An Integral Design Framework
—designing a global village

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Abstract: By drawing on the extended psychoneurological research of Clare Graves’ human value systems and by applying it on the largest and most inclusive model currently available, the integral theory, this paper “An Integral Design Framework—designing a global village” presents the short introduction of a framework or map that even though, in the light of design, still stands in its nascent state, already has the explicatory power to make sense of the worldwide interrelated nature of environment, human values and behaviour, and design. The aim of this presentation therefore is to give the first and humble steps to a new socio-cultural dimension in the global design context to approach wicked and socially complex problems, and to propose further research into a framework on which we, design as a professional domain, together can build further.

Keywords: interconnectedness, integral design framework, global village, human value systems

1. Introduction - New problem, new opportunity, new task

From our first upright steps as Homo sapiens we have stridden from one awakening to another, becoming a slightly different being with every step. Human development occurs when men and women face and solve existential problems crucial to their existence. When new problems arise higher ordered structures of dynamic neurological systems become active in the human brain. These systems trigger new forms of thinking, which on their turn, trigger new human forms of being and doing (Cowan & Todorovic, 2005). Over the course of history the human race has braved many problems that acquired many new forms of thinking and, as human consciousness slowly evolved, so did the objects of our creation—including and building upon the collective experiences of our past—many of its outcomes created through what we call design today.

Once again, the new kind of problems we are facing today, invite a new form of thinking. Arising in front of us are our human ethical failures and our misuse of the world. Because although divergent, many of our present-day problems—our ecological crisis, the European migrant crisis, conflicting cultural, religious and value eruptions, the social impacts of global inequality and the transition to...
sustainable wellbeing societies—are defined by the fact that they are caused by human behaviour, some of them involving the entire species of the planet, while others are more confined to geographic areas and its different groups and individuals. This makes us want to get the bottom of what it is in human nature that causes so much chaos and to ask if we can find a system of values that allows us to be more than freeloaders taking from upon the world. As for the designer this means working in complex systems, stressing the individual-social-environmental connection, but also turning to the human behavioural side of our problems. Because it is only when we go beyond a material theory of our systems and understand the deeper codes of how human’s existential problems, values, needs and behaviour emerge, will we be able to adequately describe, understand and design holistic solutions for our challenges that are socially, environmentally and economically sustainable. The integral design framework hopes to contribute to this challenge.

2. Human System Theory

It was 1974. On the pages of *The Futurist* magazine professor Clare W. Graves presented the results of his 20-year research on the evolutionary nature of human psychology. Tired of conflicting psychological theories, Graves set out to uncover how to better navigate through the various versions of human nature and revealed a theoretical trellis that explains human values and behaviour unfolding through recognisable packages as the world around us gets more complicated. The theory suggests that only when we have more knowledge of the adult human value systems and their hierarchical relationship to one another, are we able to more successfully understand and direct the behaviour of the adult individual, the operation of an organisation, or the development of a society (Cowan & Todorovic, 2005).

Consider that,

- The theory represents *time* in a psychological, instead of chronological way. It represents time in terms of the *existential problems* we face at the time of living, instead of “clock” or “calendar” time (Cowan & Todorovic, 2005);
- The theory represents *space* as the particular *environmentosocial* conditions, both biological and man-made, we are faced with in a particular region or area in contrast to another region or area (Cowan & Todorovic, 2005);
- The theory presents the concept of a general, but variable, psychosocial *resultant*—“a way of thinking” or “value system”—that arises when certain human biological, neurological and environmentosocial aspects meet at a particular moment in psychological time and in particular conditions of psychological space. I will refer to this resultant as a *level of being* and, in line with the popularisation of Graves’ work in what is called Spiral Dynamics, will represent each level through a description of colour;
- The theory suggests that the *levels of being* fall into (probably endless) six-set spirals of hierarchically ordered subsystems, as human existential problems arise in an ordered hierarchical fashion. When humans have solved the first six existential problems (1-6), a new six-set spiral of higher-order problems for living and so *levels of being* arise (1’-6’). This new spiral strongly resembles the previous one, but then on a new, more including and more complex level (figure 1);
The theory suggests that a level of being can take hold of an individual or a group—it sets the tone for the things we find important and do in our individual lives and collectively shapes new cultural directions, social systems, objects and artefacts;

