

## ***Introduction***

*Whereas all previous technologies (save speech itself) had, in effect, extended parts of our bodies, electricity may be said to have outered the central nervous system itself, including the brain. ...The simultaneity of electric communication, also characteristic of our nervous system, makes each of us present and accessible to every other person in the world.*

Marshall McLuhan, 1964.<sup>i</sup>

An electronic web surrounds the planet. Our ideas travel instantaneously to all points of the globe on electromagnetic waves and pulses of light. In the last decade communications networks have advanced from wires to fiber optics, from interconnected radio and television grids to a world of billions of wirelessly communicating sensory devices – each with its own address in cyberspace. Emerging from what French philosopher-priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin called the shared *noosphere* of collective human thought, invention and spiritual seeking, the *Infosphere* – our collective systems for sharing thought, is now a field that engulfs our physical, mental and *etheric* bodies; it affects our dreaming and our cultural life.<sup>ii</sup> Our evolving nervous system has been extended, as media sage Marshal McLuhan predicted in the early 1960's, into a global embrace.

With each new network extension have come bursts of idealism and creativity as well as clouds of despair. The introduction of new technology has always been associated with profound changes in our views of reality and in global consciousness.<sup>iii</sup> Socrates was unhappy with print versus face-to-face speech, and ever since the telegraph, modern critics have complained about the dangers of too rapid telecommunications. As Erik Davis has pointed out in *TechGnosis*, we imbue each new communications technology with our highest spiritual aspirations and our deepest fears.<sup>iv</sup> Electrical – and later, electronic communications, with its ability to instantaneously move human intelligence beyond the confines of the physical body, has been the focus of both utopian dreams of deep social and spiritual connection, and of profound terrors of “spiritual disassociation.”<sup>v</sup>

Today, many see the global Internet as the beginnings of a true “global brain” – a synthesis in which peoples of different cultures find a world-centric common language and develop new mental abilities and spiritual energies. To others, our communications technologies seem to hold only the basest elements of human nature. They claim that television, and more recently, videogames and Web surfing, have cut us off from each other, instilled false beliefs, and taught us to worship material goods. They point to teenagers with calluses on their thumbs from sending text messages every few minutes that cannot hold a face-to-face conversation. They see only gratuitous violence, demons and dark ghosts inhabiting the virtual world of videogames. They fear that wireless connectivity has forever breached the borders between work and home; destroying what little rest we have eked out for our inner self. In the dire view philosopher William Irwin Thompson, our bodies are cooking "in a global mulligan stew of electromagnetic noise," while according to one Buddhist scholar our minds are being “colonized” by the idea fragments – the *memes* – of commercial media.<sup>vi</sup>

Yes, much of this critique may be true. Our *outer* media have changed the balance of our senses, and thus changed our lives, our culture and our politics: maybe not as radically as techno-utopians and techno-naysayers have dreamed, but changed it nonetheless.<sup>vii</sup> The electronic media amplify, distort and attenuate our senses, change our awareness, and “mediate” our experiences. But we must also consider that these technologies are not just outside forces that appear out of nowhere to *affect* our consciousness and determine our future. They are also the products and the reflections *of* our consciousness. In Howard Rheingold's words, “just as nature is not out there, beyond our skin, but the matrix from which consciousness emerges, technology is not out there, outside of what it means to be human.”<sup>viii</sup>

Earlier, naturalistic cultures projected the challenges of evolving consciousness into myths and heroic journeys, grail quests, alchemy and occult hermetic spiritual practices. In our contemporary society we can look to *avant-garde* art as an early warning of cultural shifts on the horizon. Today our telecommunications engineers have brought

forth electromagnetic and electro-optical devices of decreasing size, increasing complexity, increasing interactivity, and increasing self-awareness.<sup>ix</sup> I believe they have also given us a new language to describe the truths that ancient esoteric teachings masked in arcane language, obscure references and secret practices. Like all the esoteric technologies that preceded them, they can be dangerous when appropriated by those of underdeveloped moral and spiritual faculties. For those ready to embrace them with open hearts, they offer another way into transformational consciousness.

