

Circles, Chakras, & Badges

Personal Learning Environment

I began by considering learning, in general, and what types of learning modalities I access. I was reminded of the readings we completed in Art & Society, particularly addressing issues of the antiquated nature of linear academic models. The modern student--we discussed--learns by interacting with, and accessing data, via a cloud network; we participate in a complex matrix where nodes simultaneously transmit and receive: no longer is the traditional linear model of broadcast to receiver applicable.

This prompted me to think about how I have long identified with the climatic formations of clouds--the personalities and temperaments of weather formation--and my love of nature, generally. I thought about portraying my Personal Learning Environment as a set of clouds interacting with each other, I also considered utilizing the aesthetic of a solar system (I have always been fascinated by interplanetary travel). I decided on a theme that is inherently symbolic of not only my perspectives and life choices, but also is aesthetically synonymous with the vision and goal of my arts organization Cloud.Break.

I decided to represent my Personal Learning Environment through the interpretive lens of the Yogic philosophy of the Seven Chakras—the energy wheels that move and activate the life force that flows through my body, my mind, and my spirit. A healthy environment, like a healthy body, is one where all Seven Chakras are aligned and energy can flow with ease. I identify with the concept of Learning Badges, so I created Badges using logos, photographs, and icons that represent arenas in my life that provide nodes in my learning matrix. This ideology prompted me to consider what systems of learning were associated with each Chakra; furthermore, the Hindu representation of each Chakra is aesthetically reminiscent of a learning Badge.

The Root Chakra I associate with Ancestry: the Root Chakra grounds me to reality, to the earth, and to my history; my family and cultural heritage are very important to me. The Badges I created affiliated with Ancestry include: an image of my grandmother at 18, a photograph collage of my friends and family, a photo of a Miao women, a photograph of my dogs, and a *Night Before Christmas* Badge (my Great-great-great grandfather composed this poem).

The Sacral Chakra (2nd Chakra) I associate with Aesthetics: the Sacral Chakra dwells in the reproductive organs and hips, it is tied to creativity, art, and reproduction; creating art, working with my hands, curatorial practice, exhibition design, and craft are all very important to me. The Badges I created affiliated with Aesthetics include: a Juxtapoz badge (visual art), a Haute Macabre Badge (fashion), and an Adobe Creative Suite Badge (to represent some of the tools I utilize).

The Solar Plexus (3rd Chakra) I associate with Epistemology: the Solar Plexus is the seat of the ego, will, assertiveness, and anger. Epistemology is the philosophical assertion of what can be known, which echoes the Vedic philosophy tied to the Chakra. The Badges I created affiliated with Epistemology include: The Portland Art Museum, The Exploratorium, and the LA County Museum of Art and a Facebook Badge.

The Heart Chakra (4th Chakra) I associate with Exploration: the Heart Chakra is the home of compassion, love, and empathy. I love to travel, meet new people, and explore the unknown, as such I think it is inherently necessary to have compassion, love, and empathy for my fellow humans so that I am open to learning as much as possible while exploring. The Badges I created affiliated with Exploration include a Human Nature Festival badge, a Kri-Kri Badge (when I was seventeen I travelled to Crete, lived on the roof of a Minoan Ruin, and studied wild goats with University of Rhode Island Biologists for a summer), and a flag of India (representing the international travel I highly value.)

The Throat Chakra (5th Chakra) I associate with Semiotics: the Throat Chakra is the origin of voice, communication, and expression; semiotics is the study of signs and meaning. I speak multiple languages, I chant, and as an undergraduate I studied literature. As such I became a huge fan of Roland Barthes, particularly his text *S/Z*, which explores the relationship between expression and understanding. The Badges I created affiliated with Semiotics include: an *S/Z* badge, a 中文 (Chinese) badge, and a Grooveshark Badge (representing access to music).

The 3rd Eye Chakra (6th Chakra) I associate with Philosophy: the 3rd Eye is the seat of psychic powers, dreams, and intuition. I love the word “philosophy:” “philo”—to love and “sophy”—derived from the Greek “-sophia” meaning wisdom; philosophy, the love of learning, or, the love of wisdom. The badges I created affiliated with Philosophy include: a Reed College Badge, a University of Oregon Badge, and a Portland State University Badge.

The Crown Chakra (7th Chakra) I associate with Spirituality: the Crown Chakra lives two inches above the crown of the skull and connects the finite human body, with the electromagnetic human aura, and, with the infinite energies of the Universe. The badges I created affiliated with Spirituality include: a Thich Nhat Han Badge (a Zen Monk who offers continually inspiring teachings), the Dalai Lama (a Tibetan Monk and world leader who, through example, offers continually inspiring teachings), a Sand Mandala (to represent meditation, mindfulness, and the practice of non-attachment), a Kundalini Yoga Research Institute Badge (I am a certified Kundalini Yoga Instructor), and a Horoscope Badge (Taurus).

The Badges are not permanently affixed to any single Chakra; just like in a healthy environment there is communication and movement of resources between all nodes. The Badges hover in a cloud generally gravitating toward their loci, but in balance and relationship with each other and with the other points of concentration. The Chakras and Badges have been applied to a self-portrait I took inside a geodesic dome while at a festival I attended during the summer of 2013. This self-portrait continues my collection of self-portraiture in homage to, and in honor of, Ansell Adams who, throughout his career, captured images of himself, in nature, by photographing his shadow. The geodesic dome casts a wonderful shadow pattern of circles that aesthetically mirrors the circles of the badges, which further aesthetically echoes the circular lotus structure of the Chakras: the circle is symbolic of many aspects of my Personal Learning Environment, but, ultimately it represents a healthy, integrated, and fluid system that is adaptable and stable.