The theory suggests that the first six levels of being of the first spiral and, roughly, the first two to three levels of the second spiral are present, operating and expressing themselves through different individuals, groups and nations today;

The theory suggests that the levels of being are qualitatively the same from one culture or one human being to another, but can vary significantly quantitatively from one psychosocial system to another;

The theory suggests that, as each new level of being is more complex, each level is a crucial building block for the next. Let’s say as an individual or group, we wish to reach value system five (orange), then we have to move, from one to two to three to four to...
five. This means the “lower” systems are as important as the “higher,” without them there is simply no spiral;
- And, as the levels of being are our human responses to the existential problems we face and solve, they show a profound and symbiotic relationship with design.

3. Towards an integral framework

In his book Change by Design Tim Brown said that he only gradually came to see the power of design “not as a link in a chain but as the hub of a wheel” (Brown, 2009, p. 5). By the presentation of the integral framework, this paper may architecturally show what Brown and maybe also we, ourselves, have instinctively known: the complex and interrelated nature of design, working between different spheres of life. The integral framework draws on integral theory as developed by American philosopher Ken Wilber and provides a content-neutral framework, or as I like to see it, a map of reality where different disciplines and life expressions get their place on an equal basis. The base of the framework exists of four horizontal domains and the theory suggests that in order to have a sustainable solution we need to take a holistic approach where nothing can be reduced to one of these dimensions, but an approach where all of them stand in reciprocal relation to one another (figure 2). And, as we will see, a base of four domains on which each human level of being has their influence.

Consider that,

- The I-domain represents the individual, subjective interior domain of life—it is the domain of personal development, the field through which we experience and express ourselves. It is the psychological field of self & consciousness and reflects our skills, values, states and beliefs, it is the domain of art & aesthetics, what we think is beautiful, but also what we think is functional, and what we think is just (Watkins & Wilber 2015);
- The WE-domain reflects the interior world of the collective. This inter-subjective domain represents the culture & worldview of a society, group or sub-group—the collective norms and standards of how “we” should act, or what is appropriate, in any given culture or subculture. It is the cultural sciences—communication forms, communal beliefs, cultural practices, shared values and ethics, or just shared meanings of any kind (Wilber, 2000);
- The exterior domains of life are those things that can be seen with the senses or extensions and this objective world is often the focus of technology and hard sciences (Wilber, 2000). And, like the I- and WE-domain, this too has an individual and collective aspect, the “IT” and the “ITS.” The IT-domain reflects the composition & behaviour of any organism or object. It is the field of empiricism, behaviourism, physics, biology and neurology. If we talk about human psychological or consciousness development, these transformations involve structural changes in the organism. A state of consciousness in the upper-left (I) for example, will influence the person’s brain waves in the upper-right (IT). In the man-made world of the design this field represents the material composition and behaviour of every product, technological invention, service or strategy. Each product’s composition and behaviour (IT) is defined by the designer’s intention (I), who is mutually influenced by the values and constrains of the culture coming from and designing for (WE). Design decisions also shape the materials and systems required to make them, the way we operate them,
and what happens to them when we no longer need them (from left to upper-right/lower-right);

- This brings us to the **ITS-domain**, the relational world of our objects and organisms—our *environment and social systems*. It is the field of systems theory, both natural—we can think of the earth, our bio-systems—as well man-made. It reflects any type of social structure, such as techno-economic systems, informational systems, communication systems, mobility systems, food systems, as well as any physical collective structure, like institutions, organisations, cities, architectural systems, design, art or fashion styles. So in a very general sense we can say that “cultural” refers to the shared collective worldview and “social” refers to the collective material base of that worldview (Wilber, 2000). This domain makes us realise that the “wheel” is more complex than a system, and an integral view or sustainable approach means taking both the exterior as well as the interior domains into account.