The wisdom embodied in the Infosphere is all around, waiting to be rediscovered, waiting to show us new ways of communicating with our inner selves and with others. It is waiting to nurture what I have called a new *Digital Dharma* – an awareness practice that will help us recognize the impact of telecommunications technology on our inner life, and also provide us with a fresh set of spiritual metaphors as we take on the challenges of contemporary life.

The relationship between consciousness and media works in both directions. All of our communications technologies, from the first telegraph signals traveling by wire to today's intelligent network routers, radio frequency identification (RFID) microchips, and global positioning (GPS) satellites have emerged from the creative collective mind. And that global mind is constantly growing and changing. In Jennifer Cobb's words, "we co-evolve with cyberspace as both we and it seek the next steps along the evolutionary path." The *Infosphere* is not inherently a dark desolate ghost-filled trap; nor is it a place of "cyber grace."<sup>x</sup> It neither drives our development, nor exists outside of it. Mapping it will not replace mapping our souls. Yet in mapping it, and in asking what the lesson of "full conscious communications" might mean at each layer of the Infosphere, we just might find a potentially useful path to greater spiritual wisdom.

The spiral path, or ladder of consciousness is of course not my invention. It has its roots not only in the chakras of Hindu yoga systems, but in the *perennial wisdom* (or universal truth and value hierarchies that underlies all mystical religions), as described by Chinese medicine texts, Tibetan Buddhism, the "ten attributes" or *Sephiroth* of Jewish

Kabalistic teachings, and the Christian mysticism of Teilhard de Chardin and Creation theologian Mathew Fox.<sup>xi</sup> It forms the basis of contemporary Western consciousness studies, including the works of ecologist Duane Elgin, systems philosopher Ken Wilber, and transpersonal psychologists Carl Jung, Abraham Maslow and Michael Murphy.<sup>xii</sup>

Ken Wilber, in his elegant and groundbreaking book, *The Spectrum of Consciousness*, described this path as an overlapping (or nested) hierarchy of mental, moral/ethical, and spiritual development stages starting from the reptilian brain's focus on the *self* – safety, security and power; through the limbic system's more *socio-centric* outlook – with its attention to family, tribe, and community rules, to the neocortex's *world-centric* view based on abstract ideals, to the *transpersonal* realms of the esoteric brain's spiritual connection to the Higher Self, Soul or Godhead. This book will also follow this well-trod path, looking at the inner spiritual challenges and outer cultural reflections associated with each stage of awareness, and finding similar themes encoded in the technological structure and the social impacts of a specific telecommunications invention.<sup>xiii</sup>

The Infosphere is the environment in which we now play out our development challenges. If the universe itself, as many philosophers tell us, is a field, not just of matter, but also of *information*, then the Infosphere must hold in its microcosm, all of the levels of human experience, all knowledge, all of our dramas of politics and power, and all of our dreams. This knowledge is encoded in our ubiquitous systems of telecommunications, and yet because it is so omnipresent, to most of us it is still invisible.

Of course, discovering ancient truths in our Palm Pilots® or Play Station® boxes does not mean that these technologies are automatically lifting us to higher states. History is full of stories of how the latest communications invention would finally bring about the flowering of humankind. We are a little more skeptical these days about any technological savior in a box of lights and wires. In almost all cases, humanity has brought (and continues to bring) all of its fears and ego defense strategies into each new

communications domain, taking its energetic gift and squandering it on personal gain and/or communal selfishness, defensiveness or aggression.<sup>xiv</sup> Giving immature cultures atomic weapons has not proved to be a step forward; and in many ways we are still children when it comes to handling the power of expanded consciousness. No wonder most esoteric practices are indeed *esoteric*. On the other hand, here at the dawn of the twenty-first century, the universe has given us the tools to create a global nervous system – and the tools of awareness to reflect on how that nervous system has within it its own healing potential. I propose that holding our interactions with the Infosphere in conscious awareness can become a new form of yoga practice, on one hand strengthening our personal centers of communications as we engage new psychic “muscles” in defending ourselves from the base vibrations carried by our new networks, and on the other, using these new network metaphors to activate ever-more refined ways of connecting with our inner being and with others.

