

En Route to Integrality: Consciousness Milestones through Online Communities

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ABSTRACT

Based on Jean Gebser's structures of consciousness, this paper proposes to investigate an area of sub-cultural interest that provides an example of how the process of integrality is still underway and how some sub-cultural communities are making steps towards its progression. A recent sub-cultural phenomenon, PostSecret.com, has arisen that encourages viewers around the world to mail in personal secrets for on-line posting and discussion. The website creates an open forum that allows users to share personal secrets anonymously without fear of retribution for controversial topics or socially taboo ideologies. This realm of virtual community building can be seen as making a step towards integrality as it attempts to reveal, explore and discuss the underlying secrets to the human soul. It is still however, only at the milestone of showing acknowledgement that societal cultures are only en route to becoming integral as the very existence of personal secrets and the concealment thereof are the antithesis of integrality.

Keywords: online community, consciousness, Gebser

INTRODUCTION

"Only someone who has overcome himself is truly able to overcome."
(Gebser, 1985, p. xxvii)

Secrets are a type of lie, an untruth. We keep secrets from our friends, our family and even from ourselves and in doing so never markedly make a step towards revealing truth in our own existence. By hiding or denying portions of our being we refuse to acknowledge and accept the whole of the self, in turn limiting ourselves to a perspectival viewpoint of self. According to Jean Gebser (1985), "man separates from the whole only that part which his view or thinking can encompass, and forgets those sectors that lie adjacent, beyond or even behind" (p. 18). Through the latency of secrets and denial of parts of the self, humankind inadvertently prevents a wholeness of self from developing and from progressing towards an integral consciousness. However, there is evidence to show that not all of humankind is entrenched in such individuated behavior and in fact one community in particular is progressing towards verition through the reflection of inner, latent self-denials in an online community setting. A recent sub-cultural phenomenon, PostSecret.com, has arisen that encourages viewers around the world to mail in personal secrets for online posting and discussion. This realm of virtual community building can be seen as making a step towards

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In postmodern society, ever-increasing fragmentation and isolation of the individual contributes to the breakdown of the interwoven fabric of society (Strinati, 1993). Some reasons for this include cultural transitions from an emphasis on community to an emphasis on individualism (Kramer, 1997); consumerist ideologies that decontextualize meaning which create an absence of a shared belief and value system (Baudrillard, 1995); as well as technological advances that attract people into isolationist environments through media convergence and computer-mediated communication (CMC) (Jenkins, 2004). Although an abundance of examples explore this phenomenon (McLeod, 1991; Cova, 1997; Mumby, 1997; Otomar, 1996), one example, PostSecret.com, is a product of a postmodern society that simultaneously seeks to amend the absence of physical communities through an attempt to establish a virtual community that unifies individuals through shared meaning and media convergence.

The fact that virtual communities have developed seems to directly correlate to the postmodern characteristics of the present society and the ever-increasing divide amongst peoples. According to Katz et al. (2004):

Our traditional communities have become so large and dispersed, that the collective social bond must be imagined and created in the mind of each of its participants, rather than directly experienced through direct contact. Our conceptions of community must be imagined because we conceive of them as sovereign, limited, and having a horizontal equality among members. In real life, however, communities are constantly challenged, have only arbitrarily chosen boundaries, and hierarchical structures. Thus, real community grounded in intimate, personal contact and concrete issues of integration has vanished, replaced by a mental construct. (p. 322-323).

Although virtual reality is referred to as imaginary in this delineation (which could be said of any aspect of "reality", the movie *The Matrix* serves as one example of an elaboration), this setting has become a very real response to the fragmentation of people and communities within the physical realm.

The PostSecret site began as part of an art project where the founder, Frank Warren, handed out 3,000 self-addressed postcards to a random sample of people asking them to mail him a secret that a) had never been shared with anyone and b) is true (Warren, 2005, p. 1). Warren updates the site weekly by handpicking and posting 24 new postcards. Although it is impossible to determine whether the secrets have fulfilled these requirements as they are mailed anonymously it is irrelevant because, regardless of the veracity of these secrets, they are presumably taken as true and connect with the receivers of these messages through the blog.

