

## The 8 Circuit Model of Consciousness

A Lurker's Guide by Paul Clark

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Timothy Leary came up with this theory - or I guess model or map would be better terms - for human consciousness. I get the impression he started working on it early in his LSD involvement, though I haven't yet been able to find where he first started talking about the ideas (I suspect there may be a reference in 'High Priest', but I haven't waded all the way through yet).

His book on the subject was called 'Exo-Psychology', and has been republished with additional material in recent years under the title 'Info-Psychology' (New Falcon Publishing). This is a good book, and it's especially valuable because it's original source material on the whole idea, but it really is out there - it's hard to make sense of it unless you already know what he's talking about.

There are, however, two excellent books that introduce, explain, and develop these ideas. Before describing their strong & weak points, let me give a thumbnail sketch of the big picture:

The 8-circuit model describes eight levels of function of human consciousness. Different books call these by different names- 'circuits' (like different circuits in a computer), 'gears' (like shifting gears on a bicycle), 'grades' (like in elementary school)- you could call them 'burritos' if you want- I like 'circuits'.

Anyhow, there are eight circuits. The lower four deal with normal psychology, while the upper four deal with 'psychic', 'mystical', 'enlightened', or perhaps even 'tripped-out' consciousness. The strong point of this system is that it integrates the two so well. Most theories deal with one or the other, but not both- mundane psychology with no consideration of transcendent experience, or mystical foo-fa-ra with octaves and rays and spiritual this or that but no grounding in nitty-gritty down-to-earth surviving in the human jungle.

The first four 'normal' circuits are influenced very much by modern psychology, especially Adlerian developmental stuff. Part of the idea is that as you grow up from infancy, the various circuits are activated and begin to function, and you take an 'imprint' from the conditions at the time.

The most obvious example is when the sexual/social circuit kicks on in adolescence, the imprint is taken when you have your first sexual experience. Sometimes, if this happens in the back seat of a car, with the panic of wondering whether Mom or Dad will appear, later in life the same person will discover that nothing turns them on quite as much as doing it in

the back seat of a car, and especially if they feel a bit panicked.

Here's a rundown of the first four circuits:

1st circuit: Survival/Security. Things are okay or they're not, or somewhere in between. This is connected to the first source of these things: nursing at Mom's nipple. People who take an imprint that things aren't safe all the time may compensate by eating, especially sweet things, pudding, 'nursery food' that makes them feel better for a while. This imprint is taken very early, in nursing. It's what's known in developmental psychology as 'oral'. Putting things in your mouth is always fun!

2nd circuit: Territorial/Emotional. This is a very particular definition of 'emotional'- are you feeling up or down? Are you on top of the world or down in the dumps? This is related to basic primate pecking order stuff- who's the big tough dog and who's the little submissive dog? Later, when you get your own turf where you can be a little king, you can defend it against others by throwing shit at each other (in the form of words, lawsuits, horn honking, or however you prefer to 'dump on' people).

This one is full of stereotypes- all the examples I gave were kinda male, yet every female knows there's just as much game-playing between women. Women traditionally have been made submissive to men, but in many cases that's not the case, and in any case there's a lot of passive-aggressive ways the tables are turned in each direction.

This corresponds to the 'anal' stage, and the first imprints are taken during toilet training- this develops greatly when the kid starts playing with other kids and finding out where they stand- big kids are always telling little kids what to do.

3rd circuit: Conceptual. This kicks in even before school- kids are hungry to learn. This circuit is the ability to make mental models of things, which help you 'figure things out' and 'be clever'. The imprint you take is whether you feel smart or stupid (which is different from BEING smart or stupid!)

Sometimes people who have a bad time in other circuits compensate in 3rd circuit- actually, that can happen with any of them. Note also that there are different KINDS of intelligence- verbal, mathematical, visual/spatial, musical, etc, etc... but as Robert Anton Wilson says, "...the people with the verbal intelligence have control of the language, so they call themselves THE intellectuals." My father, who is a clinical psychologist, always mentions a particular basketball player (I forget who) whom he claims is a genius in spatial/motor intelligence, regardless of the fact that the guy probably reads on a 7th grade level.