I have appropriated a number of yoga metaphors throughout this book. My primary organizing principle is the seven-step “chakra ladder” of communications centers associated with the human energy field: a parallel system of communicating networks, information fields and reception and transmission devices. This ancient healing tradition believes that a subtle energy field surrounds the human body. The *transponders* (transmitter-responders) that connect this field inwards to the physical body and outwards to the greater field of consciousness are the *chakras* (Sanskrit for “wheels”). Each chakra aligns with a specific set of nerve clusters along the spinal column; each is associated with a different set of organs, and each has its own emotional-developmental resonance. I believe that at a minimum, each of these developmental themes is being played out in how we use our different communications technologies, and thus each chakra can be said to have its corresponding communications theme. Different media stimulate different energy centers, and at the same time they mirror the spiritual-emotional challenge associated with the different chakra levels.

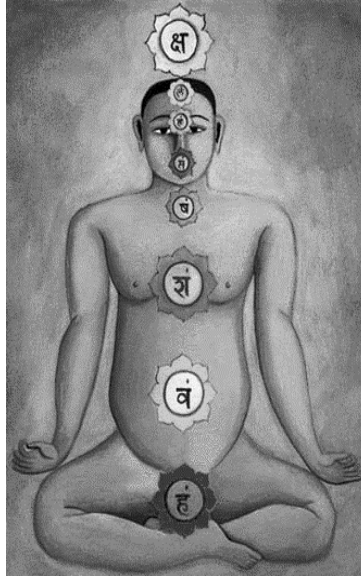


Figure 0.1: Traditional chakra locations and symbols

Satprem, a disciple of Indian sage Sri Aurobindo, writes that a chakra is “somewhat like a radio receiver tuned into particular wavelengths...

*(Each) is linked with various planes of consciousness from which we constantly receive, most often unknowingly, all sorts of vibrations – subtle physical, vital or mental, high or low – which account for our way of thinking, feeling and living, with the individual consciousness picking up certain vibrations rather than others, in accordance with its social background, traditions, education, etc.”<sup>xv</sup>*

By connecting the technologies of the Infosphere to their corresponding chakras, we discover that much of the debate over “media impacts” is really about the shadow side of our *interior* communications. We see in each of our *external* telecommunications networks not only a reflection of the state of our socio-cultural development, but also the core *inner* challenge each of us must overcome to move up the ladder of conscious communications. From this perspective, our media become our guides to advancement: our virtual ankle weights, barbells and yoga stretches in our electronic ashram!

One need not believe in the energy body and the chakras to follow the digital dharma path. The levels of the chakras also parallel the evolving ladder of *values-memes* of the *Spiral Dynamics* model developed by Clare Graves, Don Beck and Christopher Cowan, the levels of ego, or *nafs* of Sufi spiritual practice, and even the “circuits of

consciousness” theory of psychedelics pioneer Dr. Timothy Leary.<sup>xvi</sup> The underlying spiral is the same; the challenge of developing awareness is found in all these systems.

So, whatever your beliefs, join me as we follow the chakras (or colors or moral gradations) up the spine of the Infosphere and across cyberspace into greater complexity, and greater awareness. Our first chapters focus on telegraphy and telephony: the communications technologies that embody the foundation stage of our emotional-spiritual development: our concerns for safety and connection. We then explore our relationships to *others* – our power to act, our feelings of love and compassion, and our ability to speak and discern the truth. We will see how these human issues are reflected back to us in our mass media of radio, television, and the Internet.

