

## A Research Agenda To Legitimate The Study of 'Fear': Beginning Fearology 2000-2011

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©July 5, 2011

Yellow Paper DIFS #2

*Written and dedicated for the launching of the Department of Integral and 'Fear' Studies (DIFS) of the Center for Spiritual Inquiry and Integral Education.*

### Abstract

I recently came across the new book published on *Integral Ecology* and after reading a few chapters it struck me that if these authors of this new field can call their work Integral Ecology = the “ecology of ecologies”—and they mean over 200 ecologies that they classify— then I can call my work *Integral Fearology* = the “fearology of fearologies.” They and myself have come to use an integral approach as a meta-theory for better understanding a domain of phenomena. This brief paper outlines the roots of this awakening of my research on fear and fearlessness for over 20 years. The purpose is to inspire others coming to CSIIIE and the Department of Integral and 'Fear' Studies (DIFS) to continue a research tradition and educational agenda to improve the human condition, a condition severely harmed by fear ('fear') or what in this paper is the more appropriate term *fearing* (analogous to *smoking*). Indeed the problem is not smoke but smoking, and that seems appropriate to apply to the agenda of fearology in regard to fearing. How to get people to quit smoking and how to get people to quit fearing, will give you a sense of the depth and breadth of the problem fearology is taking on—that is, integral fearology. Thus, a case is made here, ever so brief, for the need for resources for research and teaching in DIFS and beyond.

### Introduction

***Fearology***- is the transdisciplinary study of the interrelationship between fear and the human experience. Coined by myself in 2000. This was not the first attempt to legitimize my passion into a field of study (i.e., an *-ology*). Why did I ever come to this point? I symbolically launched the term and discipline however, on Sept. 15, 2001, just 4 days after 9/11: “Beginning Fearology: The World Has Changed.” In that manifesto of sorts, which I sent to hundreds of friends and colleagues around the world, I defined “fearology- the study of fear/'fear' (and fearlessness) in relation to Life.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Since the early 1990s I have distinguished “fear” (and “fears”), from ‘fear.’ The latter, a much more complex term signifies a postmodern approach (and integral approach) to the topic. It is a signification that *fear* is under deconstruction and reconstruction as a concept (and reality). One implication is that we can no longer take the definitions (or meanings) of the term for granted, as if pre-given, as if correct. They may not be true, or more likely they are partially true, and the postmodern approach is looking for a better truth. With an integral fearology, the task is stretched even further beyond the limitations of a postmodern approach.

<sup>2</sup> This original written out on paper, was eventually put on my website, then I republished it in 2010 on my blogpost (see July 2, 2010) at <http://fearlessnesssteach.blogspot.com>.

The purpose of this document is not intended to summary all my work on this topic of fear (and ‘fear’), and the full history or the ins and outs of *fearology* (as I define and make ongoing meaning of it, and its potentials). Rather, I merely want to give people an opportunity to see the briefest introduction to my research initiative for build this new transdiscipline, and to give fear (and ‘fear’) their due value in the human experience, no less than, nor more important than, sex, or spirituality. If there can be legitimate research disciplines called sexology and theology, respectively, then why not fearology? Eleven years later, since coining *fearology*, it’s quite obvious such is not an easy task. Resistance abounds and it is largely driven by fearism.<sup>3</sup> Legitimizing fearology, beyond myself and a handful of playful unsystematic popular accounts on the Internet,<sup>4</sup> is a major research goal of the Department of Integral and ‘Fear’ Studies (DIFS).

Mostly, fearology is “cute” or “weird” to people who hear the term, and it certainly isn’t taken seriously. It’s arising in the human vocabulary in the last decade or so is a sign. It is a symptom dramatizing for attention.<sup>5</sup> The ultimate peak of that drama was enacted in the post-9/11 era of terrorism forcing itself into the world scene like never before. And popularly speaking, after 9/11 most everyone (for awhile anyways) was aware we had entered a climate of fear—a state of fearology. But popularizing of this notion isn’t good enough. And that’s where I part company with most of humanity, as I do take it very seriously as an independent scholar and public intellectual. I see fearology is needed to help understand better the worst problems of the human-planetary relationships; they are all, more or less, driven by fear (‘fear’)—or more accurately they are driven by the enactment called *fearing* (analogous to *smoking*).

