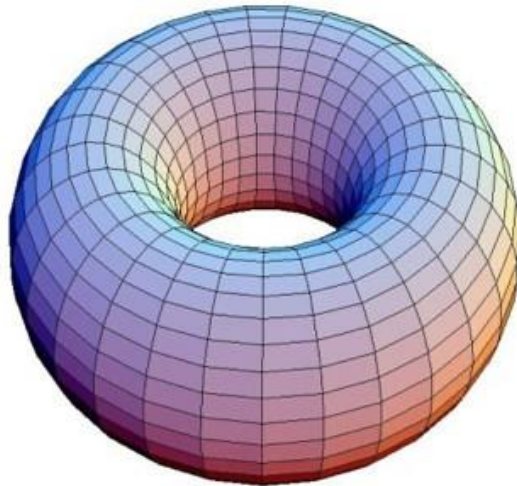


Part 11 – The Shift from an Industrial to a Planetary Civilization— Global Awareness and Personal Identity

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In December of 1972, thanks to the interest in New York for my book [At the Edge of History](#), I decided to abandon my tenured professorship at York University in Toronto and establish in New York the [Lindisfarne Association](#) as a center for study and realization of a new planetary culture. I used the word “culture” rather than “civilization” because I wanted the idea to be more open and not structured within the containing lines and single capital of a civilization.

In our gatherings at Lindisfarne in the seventies and eighties, we studied meditation and science in conferences with Gregory Bateson, Michael Murphy, David Finkelstein, Francisco Varela, Robert Thurman, Arthur Zajonc, and Evan Thompson, green and symbiotic architecture with Sim Van der Ryn, John Todd, and David Orr, sacred architecture with Keith Critchlow, Robert Lawlor, and Rachel Fletcher, appropriate technology with E. F. Schumacher and the New Alchemists, world order with Dick Falk and Saul Mendlowitz, micro-banking and ethical markets with Michaela Walsh and Hazel Henderson, eco-feminism with Elise Boulding and Nancy Todd, planetary dynamics with James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis, the new sciences of

complexity with Ralph Abraham, Brian Arthur, and Stu Kauffman, and the aesthetics of *Wissenskunst* with me and the Swiss artist Cornelia Hesse-Honnegger.

In an ecumenical fellowship that included religious leaders, we also had with us Dean James Morton from the Episcopal Cathedral in New York, David Spangler and Peter and Eileen Caddy from the New Age spiritual community Findhorn in Scotland, several members from Auroville in India, Elaine Pagels from Religious Studies at Princeton, the Benedictine monk Brother David Steindl-Rast, the Sufi Master Pir Vilayat Khan, the Tibetan lama Nechung Rinpoche, and the Zen abbot from San Francisco, Richard Baker-roshi.

Although I set up Lindisfarne in New York, our meetings were a moveable intellectual and spiritual feast, as I did not envision New York becoming the single capital of a monolithic global civilization. And to keep a balance of body, mind, and heart, we had a daily communal practice of meditation, tai chi, chi gung, or hatha yoga.

Lindisfarne was, of course, a fringe movement, and the populace as a whole voted no for cultural transformation at the same time that it sought to commercialize it in New Age spas. The Governor of California that America chose for President was Governor Reagan and not Governor Jerry Brown, whom the media dismissed as “Governor Moonbeam.” It was yes for the capitalistic conservatism of Reagan and Thatcher and two Bush administrations, and no to Brown and Gore.

Lindisfarne did brush shoulders with political practicality through Jerry Brown. Governor Brown met with the “Small is Beautiful” economist E. F. Schumacher—one of the founding Lindisfarne Fellows—and after reading my book [Darkness and Scattered Light](#), attended one of our meetings at the San Francisco Zen Center’s Green Gulch Farm in Marin County in 1980. He put Gregory Bateson on the Board of Regents of the University of California, made Sim Van der Ryn the State Architect, appointed another founding Lindisfarne Fellow the astronaut Rusty Schweickart as Czar of Energy, and the New Alchemist Ty Cashman as a director of a program in appropriate technology—both of whom had lectured at Lindisfarne in the seventies.

So although Lindisfarne was part of the fringe, we did try to be practical and not just mystical, but I have always been afraid of power and its greased slide into corruption, so I steered Lindisfarne away from becoming simply a political think tank and personally declined the invitation from the Rockefellers to serve on Nelson Rockefeller’s brain trust in his run for the presidency. I had no ambition to become a New Age version of Kissinger or Brzezinski. I let our Lindisfarne Fellow Stewart Brand lead the troops in this area and marshal his officers for a counter-cultural cabinet for Jerry Brown’s run for the presidency in 1980.

In Gregory Bateson’s concept of “the difference that makes a difference,” America, in electing Reagan and the two Bushes, lost the time of two generations that perhaps could have made a difference now in averting environmental catastrophes. Thirty-seven years later, I am now at the edge of my own history and can see that some of the ideas of the seventies have been taken up by Obama, but that for the most part traditional thinking and traditional religions are stronger than ever.