Finally, we consider the higher – *transpersonal* – realms of consciousness. First, the “eternal now” of the mystical third-eye, our connection to intuition and powers of deep knowing, and then, the open radiant Crown, where we live fully connected to our spiritual selves, as both creation and the Creator. The communications reflections of these higher levels of evolution are only now emerging: the “third eye” in digital signal coding that makes possible High Definition Television, videogames, DVDs and our MP3 players; the “crown chakra” in the world of smart appliances, peer-to-peer networks, and the always-on intelligence of “Pervasive Computing.”



*Figure 0.2: Chakras of Communications*

It is my hope that our expanded awareness of the lessons of the Infosphere – the work of our digital dharma – will speed up our journey towards transpersonal transformation. Just as no technology will carry us to utopia, the goal of this work is not to magically “skip to the head of the line” but to appreciate the potential of bringing light to all levels of communications. The emergence of “higher” communications forms does not mean we have been spared from the work of “chopping wood and fetching water.” Going on the Internet or playing a simulation game does not bring enlightenment, but these technologies do provide a new way of looking at our place in the fabric of being. In each interaction with the Infosphere we have a choice whether to embrace the big picture and take in the full spectrum of data, or just wander along, choosing the path of limited input, and limited possibility.

For those open to exploring all aspects of the yoga metaphor, each chapter will end with a set of suggested exercises that use the metaphors of the Infosphere to “re-tune” our interior communications transponders – whether we envision them as whirling energy orbs or simply as ways of reminding us to be fully present to ourselves and to others at every level of our being. It is my intention in offering these

exercises that as we open and heal these internal channels, not only will our personal communications become more whole and our spiritual flow more open, but that our global projection of *teleconsciousness* will also mature and manifest its true spiritual potential.

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<sup>i</sup> McLuhan (1964), p.247.

<sup>ii</sup> ‘noo’ from *nous*, the Greek word for ‘mind.’ Chardin saw an evolutionary process of “collective cerebralisation” leading to next stage of species evolution: the development of a “super-organism” of global intelligence. See (Chardin 1966) Chapters 4 and 5; and “The Noosphere: Verification of a Hypothesis,” in Chardin (1970), p.51. The “etheric body” is understood as the sustaining force field that surrounds all living beings.

<sup>iii</sup> See for example Mumford (1963) and Berger (1974).

<sup>iv</sup> Davis (1998).

<sup>v</sup> Sconce (2007), p.7; Mosco (2004), places our current fascination with cyberspace in a political and economic context, exploring the myths that drive each new communications technology. Chapter five summarizes the utopian promises associated with the telegraph, electricity, radio, television and the Internet.

<sup>vi</sup> The term “meme” was coined by Richard Dawkins; it refers to a unit of cultural information transferable from one mind to another. Negative views of the media are expressed Thompson (1966), p.224. A positive view is expressed by David Ronfeldt and John Arquilla, in “From Cyberspace to the Noosphere: Emergence of the Global Mind,” *New Perspectives Quarterly*, Vol. 17, No. 1, (Winter, 2000), 18; and Let Davidson, “Cyberspace Satsang,” [http://www.collaboration.org/97/nov/text/8\\_cyberspace.html](http://www.collaboration.org/97/nov/text/8_cyberspace.html). Two negative views are Herschok (1999) and Winn (1985).

<sup>vii</sup> Walter Ong (1987) first argued for the impact of media technology on individual identity and cultural formation.

<sup>viii</sup> “Thinking About Thinking About Technology,” *Noetic Science Review*, Winter 1998.