And if you are a pulmonologist (one who studies the health and diseases of the lungs and breathing system), then you would certainly not support smoking of any kind. Which is not a position of condemning smoke or condemning people smoking, as you know they are practicing self-medication (an addiction) and choose smoking for a temporary relief. Short-term consequences of imbibing are virtually unrecordable and uninteresting. The long-term consequences are what the pulmonologist would warn about, as they are usually devastating to life. Now, apply that analogy precisely to fearing. Thus, is one rationale of why being a fearologist is a serious affair for me. If you don’t like the term fearology, call me a fear (‘fear’) researcher. It matters not to me.

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<sup>3</sup> A highly complex term, fearism is basically at the root of terrorism. It is a “program” (ideology) that continually works to keep us ignore-ant and arrogant about fear (‘fear’) knowledge and thus keeps us prisoners to it (i.e., to the rule of fear, Fear’s Empire, the ‘Fear’ Matrix and so on).

<sup>4</sup> Although there are lots of “hits” on a Google search, the only book on Amazon.com (and Google Books) under the term was Tucker, B. (Ed.) (2011). *Fearology: Terrifying tales of phobias*. CreateSpace. It is not thus, an exaggeration that no one has written in human history a serious systematic book specifically on fearology.

<sup>5</sup> I have an entire complex theory of *attention and healing* behind the fearology agenda. Fearology has a mission of healing and transformation of the human condition from suffering, and in that sense is all about liberation from oppression-repression dynamics (i.e., The ‘Fear’ Project, the ‘Fear’ Matrix).

## A Brief History of Documenting Fearology's Formation

A search on seven major research data bases for academics and the public, shows that no index carries one “hit” for the terms *fearology* and/or *fearologist*. It is absent. A Google search on the Internet shows 5 hits total for these terms in slight modification: “*integral fearologist*” (3) and “*integral fearology*” (2). The latter combination term is more accurately how I see myself. And, no surprise, those 5 hits all occur in published documents of my own writing on my blogsite (<http://fearlessnessteach.blogspot.com>) in 2010. I'll explain “integral” in a moment and how it constructs a particular kind of advanced and complex fearology. For now, I'll continue the background story.

This search is an indicator of how marginal and unique this research approach I've taken is. That started long ago.<sup>6</sup> I was a kid who was an immediate naturalist and artist-type. That was unusual in the 20th century for a young boy born and raised in the big city, I suppose. It was Western Canada that enable this.

The combination left me marginal in terms of society and its norms. I still fit pretty much into society on the outside, but on the inside I was not a conformist and in fact, from my naturalist sensibility and artist sensitivity, early roots were built in my system to detect toxicity, ugliness, and fear. They all go together. I recognized from some deep instinctive organismic part of myself (my authentic self, perhaps) that humanity was deeply neurotic, paranoid, if not often schizoid. Everyone seemed to be in an “existential crisis” or something. The world of humanity was mad (i.e., crazy), as far as I was concerned.

In my earliest youth I did not have those philosophical or clinical type terms to make that distinction, but, I seemed to recognize “healthy” from “ill-healthy” and I saw that distinction when I would move from observing animals in their natural habitat to animals domesticated. And if domesticated animals were more neurotic than their wild peers, I pretty much put the logic together it was because humans had made the domesticated ones that way. They were highly fear-based creatures and that meant for me, they were “ill-healthy” (i.e., sick).