*Figure 2. The integral theory’s four domains of existence*
3.1 The integral approach UNICEF, an example

A complex strategic example demonstrating the power of the integral approach we can find in the life-long overall strategy of UNICEF. Already from 1946 UNICEF is helping children whose lives were at risk in developing countries. Throughout its history, UNICEF’s priorities have been realizing the intrinsic rights of children to a basic quality of life, rights world leaders further defined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which is part of the United Nations strategy (www.unicef.org). Yet, at the approach of the millennium, UNICEF made an assessment of their work as their progress over the decades had for a large part not produced the sustainable change intended (Wilber, 2000).

Approaching UNICEF’s work from the integral view, the assessing consultancy identified a misbalanced focus as the major reason for some of UNICEF’s past failures. For five decades UNICEF’s activities largely operated in the Individual and Collective Exterior, or Right-Hand dimensions (Wilber, 2000). In this case it meant focussing on disease prevention, the physical health of the child, and their external social systems, such as poverty and children’s rights. Yet none of the approaches focussed on personal development or changing any of the cultural dimensions. According to the Human Rights Approach to Development Programming (Jonsson, 2003) UNICEF was indeed not successful in areas that required that individuals, families, and communities became empowered in a way that service delivery-focused basic needs strategies cannot normally achieve, this while, as UNICEF write themselves years later, education provides the foundation for societal progress and has been linked to better health and well-being. This means Left-Hand focuses that have Right-Hand results.

In the new millennium, UNICEF took on an integral approach which meant, while keep targeting Exterior-dimensions, also focussing on Interior or Left-Hand aspects in the form of primary education, gender equality and early childhood development. The overall outcomes of the 2000–2015 reports have been overall very positive, “the most successful anti-poverty movement in history,” and from 2015 UNICEF together with the United Nations, have taken the integral approach even a step further in what they called the Sustainable Development Goals, an integral approach that focuses on even more diverse areas in all dimensions and to the higher human systems levels, and as for UNICEF, also targets the most disadvantaged children in the world (Progress for Children, learning from the MDG’s report, 2015).

4. An integral design framework

After the short presentation of the two theories and an example of the integral approach, I will present the human systems through an integral lens in order to a create an even deeper understanding of the theories, the framework and its possible applications for design. In the following I will describe Graves’ first eight levels of being (spiral 1: 1-6 and spiral 2: 1’ and 2’) roughly moving through the integral theory’s four domains of European history (figure 3), exhibiting how those value systems influence and create each domain. Here, the I-domain reflects the development of states of consciousness in the individual; The WE-domain the arising collective worldviews throughout history; The IT-domain, very generally, reflects on the material base of new design objects and new design orders; And the ITS-domain reveals the general social structures and economical formation of that time-space. Yet it might be clear that the description of the human systems is only a very brief summary of a much larger context and that the four dimensions of this integral framework shows only two (horizontal, the four domains; vertical, levels of being) of more dimensions.
The descriptions of the *levels of being* are primary based on, and on some occasions come from direct paraphrasing of, the neuropsychological work of Graves and the continuation of his research by Don Beck, Christopher Cowan and Natasha Todorovic (Cowan & Todorovic, 2005; Beck & Cowan, 1996). Furthermore, for this introduction, I have used the cultural explorations of Jean Gebser (1986), the work of the integral philosopher Ken Wilber (2000), the extended reflectional work of Jennifer Gidley (2007) and Richard Buchanan’s explorations of design orders (2001) to bring the matter alive and provide historic and present-day examples. Furthermore, in this short presentation, I try to demonstrate how the human interaction with our existential problems awaken the brain and so cause new states of human development, which on their turn create different ways of looking at the world. These so-called *levels of being* are worldspaces that represent important mini-cosmoses—little patterns of human needs, wants and values—the basic force fields that shape our lives and also what we design.

*Figure 3. The development of human systems through European history*
4.1 Spiral 1 – the first six subsystems

1. Beige – The Autistic Existence

The Autistic Existence is the first of human stages and we mostly recognise this stage at birth. The survivalistic self (I) uses basic drives and behaviours to survive—its values centre on the satisfaction of basic needs, such as food, water, warmth, sex, and safety. In society (WE) this system was dominant in the so-called archaic worldview, the world’s simplest food-gathering cultures that existed up to 50,000 years ago, coping with the survival problems of existence (Gebser, 1986). These were foraging cultures with a very limited concept of time, space, and materiality (IT). They formed into small survival bands (ITS) to maintain life and this state is rarely found in the modern world (Cowan & Todorovic, 2005).