4th circuit: Social/Sexual. Whereas 2nd circuit deals with who bosses who, 4th deals with who is cool. What this comes down to is that depending on whether someone is cool or not, you'd let them get close to you or not,

running a spectrum from not talking to someone at all (the snub) to having sex with them, with many subtle shades in between.

It goes both ways - how cool are you? Are there people that you aren't cool enough to talk to? "Oh, I could never ask HER/HIM out..."

The imprint you take here is how cool you feel, and how hard you have to work to feel that way.

Everyone has these circuits, but some people get stuck on one or another of them, usually because they've got some problem to work out in that area. Often one circuit gets to be a surrogate for another (especially if the other is underdeveloped)- the classic example is the pathetic (i.e. poor 2nd circuit imprint) nerd who tries to out-talk his buddies to show how smart he is (3rd circuit), in order to be an authority to them (2nd circuit dominance).

One of the ideas that came up in LSD research was the idea that you reach a state of flux in which new imprints can be taken. This is very much in agreement with ideas about set and setting, but as most people who have taken LSD agree, while everything seems to change after the experience, after a while you slip back into the old patterns (witness all the flower children who, unlike the few with real dedication, slipped back to become businessmen of the 80's).

Whether this slipback is really inherent in the function of the LSD trip is not certain, though- it may be caused by going back into one's regular environment, which has been shaped by everything one was before. Under the pressure of conformity to the old status quo, one slips back. That's my theory- the way to really find out would be to try the imprint process, and then afterwards, step into an entirely new life in another place with different people and things, and see whether the same slipback process happened. (I haven't tried such a radical experiment myself- I'm too attached to my current situation to change it just to try out a theory... rationalize, rationalize...)

I think the people who have been changed for the better by their psychedelic experiences are those who don't just get high all the time, but who follow up their realizations with action to improve themselves and their environment accordingly.

Leary felt that the goal was to work out the circuits so that one had imprints that led to a happy, healthy life, but without having to always have things one way- people who have to always be on top never learn about service, those who always have to feel secure never learn to take risks, etc.

Ultimately, the circuits would be there to plug into and out of at Will, while one navigated through the upper circuits:

The upper circuits deal with mystical, psychic, or paranormal consciousness. They are built on the foundation of the lower circuits, almost as 'overdriven'

versions of them. Interestingly, they correspond well with ideas from many spiritual traditions- I was reading a description by a woman who was initiated into a Native American sweat lodge. She described a vision in which the Great Spirit appeared and told her of the 'four gifts to mankind'. These four corresponded exactly to the upper four circuits.

It doesn't always work out so neatly, but the parallels are interesting.

5th circuit: Bliss/Healing, Neurosomatic Feedback. When 1st circuit security gets great enough, it becomes bliss, as one becomes aware of one's sensation of pleasure and learns to generate those sensations at the source. This is the SF brainbox that directly stimulates one's pleasure centers, only the box is also your brain! This feedback loop gets going, and one may remain in the state until kicked out for some reason (the world makes demands, or the chemical that boosted you into the state wears off).

Ever seen a picture of a meditating yogi in bliss? In this state, you realize you can make yourself feel bliss just as easily as you can move your muscles or keep still.

When this awareness is applied to others, the 5th circuit energy works to help their 1st circuit state- this is the principle of healing. Alli believes charisma is connected to 5th circuit, though I suspect it has to do with the others as well.

6th circuit: Psychic. This is awareness of the great information network in which we swim. The connection to 2nd circuit is not so obvious - I became aware of the connection following a series of dreams, in which certain traumatic events of my youth were replayed, but in ways that made it obvious that the real issues were current things that had nothing to do with the old stuff. The old stuff was stuff I'd worked to uncover and work out, and I'm pretty certain there wasn't much undealt trauma left. Why was I dreaming about it?

I realized that the current situation provided the flow of anxious energy, but when that flow arose, it followed the same channel cut by the old trauma, just like a flash flood will follow an old dry riverbed.

Emotions seem to run in channels in the mind, metaphorically speaking, and in the same way psychics speak of 'channeling' material from outside. This is as far as I can put it into words- I'm no master of any of these upper four, I just offer this in case it will help someone else's insight.