Reader responses posted on the site touch upon every human emotion and controversial topic imaginable, all done with the option of anonymity to allow users to

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share personal secrets without fear of retribution for controversial topics. This aspect of the blog supports the development of social action through its allowance for open discussion of controversial and socially taboo topics therefore contributing to “the formation of public opinion by bringing issues to the fore of public discussion.” Because of this allowance for open discussion many socially stigmatized issues that are rarely addressed in the public forum are now being addressed through this community, which could lead to offline discussions within local communities as well.

The site was initially a very basic design that established a two-day allowance for feedback through e-mail regarding the weekly postcard postings. However, on October 14, 2007, Warren unveiled a new aspect to the blog, which created an allowance for full community interaction with an emerging PostSecret Community (Warren, 2007). Through the Community website viewers were provided with a wide variety of communication options, including uploading video responses, audio responses, instant messaging responses to other viewers, chat room responses and traditional e-mail responses to the postcards as well as stories of how the blog has personally affected individuals. Currently there are two components to the PostSecret phenomenon: the blog, in which postcards and select e-mail responses are displayed for viewer consumption, and the website, where viewers can go to respond to the postcards through textual, audio and video media.

The Internet as Magic

The role of the Internet for this community stems from a magical consciousness that serves to establish a context for meaning interchange between members. Within this context individuals equate virtual communities with physical communities and thus behave accordingly. Instead of walking down the street to a neighbor’s home to discuss important issues that affect their local community, people log on to their computers and discuss important issues that affect the national and global community. Instead of forging relationships with those they encounter at the local grocery store, members of this community believe that by forging relationships with complete strangers in an online realm these relationships will be synonymous as each provide an interpersonal benefit for the individual through differing types of interaction. In this sense, the Internet is using magic to transform the digital realm into the natural, where it’s natural to “talk” to people through a screen, long distances away from one another and it’s natural for complete strangers to enact as close friends and disclose private, personal secrets. Gebser (1985) addresses this magical influence of technology:

Our machines and technology, even our present-day power politics arise from our magic roots: Nature and the surroundings must be ruled so that man is not ruled by them. This fear that man is compelled to rule the outside world—so as not to be ruled by it—is symptomatic of our times. Every individual who fails to realize that he must rule himself falls victim to that drive.” (p. 51)

Through an attempt to control what we perceive to be natural and what we perceive to constitute community we in turn attempt to control nature through the magic of the Internet.

Gebser (1985) established a definition of magic stemming from a common root of

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words meaning “‘make,’ ‘mechanism,’ ‘machine,’ and ‘might’” (p. 46). “This clue helps to explain Williams’ observation that the magic systems in tribal societies and in Western machines are indeed connected. The machine is itself magic in its ability to make: The car makes you go faster” (Williams, n.d., p. 71). This idea of machine and making, or creation, can also be applied to PostSecret where the Internet magically creates the illusion of a physical community based on the same values that have historically defined what communities are. Historically, one definition of community that is greatly accepted is that of Ferdinand Tönnies’ delineation between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*: community and society (Tönnies, 1887/1957). Within this comparison, community is determined to have several characteristics including intimacy, physical proximity, a common sharing of beliefs, and history, in essence, a “lasting and genuine form of living together” (p. 35). In contrast, *Gesellschaft* is synonymous with a mechanical structure, perceived as the “mere coexistence of people independent of each other” and as simply the public life: society (p. 35).