Even many of the students of Lindisfarne have returned to the fold of traditional religions, and the scholars and scientists who tried to establish alternative centers such as New Alchemy, Farralones, and the Meadowcreek Project, have returned to positions at universities and colleges. Some may have become Buddhists or Sufis or yogis, but the majority of Lindisfarne students went back to traditional religions and became followers of one charismatic guru or another in decidedly medieval monastic structures.

As I explained at the outset of Lindisfarne's activities in the seventies: we were a crocus signaling a change of season but not an enduring and rooted tree for a new evolutionary era. When Lindisfarne was founded in 1972, the fax, the personal computer, the Internet, and the World Wide Web did not exist. Thanks to all of these innovations, global awareness has now become a shift from the center/periphery dynamics of traditional empires and industrial nation-states to the node/lattice circularities of neuronal networks.

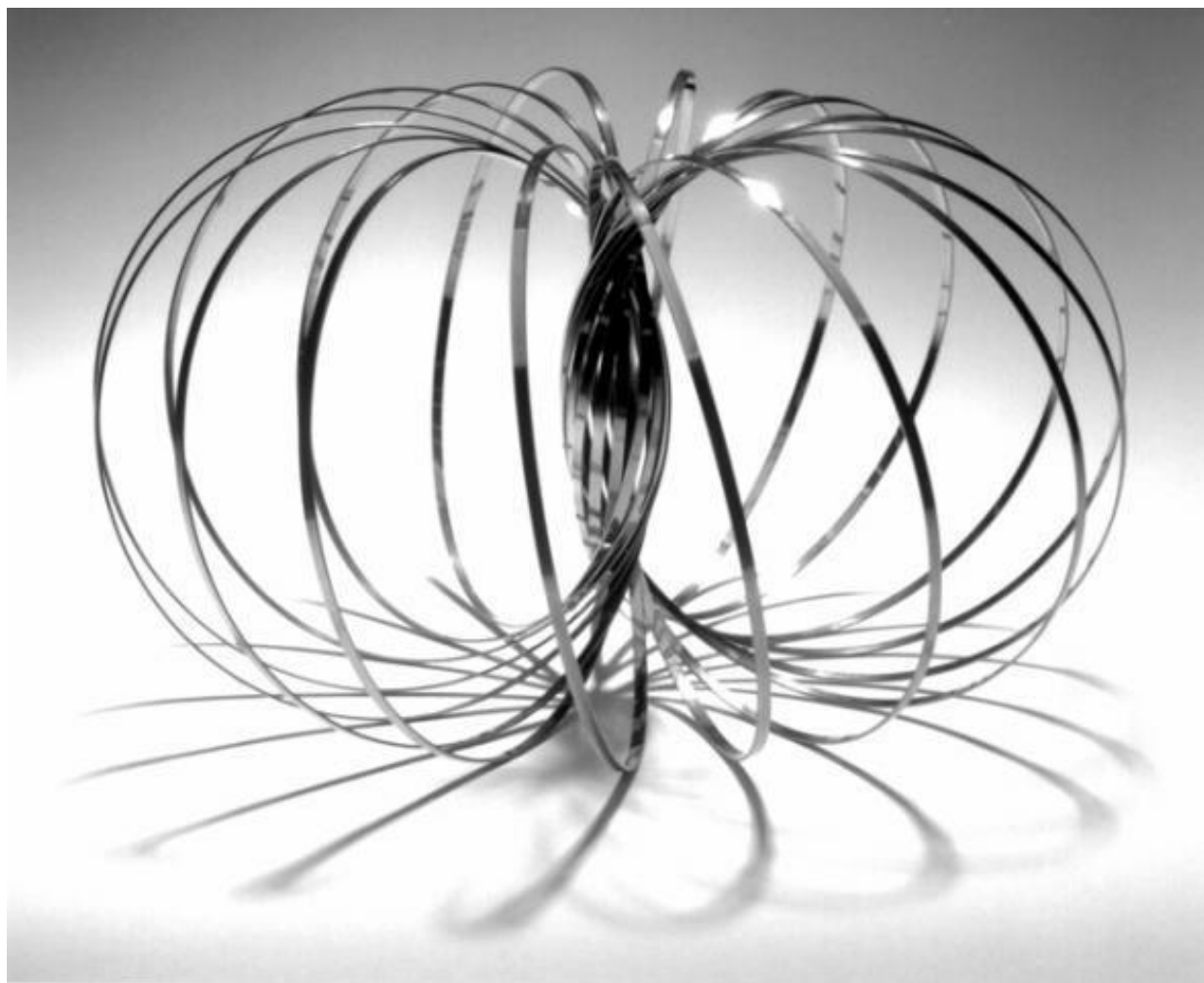
Even neo-medievalist Muslim terrorists use the Internet. These new sorts of networks are synchronies, concerts of time, as much as suspensions of space. People may inhabit the space of separate nation-states, but they participate in global networks of time, and so the YouTuber and the face on Facebook are no longer defined in what the process philosopher A. N. Whitehead called "simple location." Like a demonic Fisher-Price toy, if you beat down the terrorist in Afghanistan, he will pop up in Pakistan; if you hammer him in Pakistan, he will pop up in Yemen or Somalia—or Fort Hood in Texas.