2. Purple – The Animistic Existence

In the Animistic Existence the brain begins to awaken. This creates a magical self (I) that will seek safety and security through blood relationships—family and extended family bonds—while navigating through a magical and scary world. In culture, this tribalistic way of thinking is part of a magical worldview (WE) that forms into ethnic tribes (ITS). The Animistic Existence first appeared approximately 40,000 years ago when devastating climatic conditions changed the source of food, water, and shelter (Cowan & Todorovic, 2005). These horticultural societies were the first to start to mould the environment and created the first tools and images (IT) (Gidley, 2007). In a magical worldview values circle around traditions, customs, the honouring of ancestors, and the allegiance to boss, chief, elders, or the clan. But, be aware, ancestors or a clan are not only found in far-away history, but also in a modern-day “corporate,” “sports” or “street-gang” kind of way (Beck & Cowan, 1996).

3. Red – The Egocentric Existence

The Egocentric Existential state arises when relatively safety and security is reached. It produces the problems of boredom from living as an intelligent human being in an unchanging elder-dominated world. This activates a psychoneurological system in the brain where the self, for the first time, experiences a distinct self from the “tribe.” It creates a powerful self (I) that will try to break free from any domination or restriction and pleases the self as the self desires (Cowan & Todorovic, 2005). Generally it can be said that the first three levels of existence (beige, purple, red) are characterised by their ‘egocentric’ perspectives, meaning that we are “stuck” in a first-person, ‘me/mine’ perspective, a perspective that will change in the next level, blue (Wilber & Watkins, 2015).

In culture (WE) the Egocentric Existence is seen in a power-seeking worldview that pursues power and glory. In its first stages it formed into great empires (ITS), unifying ethnic tribes into binding social orders. Lords protected their underlings in exchange for obedience and labour (Beck & Cowan, 1996). This made the arts and crafts flourish in several disciplines, big temples and majestic buildings, mathematics was developed, as well as writing and metallurgy (IT) (Wilber, 2000). Today, generally it can be said that countries with a high rate of violence and poverty are mainly dealing with issues of red and purple. Surviving, finding safety, and making a living under power-seeking leaders are at the order of the day. Industrialisation, and in some countries even a full agrarian revolution, has not yet taken place (Beck & Cowan, 1996).

4. Blue – The Absolutistic Existence
The blue system creates a purposeful self (I) that wants to find meaning and purpose in existence. We like to bring order to things and value honest living that produces stability and guarantees future rewards. We obey to authority and sacrifice ourselves to a transcendent cause, the truth, or a righteous pathway (Cowan & Todorovic, 2005). In the Absolutistic Existence the switch from an ‘egocentric’ to an ‘ethnocentric’ perspective takes place—the focus from ‘me’ turns into a ‘group-focus,’ and this stage is seen as one of the most important building blocks of human development (Beck & Cowan, 1996; Wilber & Watkins, 2015).

Collectively this system first appeared, probably in its various forms, about 4000-6000 years ago. In this mythical worldview (WE) there is an absolutist order that enforces a code of conduct based on absolute beliefs and principles—something that arises from conditions of chaos, poverty, and suffering from red. In history it seems to have given birth to the great monotheistic religions of today and the blue system stands at the basis of early countries, nations, and states (ITS) where good and evil; right and wrong; reward and punishment; law and order ruled the day (Cowan & Todorovic, 2005). Here lies the origin of modern writing and the development of pictographic and logographic systems, the invention of paper, pamphlets, books, and print (IT) (Gidley, 2007). This perspective gave rise to the first order of (modern) design—communication—central in the establishment of graphic design (Buchanan, 2001). Today several economically more developed countries are characterized by a rigid (blue) state or order. Signs of the next level, outbreaks such as the Arab Spring, might be seen on the news and with a growing global middle class the next system, orange, is slowly rising (Beck & Cowan, 1996).