The worst problem I picked up early in life is that humans would not (usually) admit they were sick in this way—and they were, as I look back, sick from chronic fearing and worse, they were in denial that that was what was making them sick. Today, I think of it as a chronic cultural post-traumatic condition.<sup>7</sup> And as critical as I can be of it, that doesn't mean the fearologist can be objective and cool-hearted in diagnosis of it. The opposite really, is my experience. The diagnosis leads to great compassion for this

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<sup>6</sup> For a more in depth story, see Fisher, R. M. (2001). *Fearology: The biography of an idea*. Technical Paper No. 12. Vancouver, BC: In Search of Fearlessness Research Institute. For a historical quick overview of my work in the ISOF Research Institute see archives at <http://www.feareducation.com>.

<sup>7</sup> And no doubt I come to this insight honestly as my mother (matrix) was a survivor of the Holocaust. She is not a Jew, but she was a teenage girl in Belgium during the Holocaust and WW-II, under occupation by the Nazis, and working for them in factories, for over three years of her impressionable life. She never really recovered the trauma of this, nor has Western culture, modernity, or the world.

suffering dis-ease of humanity, just as one would be compassionate for anyone suffering a post-traumatic disorder.

And, I don't think for a moment, my perceptual acuity in these observations of the human condition were (or are now) special. My guess is other people saw (and see) this too. For various reasons, they tend to "forget" they see it and join the madness, more or less. If I joined it, it wasn't for long, and I never fully bought-in to it ever. And that does not mean I was immune to the dis-ease of fearing. Yet, something told me to find a vaccine for it, for myself and for those immediately around me I am intimate with. Then, as I got older I wanted this 'fear' vaccine for the world. Oh, the despairing part is, no one *really* wanted it too—or, they sure didn't want it as intensely as I did. That situation hasn't changed over the course of my life time (I'm now close to 60).

After 1989, everything changed. My life took what I call a soul-purpose path. That's another long story for another time. I began writing and researching on fear then. I began publishing my findings and speculations in 1995, with a technical papers series. Technical Paper No. 1 (Fisher, 1995)<sup>8</sup> took on the problem of defining fear and distinguishing 'fear.' The methodology is what is most important to mention here. I called it a "spectrum approach." No one, that I could find, ever had studied fear in this way. Let me quote a few pieces from that 1995 technical paper:

[re: 'Love' and 'fear'] Whatever the complex 'story' and definition is of these two patterns, defining 'fear' requires a 'big picture' context of understanding to truly get a holistic view of the 'fear' phenomenon. This article will begin to delineate this holistic (transpersonal) view utilizing a spectrum approach (*a la* Ken Wilber's '*spectrum of consciousness*' model). (p. 2)

The spectrum approach fit the fearlessness criteria [I'd set out as well in this technical paper] in that it is an all expanding [developmental and evolutionary] view of how 'fear' may be conceptualized, defined and understood.

'Fear' has been conceptualized [unknowingly or not] and defined from many perspectives since the beginning of recorded history. Various languages, metaphors, images and descriptors have been assigned to classify, organize and understand 'fear.' [They just have not been systematic for the most part]. The spectrum of 'fear' model takes into account that 'fear' has been expressed, described and defined throughout history by aboriginal peoples in art and myth; by people of classical times in philosophy and religion; in industrial civilization in the sciences, and in psychology particularly. All expression is about 'quality' of experience or sets of qualities.

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<sup>8</sup> Fisher, R. M. (1995). An introduction to defining 'fear': A spectrum approach. Calgary, AB: In Search of Fearlessness Research Institute.