7th circuit: Mythical Intelligence. This is the realm of the shaman, of spirit animals, Gods and Goddesses. It is the Dreamtime. 3rd circuit draws models of specifics in the conscious world. 7th circuit draws models of the patterns of archetype that make up the unconscious world. It does this by telling stories that illustrate the patterns that arise from these archetypes. When 7th circuit awareness is working, one realizes how these patterns are being

played out, and instead of just acting in the world, one is at the same time coming into direct contact with the archetypal.

8th circuit: Out-of-Body Experiences, Factor X, and ????. This is the far reaches, and not much is really understood about it. Since 4th circuit has to do with letting others get close and even (especially in the case of sexuality) merging with them, it makes sense that 8th might have to do with overcoming the obstacle of one's physical boundaries.

Wilson suggests how certain drugs may activate the various circuits, something like the following:

1st circuit: Comfort foods- sugar, dairy products. Sedatives may deaden alarm sensations and produce a sense of security - alcohol, for example.

2nd circuit: Stimulants in general, as well as alcohol in large amounts (the classic aggressive drunk)

3rd circuit: Stimulants, possibly, and no doubt 'Smart drugs' would fit here.

4th circuit: Ecstasy, as well as many others - generally any drug which defeats social inadequacy programming.

5th circuit: Sex is the big one, when it goes from being mere satisfaction of physical drives and becomes oceanlike ecstasy. Otherwise, marijuana, and most hallucinogens in moderate doses.

6th circuit: LSD

7th circuit: Psilocybin, Peyote, possibly LSD, many of the natural psychedelics.

8th circuit: Ketamine? Excessive doses of many drugs may produce this, as well as those which produce near-death experiences.

Note that no drug is so narrow as to only affect one circuit, and there are probably much better techniques of activating and developing the various parts of the Self. Some people, however, suggest that they became aware of these capacities in themselves through use of them.

Since the upper circuits are built on the foundation of the lower ones, you have to have your shit together to deal with the high stuff. If you don't, you can have what Alli calls 'Short Circuit', in which the energy of the higher circuit over-amps and burns out the lower circuit. This can be either a temporary or a permanent condition, apparently, depending on how far you overdo it.

For instance, someone who has 2nd circuit aggression/submission problems may, if they take a large dose of LSD, may feel overwhelmed by the influx of 6th circuit awareness- hearing voices in their head, feeling wide open to

the flow of information and unable to turn it off. This may result in over-amping of the second circuit, in which they feel greatly threatened or even victimized by the Universe. Too much. If this goes too far, they may continue to feel this even after the drug has worn off.

Okay, on to the reviews, in the order I suggest reading them:

Prometheus Rising, by Robert Anton Wilson. (New Falcon Publishing). This is a great introduction to the lower four circuits. Wilson uses cool literature (Joyce, Dickens) to illustrate them, and his sections on 2nd circuit (or Human Primate Psychology) is witty and insightful. When he gets to the upper circuits, though, he kind of peters out, although he offers some interesting ideas. RAW uses the 8-circuit model extensively in his novels, especially the Illuminatus Trilogy & Schroedinger's cat. If you liked them before, try reading them after you have this model figured out.

Angel Tech, a modern shaman's guide to reality selection, by Antero Alli. (New Falcon Publishing) This is by far the very best handbook on the 8-circuit model. He gives very lucid descriptions of the lower circuits, what can go wrong with them, and what to do about it. If you lost the owner's manual that originally came with your Human Form, this aftermarket manual is a good maintenance guide. The upper circuits are dealt with tolerably well- I don't know if anyone could really do them justice. He suggests some exercises and techniques, but hey! We're all experimenting.

Info Psychology, by Timothy Leary (New Falcon Publishing). As mentioned above, this is the source material, but it's not the best introduction. Leary added astrological correspondances which seem fairly off-base, he agrees. Otherwise, there is much depth to be dug out of this. It's not written really to be read linearly, either, but to be connected up with at whichever points are relevant to the user at the time. A classic for every bookcase!

The 8-circuit model is just another map, and the map is not the territory, just as the menu is not the meal (as many Falcon authors are fond of quipping). I've found this particular theory to be one of the more useful ones when you are trying to figure out your head.

I asked Leary about the 8-circuit model during a lecture once, and he picked up on it, but obviously he wasn't as interested in talking theory as he was working the crowd like a sideshow huckster. He did a great job of that, by the way, and I enjoyed him greatly. Too bad he gave up research for marketing, though.