5. Orange – The Multiplistic Existence

In the Multiplistic Existence the neurological system is activated that triggers possibility or multiplicity thinking instead of the blue absolute. We become an achiever self (I), escaping the “herd mentality” of blue and seeking truth and meaning in individualistic and scientific terms. While looking for a better human existence the orange value-system produces a scientific-rational worldview (WE) and typically forms into corporate states and marketplace alliances (ITS) (Cowan & Todorovic, 2005). This is the start of a ‘world-centric’ awareness, but in this state of materialistic existence the world and environment becomes our object. Material well-being sets the tone, time is money and so is success (Beck & Cowan, 1996). Here the second order of design arises in an age of construction—objects were created through traditional industrial and product design with a focus on science and technology, the mechanic, analogue, and electronic (IT) (Buchanan, 2001).

In the context of European history the orange system emerged with the Enlightenment after the Middle Ages, after dismantling the supreme blue. It was the slow movement from the pre-modern into the modern era. On a more recent global level many efforts of building an orange market place, for example in African societies, have failed because they have not been ready for them. In societies on purple/red boundaries, blue work ethic and discipline should be introduced first, and orange free-market systems will not flourish, and even fail until a healthy blue base has been settled, and red social problems and barriers are under control (Beck & Cowan, 1996).

6. Green – The Relativistic Existence

The sixth level, the Relativistic Existence, first appeared 80-90 years ago. It arises when the “orange way of life” solves the problems of living for many. Our material wants are fulfilled, but the struggle for individuality and material existence does not bring the happiness expected. This creates problems of coming to peace with aloneness, with our inner self and with others. It activates the neurological system in the brain for truly experiencing the inner subjective feelings of humankind (Cowan & Todorovic, 2005). In this communitarian self (I) we feel that human spirit must be freed from greed,
dogma, and divisiveness. We create bonding and linking, dialogue and relationship and wish to spread the Earth’s resources and opportunities equally among all.

The Relativistic Existence creates a pluralistic worldview (WE), a culture where social class distinctions blur and “everyone is in it together.” This green operating system can be found more and more in present-day Europe, although “orange” and even “blue” systems, maybe more than ever, try to prevail. The green value-system both celebrates, as well as pushes, pluralistic values of diversity and multiculturalism, yet often without acknowledging, and even denying, the stages of human development. It forms into value communities (ITS)—freely chosen connections based on shared ideas and values. Where in orange business is as war, in green business is seen a family or tribe (Beck & Cowan, 1996). At this stage ecological sensitivity often arises, and we can see design’s third order arising—interaction design (IT), partly made possible by the rise of digital technology in an informational age. Here the focus is on how human beings relate to other human beings through the mediating influence of products, which are also activities or services (Buchanan, 2001). For example, a clear shift in these values, from orange to green, is when Nokia radically transformed the meaning of mobile phones from ‘connecting offices’ to ‘connecting people,’ approaching Nokia phones as personal accessories for social relationships rather than devices for business people (Singh & Tromp, 2011).

4.2 New spiral, new values, new design

With the accumulation of the sixth sub-system, human development has reached the last of the first spiral. It is the beginning of the first spiral all over again, but on a new basis. With the next system, yellow, human development actually takes a “quantum leap” into the second spiral, also called second-tier instead of first-tier thinking. In the second spiral most notably fear and compulsion drops off almost completely and a new information-rich and multidimensional perspective takes hold (Cowan & Todorovic, 2005). Interestingly, with the start of this new spiral humans have proved to find more and better solutions to problems than any other level and a form of complexity is reached that goes beyond even the best of the first spiral thinking and complex interactive systems of “mega-roaming, mega-villages, and mega-patterns become reality because the problems of the first levels are understood, or even in full control” (Beck & Cowan, 1996). Let’s have a look.

