

## Reflections on Marcus Anthony's Not-So-Integral Futures\*

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As one who is extensively quoted in Anthony's piece and who was also present at the event he describes I found his account and interpretations at variance with my own and this dissonance led to the following reflections. Equally, as one who helped pioneer critical futures studies, and who sees work of this kind as unreservedly positive, I very much welcome critiques of this and other approaches. Critique may even be thought of as the metaphorical 'life-blood' of disciplined enquiry. At minimum it helps to raise the quality of debate, to sort out what is of temporary and enduring value and to take perspectives beyond the limitations of individuals. This said, critique has its own discipline and this is partly where Anthony's account falls down.

One of the most appealing aspects of the piece is the way that the author is both aware of his own shadow self and is willing to foreground aspects of this very clearly (in references to 'cowardice', 'shame' and 'discomfort'). This is commendable but it does not excuse some quite serious errors of fact that vitiate the analysis he has offered.

The very first line of the piece gives a clue to what follows, ie, 'What happens when you take a prominent techno-utopian futurist (Michio Kaku) and place him in a room full of post-conventional and Integral Futures practitioners'? I'll pass over the question of whether or not MK can be considered a 'futurist' as such and simply ask if, indeed, there was a room full of people who'd consider themselves as 'post-conventional and Integral Futures practitioners'? Personally I think is this rather over-stated. I'd be more comfortable saying something like 'a room full of people many of whom were open to considering post-conventional and integral futures perspectives' which, of course, is not the same thing at all. The exaggeration constructs an exclusive set that generates the major thrust of the piece. If you see that set as a fiction then the argument collapses.

The writer then goes on to argue that the by-now familiar four quadrant device 'encapsulates the (integral) model'. This is factually incorrect. The model that best 'encapsulates' the integral perspective is known as the 'integral operating system' (IOS); the four quadrant model is merely one aspect of that. Since it is easy to understand at a superficial level, it is unfortunately also something that is reified, 'frozen' and perhaps misused. The error is compounded when Anthony refers (twice) to MK's work as being located in the UR quadrant (individual exterior) when, in fact, it refers to the

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\* Anthony, Marcus. (2006). Not-So-Integral Futures. *Journal of Futures Studies*, 11(2): 155-163.

LR one (collective exterior). This shows rather clearly that someone is either not paying attention or has misunderstood what the model suggests. I'll return to the RHQ issue below.

One of the appealing features of the piece is its sincerity and, I'd say, its honesty. It's a brave piece that reflects on a context and raises some useful questions. But when the author suggests that MK was snubbed at the meeting, and that we were all 'arrogant' in our complicity, I again felt that this interpretation may have more to do with the author's own subjectivities (upper left quadrant) than it does with the rest of us who were there. I remember being at the first Foresight conference at Strathclyde, Glasgow, and being appalled at what I then saw as a complete lack of interest in facilitating any meaningful personal interactions between attendees, many of whom had travelled long distances to be there. Was this the result of arrogance? Were the organisers being superior? I suppose you could argue along those lines. But a more 'common or garden' explanation would be that, for all sorts of reasons, most conferences tend to employ fairly stereotypical and even unproductive routines that do not actively encourage or facilitate meaningful interactions outside the official program, especially between individuals who do not already know each other. If such contacts occur at all then they tend to be informal and accidental rather than planned and intentional.

I, too, was listening carefully when MK gave his address. I also saw the pre-programmed pause that was clearly intended to accommodate expected applause that, in this instance, never came. The reason it never came was not that the audience was exclusive, arrogant or, in any sense, integral. Rather, the performance was pitched for a very different kind of audience. MK was like the proverbial 'fish out of water' at the event and people perhaps found it too challenging to try to close the wide gap between themselves and this highly confident celebrity figure cloaked in the authority of science! In other words, his relative isolation had little or nothing to do with the integral perspective or 'quadrant absolutism'.

Anthony goes on to argue that the UL quadrant is privileged within the integral perspective and there may be some truth to this in individual cases. But I cannot see it as an in-built feature of the IOS model, or perspective, itself. Anthony seems to have forgotten the fact that what can be depicted as an over-emphasis on the UL occurred as part of a re-balancing process, a necessary corrective to several centuries of Western development when the empirically-oriented LR was so dominant that questions of human and cultural interiors were eclipsed for a very long time. I happen to think that it is within these interior domains that the wellsprings of our lives originate. But that does not mean that I, or anyone else, can live there or in some way deny the materiality and 'groundedness' of everyday life. So the call for 'grounded' futures seems obvious, trivial and unnecessary. As the jargon has it, everything can be said to 'tetra evolve', not 'uno evolve' or 'duo evolve'!

The challenge thrown out at the end of the piece is, however, worth taking seriously. I believe that it is possible to explain, explore and utilise a wide range of integral ideas, models and methods in ways that are both innovative and readily explicated. I reject entirely the implication that advanced and post-conventional futures work must necessarily be exclusive, leading to the pathologies that he purports to have found at the conference. This does not mean that the need for 'adequateo' can be

denied or dismissed either. In this and any other field it is axiomatic that there must be *something* in the knower that is, indeed, adequate to that which is to be known. The 'elitism' that Anthony finds in integral enquiry may be no different to that found in any field where some enquirers or practitioners come to believe that they are, in some way, 'special'. It has been suggested that medical doctors and lawyers run this risk, so can we assume that futures practitioners are immune? In passing, I note that I've seen this phenomenon prominently displayed many times at WFS conferences in the USA where 'integral futures' – or integral anything - remain rare beasts indeed! Clearly the integral perspective is not really the issue here.

Standing behind what I see as an ill-judged attempt at critique is a truth that I want to bring forward and reinforce. Students at the Australian Foresight Institute became familiar with a mantra that I coined a few years back, namely: 'every model conceals and reveals at the same time'. I've also repeatedly said that, while the integral perspective has much to offer FS across the board, and while it brings us many gifts (in particular that of increased clarity about which 'ways of knowing' most centrally apply in any situation) that, nevertheless, it must not become an unthinking orthodoxy. Critique is therefore vital and necessary at each and every stage. Critique keeps us honest and moves things along. But it also has to be factually sound and *itself* well grounded, or nothing much is gained. So in closing this reflection let me draw attention to the occluded question that I think lurks behind Anthony's effort and, in so doing, invite further comment: what does the integral perspective conceal?

For me the central value of the perspective is that way that it clarifies, refreshes and opens out new options and methodologies.<sup>3</sup> I no longer find what I call 'unitary' views of the world convincing. From an integral viewpoint I think that they 'run together' - and therefore confuse - phenomena that need to be understood using different tools and different ways of knowing from many sources. Yet, in that very effort of refreshment and clarification, I wonder what epistemologies, ways of knowing, cultural resources that I do not see, are being unconsciously set aside?

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