In a 1982 comprehensive analysis of 94 definitions of community, three common characteristics found within the definitions were social interaction, common ties and physical colocation (Hillery). This definition moves from the restrictive *Gemeinschaft* ideology yet is still contingent on the necessity of the *physical*. As stated in James Katz et al.’s 2004 article, “Jones (1995) found that the majority of constructs rely on social involvement and interaction; in essence, community is a social system” (p. 317). This definition finally breaks from the historically contextual constraints but leaves the problem of differentiating between what is a community versus a society. In his research of social networks and communities, Barry Wellman found that nostalgic definitions of “tightly-bounded, densely-knit groups of broadly based ties” rarely exist. Instead his research showed that contemporary Western communities “are usually loosely-bounded, sparsely-knit, ramifying networks of specialized ties”, and therefore more networks and social groups like online communities would fall under the classification of community and social network (Wellman, 2001). No matter the precise definition, current meaning needs to focus on the abstention of the necessity of geographic proximity as the same foundational necessities that can still be met through the virtual realm.

For the magical consciousness structure, Gebser (1985) identifies five characteristics: “(1) the egolessness of magic man; (2) his point-like unitary world; (3) his spacelessness and timelessness; (4) his merging with nature; (5) his magic reaction to this merging” (p. 48). An example of the first characteristic, egolessness can be seen in PostSecret through the collective engagement and discourse of the community. Through the shared environment of the online community, members create a collective consciousness where individuals interact with one another for the benefit of all. Through the sharing of individual secrets, the community as a whole grows and understands dark aspects of human nature that culture dictates we should hide. Parts of the community work together for the betterment of the whole. In this respect, the community exemplifies Gebser’s (1985) concept of the magic world as being “a world of *pars pro toto*, in which the part can and does stand for the whole” (p. 46).

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Another characteristic of magical consciousness that PostSecret depicts is the existence of timelessness and spacelessness within the community. The Internet can further eliminate boundaries of space and restrictions of the mental-rational perspective of time through the creation of a domain that can be accessed at anytime from almost anywhere. It's not bound by physical restrictions of distance, physical ability or means of transportation and so long as members have access to a computer and the Internet they can engage with others (restriction of access is a problem that stems from both economic displacement as well as physical restrictions of technology like satellite reach addressed by research on the digital divide, see Norris, 2001). The chat forum provided through the community makes available a medium for members to instantly engage in the community and provide feedback to the discussion for group production. It also allows multiple members to contribute to the dialogue simultaneously, in turn allowing them to engage in a group production and transformation of meaning. Through the simultaneity and allowance for instant access of discourse, members break the boundaries of time restrictions and allow individuals to collectively progress towards integrality through the revealing of secrets.

The Internet setting for this community is an important aspect of its progression towards integrality as it stems from a magical consciousness but allows for content that stems from a mythical structure while simultaneously being influenced by the mental-rational perspective from dominant cultural standpoints. Each of these influences of consciousness structures will be detailed further below.

Meaning Interchange through Myth

The underlying assumption to this paper is that overarching cultural structures deem personal secrets as taboo, forbidden, and something that should be hidden from the public sphere of society. This paper also suggests that personal secrets are a hindrance to integrality. I will first address the initial assumption. Through PostSecret, a community is developing where under the veil of anonymity, open communication of controversial topics occurs. The need for such an anonymous environment to reveal personal secrets has become necessary due to the stigma placed on them from dominant cultural structures. According to Allen Read's (2004) definition of controversial, taboo communication stems from a cultural or social necessity for scapegoats or symbols of the forbidden. Cultural aspects come to be deemed as controversial from a "hushed awe that surround [them], the refusal of information concerning them, or the punishment meted out for inadvertent use of them" (Read, 2004, p. 445). Many of the topics discussed through the PostSecret forum fall within this definition of socially ostracized and stigmatized conversation that are all too quickly hidden in the skeletal closets of society.

Dominant culture structures stem from a mental-rational consciousness in which hiding secrets and things that are deemed forbidden or taboo is valued. "Mental consciousness presumes that its rationality has the sole claim to truth and objectivity, while other modes of experiencing are dismissed as subjective" (Mickunas, n.d., p. 12). This presumption of verition creates an overt self-righteousness where dominant members of a culture will oppress minority voices that dissent mainstream ideologies.