4.3 Spiral 2 – the first two subsystems

1’. Yellow – The Systemic Existence

The Systemic Existence is triggered by the problems that threat our organismic life caused by the rape of the world produced by our third, fourth, fifth, and sixth level ways and systems. This level is the base for an integral self (I)—we discover personal freedom without harm to others or excesses of self-interest. Although this perspective is not yet seen as a dominant worldview in history (WE), we can detect this kind of thinking in navigating chaos driven interdependent systems that interact within the physical, economic and social environments. In this perspective we see life as a web of natural hierarchies, systems, and forms. The feeling of a global village (ITS) is slowly emerging and we could say the leading edge of design today is seriously working on this level. It focuses on organization and thought—organising complex wholes in the context of organizations, environments, systems, and cultures (IT). Buchanan calls this fourth order of design environmental design.
2’. **Turquoise – The Intuitive Existence**

In the **Intuitive Existence** we pursue to be a *holistic self* (I) that sees the world as a single, dynamic organism with its own collective mind. We are as well separate, as a blended part of a larger, compassionate whole. Everything connects to everything else in ecological alignments and we can see levels of interaction. It is the basis of extensive wholeness. We act for minimalistic living, so less is indeed more. A ‘grand unification’ or big picture is possible, in theory and in actuality (Beck & Cowan, 1996). This system will, hopefully, flourish in a *holistic worldview* (WE), that of whole earth networks and interconnections with a macro-management of all life forms. It most likely will form *global tribes* (ITS) and I believe this kind of thinking will establish design’s fifth order. Because where yellow structured thinking, and design’s fourth order, connects the dots, shaping the picture of the world as one system—a global village—turquoise let’s the picture of different colours and shades come alive. Earth’s recourses and learning will be distributed by need, not want, so all can survive with enough.

3’. **Coral**

While the next level, coral (and most likely design’s sixth level) is still under investigation and what it exactly will, or will have to do, remains yet to be seen, but if the world keeps going the way it does, it is an almost certain fact that it will arrive, just as the next, and next, and next, which also means for new design orders.

**Conclusion, applicability and further steps**

Although the integral framework, in the light of design, still stands in its theoretical state, both the human system theory, as well as the integral framework in general, has been successfully applied in the fields of HR, geopolitics and real-life settings of social change (Wilber, 2001; Watkins & Wilber, 2015; Beck & Cowan, 1996). Both theories have been proved to be useful tools when managing our complex world, a role, which I believe, it could also fulfil for the field of design. It is pretty safe to say that its application can be wide and can be taken into several directions—here a few of which I see clear visions.

**Managing complexity, towards an integral system by adding the human aspect**

One of the most interesting features of the integral design framework is the function as a complex map of reality. Because while social innovation in the last years has emerged as a potentially sustainable solution to many of our world’s problems, one of the main challenges the field is still facing, is finding ways to frame its multidimensionality and build a context that instead of isolates, embraces the recognition that all of its facets—environmental, cultural, psychological, technological, social, and economic—are interdepended (Dorst, 2015; Lockwood, 2009; Brown, 2009; Rifkin, 2011). I believe that this framework can be a step in that direction and with further development, the framework can function as a practical map of sustainability where all of these facets can be added. But on top of that, as in the example of UNICEF, the framework theoretically demonstrates what design feels that needs to be done: adding the human individual and cultural, value and behavioural aspects to our existing work area. This means broadening our vision from our work field as the environment and social systems—sociotechnical arenas where we work with different objects, processes, products and services (Friedman, 2016; Norman & Stappers, 2015; Murativski 2015) —to the notion of an even more complex work area, an integral system, that consists of individual, cultural, behavioural and systematic systems—in integral words, Interior plus Exterior aspects.
And yet by presenting the two theories I hope to have opened our horizons even a step further, namely to the idea that for any form of sustainable development, the designer not only needs to have awareness of the horizontal facets (the four domains), but as well of the hierarchical (human system) ordered levels. Because by adding the vertical dimension, we now truly come to see a multi-dimensional view of complexity, sustainability and development. In this new vision we may find out that underlying a ecological problem, toxic waste dumbs for example, is the fact that not enough people working with these materials are on the world-centric levels (orange-green) of development (a level where ecological awareness arises). This could mean focusing on products and services that bring people to these higher value levels—a more strong Interior emphasis, one that targets the human internal levels of development. Because although this paper presentation reflects on European history, by creating awareness of the vertical aspect we theoretically come to see that both Europe and our global village is a melting pot of different individuals and groups that operate, create and act from different value systems and thinking structures. We might be struck by people practicing “purple magic” in the dark streets of Lisbon, as well as in the mountains of east Ghana. “Blue’s absolute” may be leading some crowds in the suburbs of Paris, as well as in the far-reaching corners of India, and “green’s pluralism” may be on the top of the agenda of the European Union, so too in the design schools of South Africa. And this realisation might have big consequences.