Ultimately, my research ambition is to establish a paradigm [and methodology and field] much like Robert Pirsig's notion of a "metaphysics of Quality" in order to deeply and aesthetically understand 'fear' and its interrelationship to the human experience.... Without a spectrum approach to defining 'fear' many forms of 'fear' are likely to be missed and misunderstood. (p. 3)

The sub-text is that in 1994 Ken Wilber sent his huge 800+pp manuscript to my office by courier without me knowing it was coming. What a delight and honor. We had sent a few letters back and forth prior. He sent the ms to several others for review before his final draft, a draft that was to shake the spiritual world a year later in the book publication of *Sex, Ecology and Spirituality: The Spirit of Evolution (Vol. 1)*. I had read Wilber's work for years, but to really get into it in this raw form of a ms., was quite an astounding experience. This work is now called Wilber-Phase 4 theorizing. It was his introduction to his (some years later) naming Integral Theory (even though he didn't call it that at the time)—that is, "all-quadrants, all-levels" approach to knowledge. His integral meta-theory had truly advanced beyond (but included) his spectrum approach (the roots of his integralist thinking).<sup>9</sup>

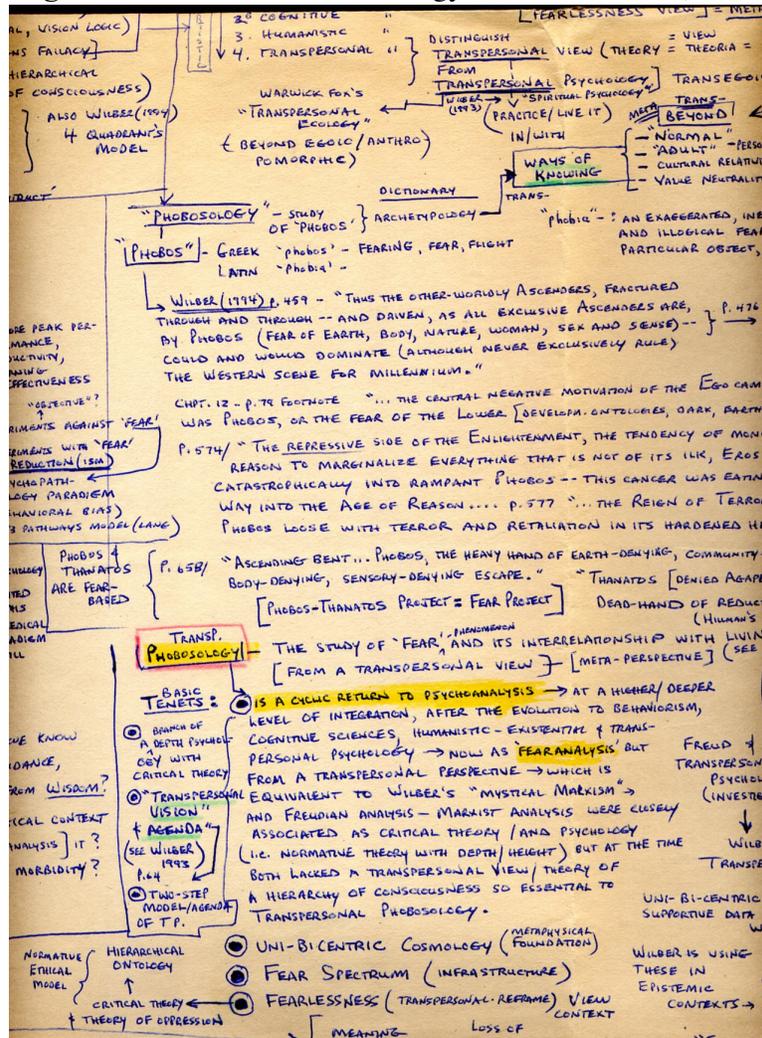
In 1994, highly influenced by Wilber's ms, I struck forth with a larger claim on the field I was to create. Before "fearology," I called it *phobosology*.<sup>10</sup> I've inserted a picture (small extract from an 18 X 24" large sheet) in Figure 1 below of the first drafting out of the fields breadth and depth.