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Thus, the extreme emphasis on closing off stigmatized portions of the self, lead some members of society to overtly display the taboo in aggrandized manners. An example would be in conservative portions of the country where homosexuality is viewed as a negative thing and is encouraged to be denied and ignored. In response to this suppression, gay rights parades were created where those who refused to deny aspects of themselves openly and flamboyantly displayed a specific part of their being in front of all of society and culture: their homosexuality. Because of this extremism, a duality of repression and flamboyance is created. "When any movement tends to the extremes it leads away from the center or nucleus toward eventual destruction at the outer limits where the connections to the life-giving center finally are severed" (Gebser, 1985, p. 3). This extremity in turn shows a marked display of deficiency in the manifestations of consciousness by dominant culture structures.

Alternative lifestyles and communities like PostSecret were created as a response to this deficient manifestation of mental-rational construct. The PostSecret community was established due to the lack of coverage of important, albeit controversial, issues in the national media like suicide, sexual abuse, domestic violence, etc. Members perceive national media to either largely ignore these controversial topics or address them through a specified media frame, which in turn loses the aspect of humanity that touches on a personal level:

It's sad; but eating disorders, suicide, self-injury--they're all still the punch line of so many jokes. People hear of a suicide, and it's just another name in the obituaries to them. And maybe I take it too seriously, and am a bit over dramatic. Maybe you really haven't overcome it until you can laugh at it. But what about the life behind it? They were, are, people too. And that aspect seems to be lost. (Member interview, March 19, 2008)

Along with this, some members believe there needs to be an overall acceptance from audience members of the national media in order to even have a meaningful discussion of such topics to begin. Many members inevitably joined PostSecret because of this substantial lack of meaning and depth of controversial topics, which has also been noted in current research as well (Pirkis et al., 2007; Chesebro & McMahan, 2006). This lack of substantial and meaningful national coverage in turn establishes the foundation for the PostSecret community's conception of reality by accepting and addressing these topics.

As a result of the lack of coverage of controversial issues in the national media, members sought an alternative media format, such as PostSecret, to be able to discuss the issues they find important. Through creating an alternative medium to the national media, PostSecret directly established a community that could be more conducive to open discussion. Without the restrictions placed on the community like corporate oversight or viewer ratings, PostSecret is able to focus on the issues that matter most through user-generated content. This in turn helps to facilitate the development of an open forum.

The second underlying assumption of this paper suggests that secrets are a hindrance to integrality. This assumption stems from the following: Latent secrets are a

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type of lie, an untruth about parts of ourselves. We keep secrets from our friends, our family and even from ourselves because we don't want to acknowledge the parts of ourselves that we don't like or can't live with. In doing so we never markedly make a step towards revealing truth in our existence. By hiding or denying portions of our being we refuse to acknowledge and accept the whole of the self, in turn limiting ourselves to a perspectival viewpoint of self.

Man, himself a part of the world, endows his sector of awareness with primacy; but he is of course, only able to perceive a partial view. The sector is given prominence over the circle; the part outweighs the whole. As the whole cannot be approached from a perspectival attitude to the world, we merely superimpose the character of wholeness onto the sector, the result being the familiar 'totality'." (Gebser, 1985, p. 18)

This belief that we are whole and total people results from this perspectival view of displacing the whole of ourselves with portions of ourselves that we believe best represent who we are. This brings me back to the initial quote of this paper, "only someone who has overcome himself is truly able to overcome" (Gebser, 1985, p. xxvii). By ignoring pieces of ourselves that are stigmatized or negatively perceived we will never overcome ourselves nor be able to overcome the potential negative outcomes we impose on the world as well as humankind. It is only through the individual evolution of consciousness structures that we will collectively evolve as a human race. Thus, this adoption of perspectival view confines us to a mental-rational viewpoint and hinders us from achieving an integral, aperspectival vision.