Social innovation and social design

This brings us to what I see as the most valuable application of the integral design framework, the field of social innovation and social design. From a social design perspective, whether it is design for the third world, participatory and user-centered design, service design, or new forms such as co-design, co-construction, collaborative design, community design, design activism, frame creation (Dorst, 2015), social innovation (Manzini, 2015) and supporting manifestos such as Design for Transformation and DesignX, all design practices that urge designers to use their skills to work on major societal challenges, sometimes in conjunction with, but often regardless of, outside, and even against the market all working with the various versions of professionals and lay persons (Komatsu, Celi, Rizzo & Deserti, 2016)—in the designer’s growing role as facilitator and change-maker, it might not be hard to imagine the usefulness of the framework. The two-presented theories, and especially Graves’ human value systems and the popularisation in what is called Spiral Dynamics, have been proven successful in managing different humans and their behaviour and values. For example, by working with these human levels we know that change must be delivered through the system of the target group, in the psycho-social language they understand, not that preferred by us, the change-maker. A “blue” social strange strategy needs to be ‘carved in stone,’ in shape of a mission statement and new rules, while an “orange” strategy needs to be wrapped more in possibility-thinking and goal setting. And through the human systems theory we come to see that some of what seems to be cultural or just basic human differences, are just friction points of value systems—in politics for instance, we can see this quite clear where the right-winged versus left-winged propositions are often blue-green or orange-green colour battles.

Furthermore, the framework demonstrates that social change can only be brought in hierarchical steps—it being in a person or a group, as well as in any object or sociotechnical system—instead of the steps that we, as designers or change agency, favour. Because while all human levels are legitimate expressions of the human experience, as problems arise in a hierarchical fashion, they are not ‘equal’ in their capacities to deal with complex problems. An “orange” marketplace might be a good idea, yet only when the majority of the structures of the society are ready for that level of development. And so more than a human managing tool, in the light of social innovation and the way in which people generate social forms (Manzini, 2015), the framework could be proven useful in
framing societal problems and building social strategies, because it shows us from where to where we are developing our social structures and societies. In this light the theories can give us radical insights in both existing, as well as in future wants and needs of our human species, and provides a profound context for some of the problems that are arising.

Second-tier education and new design orders

In 2015, design researchers Norman & Stappers proposed an interesting question: “Do the current methods taught in design education, especially considering its emphasis upon traditional craft, prepare designers for work in and with complex sociotechnical systems? What can design add, and what needs to be added to design?” (p. 84). According to them, the emphasis on perfecting craftsmanship using a variety of materials would seem no longer necessary, while enhancing problem-finding and observational skills, and cultivating an ability to manage iterations of prototyping and testing do seem relevant. Through the integral framework we can see that for managing or dealing with our current sociotechnical systems, or better yet, with these complex integral systems, we need to educate our designers into the second-tier thinking levels as the solutions for first-tier problems can only be found in second-tier approaches (Beck & Cowan, 1996).

And while the leading edge of design thinking well entered the first second-tier levels, with turquoise and coral it also preludes new design orders. The human systems theory can help us understand our own domain and its future development better and, as the second spiral resembles the first on a more complex level, a deeper exploration of the content can give us insights into future problems we are going to face and how to work with these changing human values. Also here, the theory provides us a better map from where to where, and into what, we need to convert our future designers, while at the same time the framework could provide these designers with a better map of what our complex world looks like. For this reason I hope to propose further research, elaborating on the existing domains, but also adding new dimensions and levels, into a framework on which we, design as a professional domain, together can build further.
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