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<sup>9</sup> See Wilber, K. (1977/82). *Spectrum of consciousness*. Wheaton, IL: The Theosophical Publishing House. This book had a great impact on my thinking about methodology of studying anything. He applied the model to psychology and therapy and philosophy and spirituality. He was looking for that meta-theory that would unite psychologies—and thus, indeed his approach from the very first book (which he wrote at age 23) was a "psychology of psychologies" (not his words, but mine). In 2000 Wilber finalized that initiative in his amazing book *Integral Psychology*. Note, this is the meta-theory theme came out in the Hargens & Zimmerman (2009) book *Integral Ecology*, discussed later in this paper.

<sup>10</sup> When I wrote a letter that year to Wilber, he wrote back not favorable of the name but the project was good he thought. He wrote, it sounds more like a "nose disease." His humor, of course.

Figure 1: Notes from Phobosology Document (January, 1995)



You'll notice I was calling it *transpersonal phobosology*, which is the close approximation to what in 2010 I called *integral fearology*. The rest of that all is a longer story beyond what this brief history will enter. Following the mapping out of the field of transpersonal phobosology, I wrote my first systematic document (Fisher, 1995a)<sup>11</sup> on it with the following definition:

The unique term **TRANSPERSONAL PHOBOSOLOGY** consists of two major components in this new discipline; where the latter term 'phobosology' delineates the content of interest, which is 'fear' as a global phenomenon or pattern (i.e., Fear Project =

<sup>11</sup> Fisher, R. (1995a). Transpersonal phobosology: An introduction to a new discipline. Unpublished paper. Sponsored by the In Search of Fearlessness Research Institute, Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

Phobos).<sup>12</sup> The former term “transpersonal” informs the study of ‘fear’ with a specific transpersonal perspective, context or worldview, which goes beyond the predominant and normal personal-egoic worldview (consciousness) view of Reality.

PHOBOSOLOGY- means the study of ‘Phobos’ which is Greek for ‘fearing,’ ‘fear’ and ‘flight.’ [Latin is ‘phobia’] (p. 3)

I dropped the “transpersonal” term and association, and that was no doubt influenced by Wilber doing the same, as he left the field of transpersonal psychology (even though he was a recognized founder of it) and started up his own new venture to be called integral psychology.

### Integral Fearology

Since 2000 and the coining of *fearology* as a playful and yet better term for my work than phobosology, the writing and terms for the new field have grown immensely. Some I have published in educational journals and elsewhere, but most of it is published by the In Search of Fearlessness Research Institute, which I founded in 1991 and am Director. It is basically a name and an official publisher. Out of the margins, for a few moments now and then, my work would get some serious attention by a journalist, and even got onto a 20 min. interview with Shelagh Rogers for CBC radio in 2004.<sup>13</sup> Rogers opened the live interview with the following dialogue:

Rogers (R): Wherever we turn there’s something new to worry about. Even as we head to the polls, the rhetoric has turned from why you should vote for one party, to why you should be afraid of voting for another. According to Dr. Michael Fisher, ‘fear’ isn’t even an emotion anymore. It’s the lens through which we view our lives. And Michael himself is proof of that. He’s a self-described fearologist. Dr. Fisher is in Vancouver this morning, Good-morning!

M: Good-morning Shelagh.

R: To begin, what’s a fearologist?

M: Well, a fearologist is somebody who studies the relationship

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<sup>12</sup> This was only half the truth, which at the time I had not integrated Wilber’s (1995) new integral theory where both Phobos and Thanatos had to be dealt with together and dialectically as a ‘fear’ patterning, in opposition to (respectively) Eros and Agape. Two years later, I revised this in a paper I submitted to *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* entitled “*Thanatos and Phobos*” ‘Fear’ and its role in Ken Wilber’s transpersonal theory. That got lost in the editorial process and was never published, nor have I tried publishing it since.

<sup>13</sup> June 10, 2004, “Sounds Like Canada,” Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (Radio One 690 AM). Live interview on national radio and around the world.

of fear with, basically, Life. And that fear is not just, what I'd call psychological fear but actually cultural, sociological, political fear.

S: And how did you become a fearologist?

