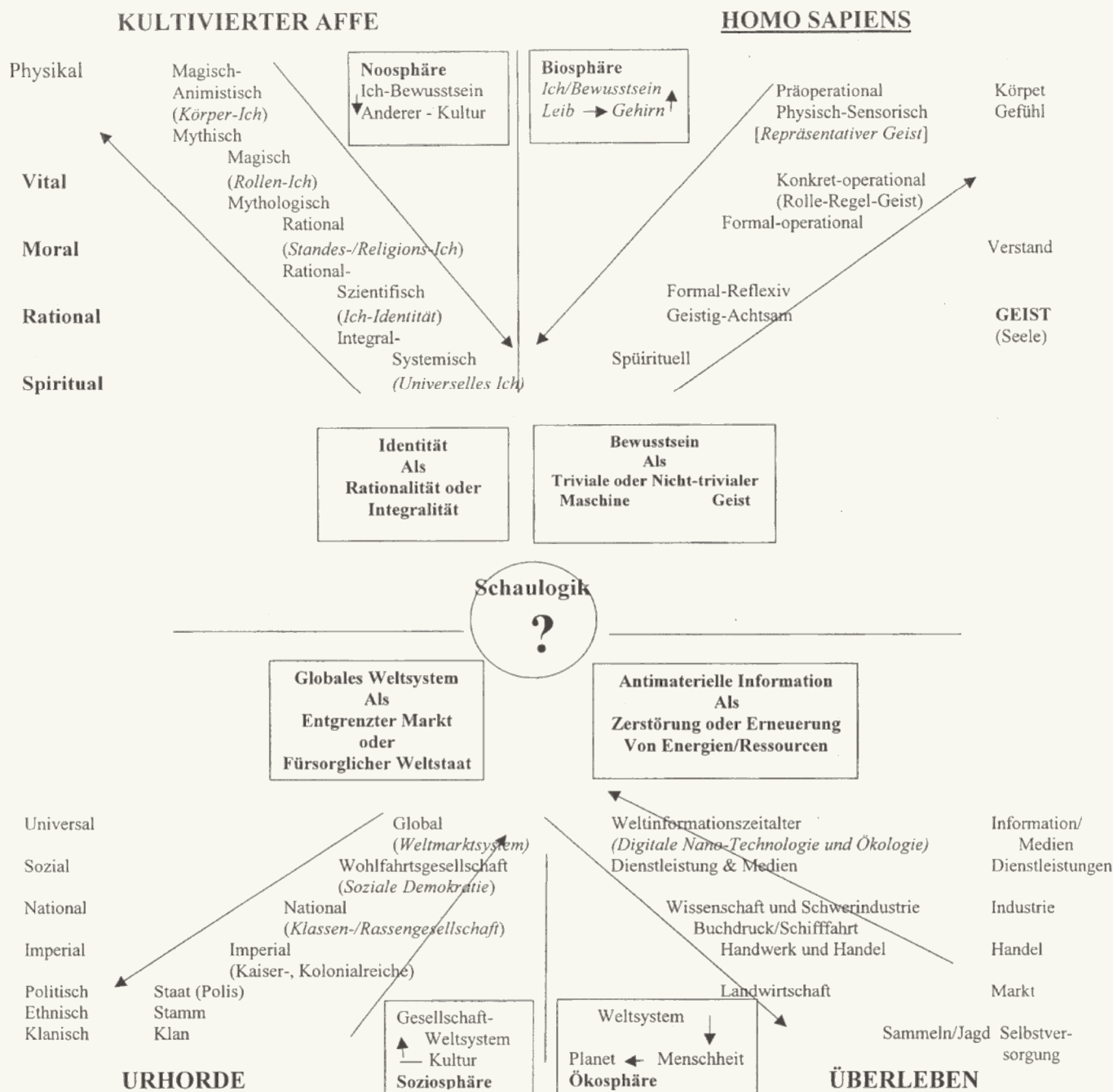
It is more than a formal compromise to propose a transversal revisiting of both concepts. The vertical concept depends on individuals who ‘surrender’ to the truth consciousness or the being – without taking into account the fact of ‘inter-being’ with social and historical contexts. The horizontal (western) concept is an illusion in a time in which science intervenes more and more itself in the evolution of human being, humanity and consciousness. These interferences of science call for the development of consciousness to orient better new forms of ‘co-evolution’.

A basic integral concept takes into account all the spheres of human life. Ken Wilber and others classified four squares of human life:

| | Inside | Outside |
|--------------------|---------|---------|
| ME (Individual) | Mind | Body |
| WE (collective) | Culture | Society |

I propose to revise this quarterfield in a field of four interspheres:





Each sphere is an intersphere because it has (now) to work upon the evolutionary interactions and interferences of formally separated realities. Now body and mind are interacting parts of the biosphere, mind and grouping (culture) constitute the noosphere, culture, society and world system the sociosphere and the ecosphere is made out of the interaction between world system humanity and cosmos. The recognition of these interities places the consciousness at its right interacting place: it is depending on nature and body and at the same time it finds its historical signification in the efforts to outgrow out of this dependency and to transform it into interdependency.

1.7 But what are evolution and involution all about inside or beyond all these interspheres?

First we have to revisit the evolutions and involutions in all these interspheres. In a very rough summary I try to present these evolutions in the following graphic.

It is clear that we do not imagine these involution and evolution here as linear or progressive hierarchical. At least they must be understood in spiral-like transformation processes that comprise upward and downward spirals but also devolutionary interceptions or other historical interferences of human beings in their evolution. The graphic must not be misunderstood. I do not at all suggest an Omega Point in the center to which all evolutions and involutions tend and signify the terminal point of their material times as if out of consciousness arises truth consciousness, out of clashes of civilisation a world civilisation and so on. We will probably not gain back God. And I do not suggest just the opposite: the final catastrophe against which only integral learning could resist... But intervolutionary learning must take into account the major issues at the top of the actual development inside and between the interspheres. In the biosphere we are confronted with the tension not only between body and mind but moreover between biology and spirituality – and the potentials for a further evolution of an embodied consciousness. The conflict lies between the power of trivial machines and the spirit of non-trivial consciousness. In the noosphere we have to do with cultural anthropological balance between the reembedding of the individual in the community or his disembedding into an autonomous independent self. The tension here lies between tendencies of integrity (fundamentalism) and hybridity. In the sociosphere we have to do with the dilemma between a liberal deregularization of the world market and the possibilities of a re-regularization of a world welfare state. Finally the eco-sphere is threatened by ecological imbalances between the exploitation of resources and the utilization of renewable energies.

Integral learning in the form of intervolutionary learning has to do with the future of humanity: regression in barbarisms, dissolution in socially polarized and culturally separated groups and regions, neo-caesarism in new world empires, international networking or ecological democratic world society?