<sup>ix</sup> *Hermetic* (from the “ancient writings” of Hermes Trismegistus), alchemical practices were frowned upon by the Church and thus driven “underground.” The idea of an interrelationship between technology and our inner life is not new. Leonard Shlain (1991) has made the connections between modern art and physics and (1998) between the technologies of literacy and the explosion of patriarchal values. Contemporary critics Erik Davis (1998), Jeffery Sconce (2000) and Michel Bauwens have drawn our attention to the *inner* metaphors of communications technologies. Bauwens makes the point that our media has affected not just our external “systems of governance, economy, and social organization,” but also our internal “systems of self, our individual inner values, desires, (and) motivations.” Michel Bauwens, *Technology’s Spiritual History*, posted on <http://www.lastwizards.com/pages/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=12>. I agree with this inner/outer connection. I also believe that the impacts our telecommunications systems on our inner life are *multi-dimensional* and *two-way* in nature.

<sup>x</sup> Cobb (1998), p.118.

<sup>xi</sup> Shumsky (2003), Myss (2001), and Judith (1996). The best description of all these systems is Ken Wilber (2000), especially his charts starting on page 197. For an online summary and links to more detailed sources about the chakras, see [http://www.answers.com/main/ntquery;jsessionid=1fs1sb1igjnh?method=4&dsid=2222&dekey=Chakra&gwp=8&curtab=2222\\_1&sbid=lc02a](http://www.answers.com/main/ntquery;jsessionid=1fs1sb1igjnh?method=4&dsid=2222&dekey=Chakra&gwp=8&curtab=2222_1&sbid=lc02a). Matthew Fox (1999) has used the seven chakras as mirrors of the Christian “Seven Deadly Sins” and their transformative opposites.

<sup>xii</sup> Elgin’s model (1993) of evolution is in his words, drawn from “the Western psychology of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi; the spectrum psychology of Ken Wilber; the philosophy and history of human

consciousness of Jean Gebser; the humanistic psychology of Abraham Maslow; the Hindu philosophy and meditative insights of Sri Aurobindo; and a range of Buddhist traditions.” *Appendix One*, 319. Examples of these cited works are Maslow (1989), Wilber (2000) and Murphy (1992).

<sup>xiii</sup> Wilber (1977), p.43-44; (2000a), p.42-43. Following Wilber’s “four quadrants” approach, I have placed our telecommunications systems (as technological “extensions” of our nervous systems) in the realm of objective reality, in the UR “exterior-individual” quadrant. Media scholars have done a good job in mapping the changes in this quadrant to their social and political impacts in the LR “exterior-collective” holon, and to the changes in the arts and popular culture and in the LL “interior-collective” quadrant. I have followed their lead by including how we have organized and *used* each medium in the LR-quadrant, and the dominant psychological/spiritual associations – the “inner cultural truth” or belief-system, associated with each technology – in the UL quadrant as well. For an extended view of Wilber’s Four-Quadrant approach, see Wilber (2002) Chapter Four. See also, his website, “Ken Wilber Online, especially <http://wilber.shambhala.com/html/books/kosmos/excerptG/part1.cfm/>. Reynolds (2006) includes a detailed summary of Wilber’s “All Quadrants, All Levels” model in Chapters Eight and Nine.

<sup>xiv</sup> On the crisis of our interior development lagging our external ability to create new technologies, see Ken Wilber (2000a), p.103-106, and (1996), p.309. On some of the earlier utopian hopes, see Davis (1998) and Mosco (2004).

<sup>xv</sup> Satprem (1984), p.128.

<sup>xvi</sup> Beck and Cowan (1996); Shaikh Tosun Bayrak al-Jerrahi, “The Seven Levels of Being,” at [http://www.crescentlife.com/spirituality/seven\\_levels.htm](http://www.crescentlife.com/spirituality/seven_levels.htm); Robert Anton Wilson, “Timothy Leary’s Eight Circuits of Consciousness” at <http://deoxy.org/8circuit.htm>, also at Electronic Frontiers Foundation archive: [http://www.eff.org/Net\\_culture/Consciousness/wilson\\_leary\\_brain.model](http://www.eff.org/Net_culture/Consciousness/wilson_leary_brain.model).

## CHAPTER ONE