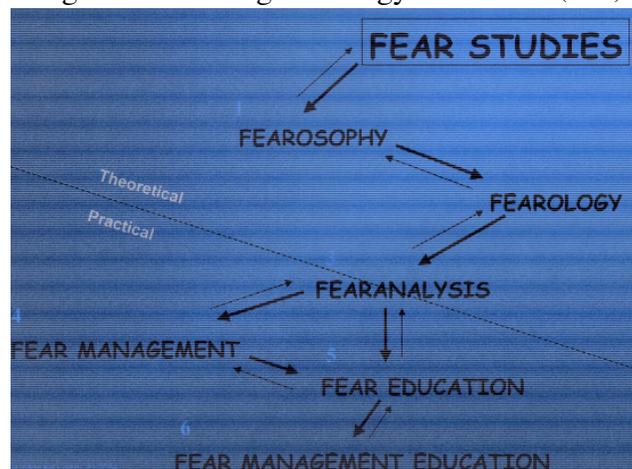
M: Well, basically, I'm not trained in fearology. It's hard to find anywhere that will give you a degree in that.

S: [chuckles]

M: But as an educator, when I was studying education, I became interested in how fear is basically, such a core part of the curriculum. It's a core part of the way teachers interact with students, teachers with teachers, parents with teachers, on and on.

This first public exposé of “fearology” and myself as a “fearologist” was a sweat-filled moment in my history, and an interesting occasion in human history. The beginning of it is symptomatic of the doubt in Roger's minds, like her listening audience, as to whether this guy has anything legitimate to claim under that title, and under that discipline, of which either is not recognized by society. She was right to be skeptical. I tried to make it humorous. Yet, from that moment on, I sensed I had made a greater commitment to this cause. So, now, ten years after receiving the Wilber unpublished ms, I jump-started to conceptualize the field and the larger domain of Fear Studies (now ‘Fear’ Studies)<sup>14</sup>—see Figure 2 below:

Figure 2 Locating Fearology in Context (2004)



<sup>14</sup> I published “Invoking ‘Fear’ Studies” in a respectable (albeit, postmodern alternative) educational curriculum journal in 2006. I'd put it out into the academy. I heard nothing, for years, and then a few small citations showed up in the last few years but no one in education or any discipline in the academy has engaged this. Fisher, R. M. (2006). Invoking ‘Fear’ Studies. *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, 22(4), 39-71.

That said, it would be six years later (2010), that I'd begin to *really* take it seriously, and see that I was an integral fearologist not merely a fearologist. And it is to this point that I will finish this paper, with some elaboration, albeit very brief.

In 2007 I wrote a technical paper on “Action Fearology,” a term that came because I wanted to be culturally hip, I think now in retrospect.<sup>15</sup> Everyone it seems these days likes “action” and not a lot like “theory.” So, I accommodated to some degree. I wanted to locate fearology as an action concept on-the-ground (working in cultural reform and transformation) and radically liberational--as a discipline with ethical accountability built-in, not just some ivory tower impractical one. I was fishing for students. I want to talk to people about this. The silent black hole remained.

In summer of 2011 a new sparkle came into my interest to push this new field outward again. I came across a wonderful book entitled *Integral Ecology* (Esbjörn-Hargens & Zimmerman, 2009)<sup>16</sup>. I respected these two authors from their prior work for years. Now they collaborated. The 800pp text is a fascinating study of what they call an “ecology of ecologies.” That is, they had used a meta-theory (Wilber’s Integral Theory) to create Integral Ecology as a new field that studies ecologies, in fact, they categorize 200+ ecologies that are current. The problem, they address is how to get those multiple ecologies with their multiple worldviews and diverse practitioners to “unify.” They don’t want them to all dissolve into a fantastical unity, but to rather embrace and respect each others’ work as having some partial truth, some piece of the Reality pie—and thus, to make a stronger ecological, conservation and environmental movement because of that.