** FILE ** This image made from television shows Iraqi Sajida Mubarek Atrous al-Rishawi opening her jacket and showing an explosive belt as she confesses on Jordanian state-run

television to her failed bid to set off an explosives belt inside one of the three Amman hotels targeted by al-Qaida in this Sunday Nov. 13, 2005 file photo. Three female suicide bombers detonated themselves in a spate of weeks, killing and injuring dozens as U.S.-led coalition forces catch insurgents suspected of training women to become human bombs. Women appear to be used as human bombs as coalition forces push extremists out from former strongholds, shrinking their pool of potential recruits, and forcing them to devise alternative methods to penetrate stiffened security measures, said Diaa Rashwan, who follows Islamic militancy for Egypt's Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies. (AP Photo/Jordanian TV, File)

Global awareness is not simply a new and bigger empire or nation-state, for these represent merely three-dimensional morphologies. Like threads circulating in a rotating hypertorus, these new networks instantiate space and spatialize time in a seizure of identity within a higher dimensional topology. (To appreciate the torus below, one needs to see it rotating on a stick or coil.)



Torus

The suicide-bomber seeing paradise, or even the political candidate Sarah Palin seeing death squads in Obama's national health insurance, is participating in a new seizure of mythic identity that no longer takes the form of a stable traditional personality. Sarah Palin has a

very labile identity that gets stretched out of shape by observing herself in the media—from beauty pageant to presidential campaign. Now she is performing a caricature of the traditional suburban Mom by calling herself a Soccer Mom at rallies in shopping malls, just as before she called herself the Governor of Alaska, but she can quickly drop both roles in order to play a new one as national media avatar of the anti-elite.

In the medieval “Great Chain of Being,” a system of vertical hierarchies and horizontal planes of correspondence served to define and stabilize a fixed human identity in a grid. As the lion was to the kingdom of animals, so was the king to the realm of men; as the hand was to the body, so was the peasant to the body-politic. If one was not bound to the land in a system of serfdom, as in Russia, then one was bound in England to a class by one’s dialect or accent and lack of education. With the rise of the print media, a new identity began to be formed, and writing began to become the means by which one could fashion a self. First the essays of Montaigne, then the picaresque novel that told the story of an ordinary person’s movement from rags to riches, and then the art of portraiture of businessmen rather than saints: all began to proclaim that through capitalism and printed money and books, you are what you own, and you can make of yourself what you will. The *Lyrical Ballads* of Wordsworth radically proclaimed that the common man in a state of vivid sensation could be the subject of poetry. Wordsworth was challenging aristocratic Sir Philip Sidney’s Renaissance idea that poetry was “to fashion a noble gentleman in virtue.” Novels such as Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* began to question the whole fixed nature of the class system in the old world.

The electronic media of television, the World Wide Web, *Facebook* and *YouTube* take this literary process of democratization one step further. Identity is now not so much unfixed as fluid. It became a currency of derivatives that destabilized the whole world economy and allowed the fake identity of con men like Bernie Madoff to serve as the stain in the petrie dish that made the new connective tissue of the common lies of bonds and investment banking visible.

In my efforts to apply the thinking of complex dynamical systems to cultural history, I have argued that “evil is the annunciation of the next level of order.” The Vikings were first terrorists that sacked the monasteries, then the traders that founded cities like Limerick, Dublin, and Kiev, and then the cultural projectors of European civilization across the Atlantic into the New World long before Columbus.

For the British, used to fighting in the fixed formations of baroque warfare, George Washington was a terrorist whose men were cowards who hid behind the trees in the forest and aimed directly at the officers rather than at the expendable cannon-fodder of the lower classes. Baroque warfare was assumed to be a game for gentlemen, and after the campaign officers of opposite sides could dine with one another. Washington was not playing by the rules, but from George Washington to Mau Mau Jomo Kenyatta, or Menachem Begin and Yasir Arafat, yesterday’s terrorist is tomorrow’s father of his country.

We should be more fearful now that Obama has taken up the fallen standard of Bush’s War on Terror, because the more soldiers we send to Iraq or Afghanistan, the more we serve to recruit Islamist fighters to join in the struggle against the Great Satan of the American Empire.

So your suicide-bomber seeing paradise in making a death instead of making a living is participating in a new electronic magnification of identity through Islamist recruiting on the Internet. As Marshall McLuhan pointed out long ago when he noticed that the new medium of TV had Western movies as its first content, the Internet is playing reruns of the middle ages in its rejection of print media and modernism. Suicide bombing, or recreational group suicide in the case of the California cult of Heaven's Gate, is evil as the first formation of a future transformation of personal identity in which the fractal self participates in the fractal landscape of the Cosmic Mind, or what the Buddhists call Buddha Mind, and Whitehead called God and the creative advance of the universe. But remember, it took a dozen centuries to turn Vikings from raiders to awarders of the Nobel Prize for Peace.