The deeper significance of secrecy can be addressed through the further explication of Gebser's concept of latency and value of silence. According to Gebser (1985), "latency—what is concealed—is the demonstrable presence of the future" (p. 6) and "provides clues for the active copresence of all domains of consciousness" (p. xvi). This copresence can be seen throughout PostSecret through the diaphenietiy of consciousness structures that are used in interacting online, sharing secrets of the soul and in engaging through a perspectival structure. Latency results specifically in the sharing of secrets. Secrets by their very nature are latent, hidden aspects of the self. Through concealment of secrets, aspects of ourselves are denied, leaving the attainment for wholeness unfulfilled, thus creating a necessity for future efforts in revealing our secrets and attaining wholeness of self. In striving for wholeness, what are latent thus become manifest and the future is shown through demonstrable artifacts: secrets.

The meaning interchange that occurs on PostSecret is an example of mythic consciousness. According to Gebser (1985), myth is a "silent, inward-directed contemplation, it renders the soul visible so that it may be visualized, represented, heard and made audible" (p. 67). It is through this silence and visualization of the soul that secrets are revealed within the PostSecret community. "Only when the unspoken communicates its silent message does the spoken word convey the depth and polarity that constitute the tension of real life" (Gebser, 1985, p. 68). Latent secrets hold the truth of real life and of the soul in silence. It is when those secrets are made latent, addressed and discussed that they then become reality. They are exposed and they are

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confronted so that the owner of the secret must then choose to address them or at the very least acknowledge that they exist. “Thus the word is always a mirror of inner silence, and myth a reflector of soul” (Gebser, 1985, p. 67).

Although these connections with secrets form the fabric that ties members together within the community, for some members the secrets within the postcards can sometimes affect them too personally, which could cause them to turn away from the community as opposed to invite them. In this respect, although it is the connection with the secrets that draw individuals to the website and to the community, if the impact becomes too overwhelming there lies the possibility for turning members away versus attracting them to the community. At the same time, this sense of vulnerability adds to the reasons why members choose to interact in the community. When confronted by inner secrets or even personal demons not yet recognized, the ability to be able to address, analyze and resolve these issues is invaluable for some members and encourages them to continue the social dialogue initiated in the community. These realizations and confrontations contribute to the interpretative process for the community by providing insight, individual meaning and interpretations to the communal dialogue.

In Postsecret secrets can also be seen through polarity where the latency of secrets draws people together to in turn address the manifestation of secrets through postcards and sharing. “In polarity, correspondences are valid. Every correspondence is a complement, a completion of the whole. Whatever is spoken is corroborated by the invisible and latent unspoken to which it corresponds” (Gebser, 1985, p. 85). Each secret represents not only what is now known but what also was unknown and what could still be unknown for others. Through polarity secrets are no longer seen as taboo or controversial but instead as reality. This polarity is a sign of mythic consciousness in which individuals show reciprocal perception and exchange of truth where the world then becomes transparent, or in other words integral.

The ways in which secrets are exchanged through PostSecret are also an example of the mythic structure in which meaning interchange in the community occurs. When looking at the messages displayed on PostSecret, the primary characteristic that binds all of the messages together is the form of the postcard. Despite varying content, images, linguistics and topics every message conforms to the guideline requirement to create a 4 x 6 postcard mailed through a public postal system to be posted onto an even more public World Wide Web. According to Jan-Ola Östman, “The postcard is a meeting place, not only for cultural phenomena . . . but also for several different semiotic modes, and for a plurality of language varieties” (2004, p. 437). These postcards however, can’t be viewed as simply postcards because as in traditional postcard format they are initially mailed to one sender, but unlike traditional postcard behavior they are then scanned and posted on the Internet for anyone with an Internet connection to view. No longer private or even semi-public as Östman posits, but entirely public and available for mass consumption.

The other aspect of the digital postcard that differs from the traditional is the fact

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that the viewer cannot hold the postcard, turn it over in her or his hands, view *both* sides, or even see who the sender is or where it is being sent from. These aspects are reserved solely for the Webmaster and whomever he decides to share them with in hardcopy. Regardless of this loss of physical interaction, viewers online can still be emotionally touched as well as virtually connected to the message. This connection is supported by Walther's hyperpersonal communication model (Walther, 1994) that states that "the absence of nonverbal cues, as well as editing capabilities, identity cues, and temporal characteristics may prompt CMC users to engage in selective self-presentation and partner idealization, enacting exchanges more intimate than those of FtF [face-to-face] counterparts" (Tidwell & Walther, 2002, p. 319-320). Although Walther found that intimacy is conveyed more over time, it is still capable of being transmitted through CMC and anonymity.