I read the various principles, and concepts, and their model. It was all quite “integral-familiar” to me. Integral approaches are not new. Yet, I really got hit over the head when I realized that everything they were doing to make ecology integral, I was trying to do in my own way to make fearology integral. Thus, from their integral ecology, integral fearology flowed out. That was it. I’d been looking for this notion for a long time.

Integral Fearology (with caps or not), is the capable of being that “fearology of fearologies.” What fearologies? Well, that’s where the analogy wasn’t quite exact. But I figured out a way around that. First, ecology is popular, now 60+ years. Fearology is not, and is only popular in the last 10 years. Ecology was (and still is) a serious science. Fearology was not and still isn’t for the most part. Universities were very interested in doing research on and developing this new field of ecology. I myself was taking post-secondary courses in its boom-day. It was my speciality in my 20s. My profession was a budding ecologist but I think I like animal ethology much more. I was also an environmentalist, and eventually became an educator.

So, because of this difference, ecology was taken so seriously as an answer to the world’s global environmental problems, that scholar after scholar was “doing it” and labeling

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<sup>15</sup> Fisher, R. M. (2007). Disappear fear: Action fearology for the 21st century. Technical Paper No. 26. Carbondale, IL: In Search of Fearlessness Research Institute.

<sup>16</sup> Esbjörn-Hargens, S., and Zimmerman, M. E. (2009). *Integral ecology: Uniting multiple perspectives on the natural world*. Boston, MA: Integral Books/Shambhala.

themselves ecologists. It got popularized, and just about anyone could call themselves an (amateur) ecologist. Reality was, in that seriousness of its birth, the field got turned into more and more diverse kinds of ecologies—it differentiated and grew. This is what the integral ecology authors above document and categorize: e.g., over 40 pp. Appendix at the back of their book lists “acoustic ecology,” “agricultural ecology,” “ecological humanities,” “organizational ecology,” “zoosemiotics”). All “ecologies” because these integral ecologists say so. Sure, some of the titles of these schools show they are an ecology type, but the authors bring in a whole lot of other schools and claim they are all ecologies.

<sup>17</sup>So, I could do the same. There are a whole lot of fearologies out there, going back into time. I want to write a book on that some day. The fearologies, as I am making up their names, based on my reading of fear literature for 25+ years: e.g., scientific fearology, psychological fearology, theological fearology, etc.— are basically “schools of thought” and methodologies, perspectives, and ideologies—their purpose is to better understand fear and how best to manage it. I’ve addressed these schools indirectly in a different approach than the authors above. I used a model from what I call fear management systems theory (*a la* integral). In otherwords, I didn’t call them fearologies, nor look to find how they called themselves, but I called them discourses of fear management/education (FMEs). Now, a complementary tactic I think is to research all this work on fear and put it into fearologies. That research agenda is a first goal of an integral fearology—to be a fearology of fearologies.

One could read the book *Integral Ecology* and develop a lot of similar templates regarding their methodology to integrate the diverse, and often competing ecologies—and apply that to diverse and competing fearologies. I know the latter exist, just as real as the former. The task is the same: apply an integral approach to a topic, it could be “ecology” and/or “nature” and it could be “fearology” and/or “fear.” This is a breakthrough. Again, the details will not be articulated here of that unfolding of a new discipline of integral fearology. I trust I’ve guided you to see the formation as I have now in reflection over the years.

What I look forward to is collaborations and students wanting to learn more. I look forward to funders stepping and seeing the value of this work. At this time, DIFS and myself operate on a zero-budget. If this breakthrough proves to be what I think it could be, then *fearing* is about to get one heck of an intense scrubbing. My senses tell me there is a revolution in our knowledge on fear (‘fear’) awaiting. The world so needs it.

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<sup>17</sup> It would be called *The World’s Fear Teachings*, as a volume 2 companion to my current book *The World’s Fearlessness Teachings* (2010). I began to articulate this in a ms for a book called *Spectrum of Fear* (1997) which I never published.