This intimacy is created through the postcards and a heavy reliance on imagery, which stems from a mythic consciousness. It is through this imagery that secrets are revealed and reality unfolds. According to Gebser (1985), the mythical world was closely tied to pictorial expression and imagery "since imagery is the prominent mode of the soul's manifestation" (p. 63). Through this manifestation of the soul members reveal their inner most secrets. In conjunction with the pictorial aspects to the postcards elements of text create an interdependent relationship for meaning. The result is an appeal through mythic structure for members to be drawn to and relate to the postcard secrets.

Members connect with topics based on their own personal experiences and then share that connection with others to create communal meanings. Whether members have a positive or negative connection with the postcards/topics, they draw from their previous experiences in life to determine their initial meanings for how they will interpret and connect with the media content. This initial establishment of meaning correlates to the first premise of the social action media studies theory by embodying how "the meaning of media content has no autonomous existence and must be brought into being in deliberate ways" (Schoening & Anderson, 1995, p. 99). By first constructing initial meanings of media content through their own lived experiences the members are setting the foundation for which to share and construct communal meanings with others. In order to establish communal meanings, members then share these connections with others and elaborate on them in a social dialogue through the chat forum. As the topics/postcards impact and make an impression on members' lives, members in turn make personal reflections and self-realizations before sharing their experiences with others.

Another important aspect of PostSecret that allows for the revealing of secrets, connection of members and transgression of cultural deficient mental constructs, is the role of anonymity within PostSecret. One of the benefits users gain in communicating through Internet cultural groups and the security of anonymity is the freedom for self-disclosure and addressing controversial topics without fear of retribution. According to Eun-Ju Lee, "by creating this pseudo-private communication environment, computer mediation is believed to minimize concerns about public evaluation by allowing

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complete anonymity among users. This, in turn, likely liberates people from the norms and regulations that govern their ordinary life,” (2004, p.350). This liberation thus allows members to reveal inner secrets and go against dominant cultural systems and deficient mental constructs.

According to Gary Marx (1999), anonymity allows for the open communication of controversial public issues. Marx states that anonymity encourages individuals participating in computer-mediated communication (CMC) group interaction to focus on the content of the discussion, leaving individual participants to feel protected from individual attention. This aspect of anonymous communication assists in the examination of how and why users prefer to communicate in a mass communicative format and yet seek to remain fully anonymous. The benefit of anonymous communication allows communicators to feel as though their message is being examined and critiqued and not her/him personally, which allows for greater self-disclosure and more intimate communication (Marx, 1999).

Marx (1999) also posits that anonymity helps stigmatized individuals join collective groups as a form of social sanctuary and support. Examples of self-help groups available for groups anonymously through CMC are addicts, victims of abuse, individuals with diseases and other ailments (Kling, 1999). Davison et al. (2000) also point out that anonymous CMC users are more motivated to communicate anonymously due to anxieties or uncertainties they may feel in face-to-face communication, especially when the individual has an embarrassing illness, disfiguring ailment or any other stigma. Another aspect of anonymous communication that explains its usage is its availability for users to avoid persecution; for example, revolutionaries or protestors against repressive governments, individuals with varying sexual preferences in certain areas of the world, or writers publishing documents that are potentially harmful by the document's content or group it's targeting (government or corporate organizations) (Marx, 1999).

Because of the availability for anonymity within the PostSecret community, members are able to suppress the fear of retribution and negative value judgments and accept taboo secrets. By addressing the taboo and making stigmatized issues manifest, this community is creating a necessary rupture in the restrictive value of the mental-rational structure, where the taboo and forbidden are seen as qualities that need to be hidden, ignored and denied. Sometimes a rupture needs to occur in order to transgress deficient consciousness structures like the mental-rational. Through the transformation from latent to manifest, these secrets in turn mutate the restrictive of the mental toward the integral.

The connection members create and make with postcards, secrets and one another occurs within a mythical structure in which an affect on the soul occurs through the latency, silence, polarity, and imagery of secrets shared within the PostSecret community. This affect is shown in two ways: verition and wholeness. Gebser (1985) explicates the path in which, in this case secrets, would traverse from polarity to integrality:

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The dissolution of this [polarity] principle is nothing other than the supersession and concretion of the soul, and thus the first step towards its integration. This integration cannot be effected by mere thinking or contemplation, but requires another capacity which we shall call “verition” or “waring” and encompasses the “sense” of perceiving as well as imparting verity or truth. *Only through this reciprocal perception and impartation of truth by man and the world can the world become transparent for us.* (p. 261)

An impartation of truth is shown in PostSecret through the revealing of secrets. By acknowledging wholeness of ourselves in place of parts, we confront the truth of human nature and of ourselves. Through this impartation and confrontation members of this community create a world that is transparent based on verition and acknowledgement/acceptance of self. This in turn shows a progression towards the integral through the sharing of secrets.

En Route to Integrality

PostSecret is a community where complete strangers can reveal their innermost secrets to one another in a timeless, spaceless realm. This phenomenon is seemingly rare and extraordinary in the world today although occurring because of new technological advances that pop up on a daily basis. PostSecret is even more noteworthy when taking into account the diaphaneity of consciousness structures that occurs in order for this phenomenon to exist. This diaphaneity is imperative if we are to achieve a consciousness of integrality. According to Gebser (1985), “a truly integral perception cannot dispense with the foundation of the mental structure any more than the mental structure can dispense with the mythical, and the mythical with the magic, that is, if we are to be ‘whole’ or integral human beings” (p. 299). And so for PostSecret this diaphaneity occurred in three ways: the magical construct of the Internet, the mythical interchange of secrets, and the mental-rational deficiency of oppression.

Through the interchange of secrets, members of the PostSecret community move towards the integral by accepting a wholeness of self. As has been noted throughout this paper, by keeping secrets one is denying aspects of herself, in turn preventing her from ever accepting her whole self. This denial of whole and acceptance of part impedes a path to integrality, one in which “mankind and not man, the spiritual and not the spirit, origin and not the beginning, the present and not time, the whole and not the part become awareness and reality” (Gebser, 1985, p. xxviii). This wholeness of self and inclusion of parts that have been stigmatized by the deficient mental-rational consciousness is one tangible example of how PostSecret is moving towards integrality.

The final artifact of integrality is the timeless-spaceless context that PostSecret thrives within. The Internet, though magical by nature, allows for transformation of consciousness through the elimination of time and space. Gebser identifies the need to perceive four-dimensional, not just three-dimensional coordinate systems in order to be time and space free. “Only this space-time freedom, only ‘in’ it, is the transparency of the spiritual—the diaphainon—perceptible, for it cannot be manifest in any visible form” (Gebser, 1985, p. 299). It is through this diaphainon and transparency of consciousnesses that we achieve integrality, which Gebser says can only happen with

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space-time freedom, “being freed from time and thus free for the spiritual” (Gebser, 1985, p. 299).

Throughout this paper I have tried to show how a sub-cultural online community, PostSecret.com, reflects many of the important concepts Gebser holds to be signs of showing mutation towards integrality. The website creates an open forum that allows users to share personal secrets that go against the dominant cultural system that has stigmatized them for their secrets. This realm of virtual community building can be seen as making a step towards integrality as it attempts to reveal, explore and discuss the underlying secrets to the human soul in a mythical context through a magical medium in spite of mental-rational oppression. This diaphaneity of multiple consciousness structures approached through space-time freedom shows how PostSecret is attempting to achieve wholeness through confronting stigmatized, hidden portions of self, all while en route to integrality.

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