



World Wide Mind: The Coming Integration of Humanity, Machines, and the Internet

Michael Chorost

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What if digital communication felt as real as being touched?

This question led Michael Chorost to explore profound new ideas triggered by lab research around the world, and the result is the book you now hold. Marvelous and momentous, *World Wide Mind* takes mind-to-mind communication out of the realm of science fiction and reveals how we are on the verge of a radical new understanding of human interaction.

Chorost himself has computers in his head that enable him to hear: two cochlear implants. Drawing on that experience, he proposes that our Paleolithic bodies and our Pentium chips could be physically merged, and he explores the technologies that could do it. He visits engineers building wearable computers that allow people to be online every waking moment, and scientists working on implanted chips that would let paralysis victims communicate. Entirely new neural interfaces are being developed that let computers read and alter neural activity in unprecedented detail.

But we all know how addictive the Internet is. Chorost explains the addiction: he details the biochemistry of what makes you hunger to touch your iPhone and check your email. He proposes how we could design a mind-to-mind technology that would let us reconnect with our bodies and enhance our relationships. With such technologies, we could achieve a collective consciousness—a World Wide Mind. And it would be humankind's next evolutionary step.

With daring and sensitivity, Chorost writes about how he learned how to enhance his own relationships by attending workshops teaching the power of touch. He learned how to bring technology and communication together to find true love, and his story shows how we can master technology to make ourselves more human rather than less.

World Wide Mind offers a new understanding of how we communicate, what we need to connect fully with one another, and how our addiction to email and texting can be countered with technologies that put us—literally—in each other's minds.

World Wide Mind: The Coming Integration of Humanity, Machines, and the Internet Details

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From Reader Review World Wide Mind: The Coming Integration of Humanity, Machines, and the Internet for online ebook

Catherine Davis says

This was a bizarre book for me....I honestly felt like I was reading Jules Verne. But it really isn't IF we can connect brains with computers but WHEN. And in the end, it is all about creating *communitas* (Latin for community) which is the basis for all that we do and how we survive. I came away with a lot of questions but not even sure I can ask them.

Carolyn says

Fascinating speculations about the co-evolution of humans, computers, and their interconnections. The author lost his hearing, then recovered it with cochlear implants, which required learning to hear again, a process he described in an earlier book. Having come this far with computers implanted in his body, he sought out people who had gone further, or who would like to, such as stroke victims with locked-in syndrome and one man who wears a computer with the "monitor" sitting in front of one eye, keeping him connected every waking moment. Chorost is a superb writer and clearly a brilliant man.

Gregg Sapp says

Before reading this book, if you'd have asked me if I'd consider undergoing a surgical procedure in order to enable my brain to connect to a global networked mind, I'd have walked away from you very quickly. Now, I'm thinking... not so fast. Mind to mind technological linkages may not be so far-fetched, after all, especially considering how far we've already come since the dawn of the internet age. Chorost is a perfect author to explore these issues, for he is an acknowledged science geek who nonetheless writes in an engaging, personal style, and he is furthermore already partially robotic, in the sense that he is deaf and wears a cochlear implant. The author looks primarily at the technology, leaving some of the philosophical issues about whether brain-sharing is a good thing for others to ponder. Right now, I'm still unconvinced that I'd consent to that surgery, but at least it is worth thinking about, now, while we still have a choice.

I reviewed this book for Library Journal. See the March issue, or connect to:
<http://www.libraryjournal.com/lj/reviews/2013/03/01/130301001>

Tim says

I'm not as familiar with futurist writings and I'm also unfamiliar with most of the topics that Chorost is referring to. I feel like that should be addressed before I review this book.

Overall, I thought that the book was fascinating. He starts off with his personal story of how he is somewhat of a cyborg. He also goes into detail about what it means to be human and the importance of human communication. Chorost has a deep understanding of the human experience. I also find the idea of being

plugged into a 'World Wide Mind' alluring. An entirely alien experience to what we have today. I think that Chorost got his point across. He feels that technology would connect us in a way that makes us more empathetic. I don't think he focused enough on the negative aspects of moving forward [if it is even possible] with a concept like this. Then again, I'm not sure if that is the angle he wanted to take. I think we are a long way away from getting to this point. I'm still a little terrified of the concept, but his book offers the reader with something to ponder.

Nikhil P. Freeman says

It was okay, really 2 and a three quarter stars; a geeky technophilic codex on the coming singularity. Depending on one's worldview, this could be the blueprint--instructions for the mark of the beast (ha!) OR simply scientific fictions quickly becoming scientific fact. I'm still left with the question of how exactly consciousness fits into the merging of humanity and machine. I'm not convinced science can even pin down exactly what is consciousness. Even if this would be possible do we really want to have real-time access to a world wide mind? Having the internet itself, Facebook, and Twitter is one thing, but to literally be able to tune in to someone's thoughts instantly--doesn't sound like much fun at all. What about computer viruses and biological viruses; worms and Trojan horses competing with real tapeworms and retroviruses. If this will be the next stage in human evolution than security issues and matters of consciousness will be this stage's missing link.

Richard says

Disappointing. First, since I've read so many books on related topics, much of what Chorost spends time explaining I've already long since learned, so the book felt slower and less intriguing than it probably would for other folks.

But the second reason — and why it barely gets those three stars — is that the author ends up with an almost Pollyanna-ish view of the prospects of integrating the Internet into the human mind.

He pays lip service to the dangers, but doesn't really do any significant examination of what those threats might be like. For example, he notes that VR pioneer Jaron Lanier warns of "cybernetic totalism" in his *You Are Not a Gadget*, but dismisses that on the grounds that "the Internet is separate from the human body," and that a direct connection can "enhance empathy and the direct recognition of another person's uniqueness." Uh, well, sure — that's possible. But isn't it also quite possible that some folks will get an even more visceral thrill out of bullying or attacking someone with that direct connection?

The problem with the predictions and suggestions in this book are that they universally imagine a pleasant outcome, and then proceed as if that outcome were more than just plausible, but likely, or even guaranteed.

Part of this seems to be due to the author's clumsy reliance on metaphorical thinking. When imagining how wondrous it will be when humans can actually share thoughts, he pauses and notes that granting the thoughts of others access to your own brain is a bit problematic, considering how similar that comes to schizophrenia:

It raises the possibility that even if [a World Wide Mind] could be created, it would present a threat to users' sanity. However, I think the risk of schizophrenia is not as substantial as it might appear. As I explained earlier, input from others would probably feel distinctly different

from one's own self-motivated brain activity by virtue of its lesser intensity and relative incompleteness. It would no more fool the user than a photo fools the viewer into thinking he is seeing the actual scene.

There is no real reason to believe that the reality of a photo is or is not a reliable predictor of inserted thoughts and emotions beyond its superficial similarity, but that's as far as he goes with respect to that problem. You could easily expand the "photo" analogy to bring in *trompe l'oeil*, for example, if you really want to examine the analogy.

But even beyond that, the consumer entertainment industry would undoubtedly be striving mightily to make those impressions "more real than reality," wouldn't it? Once those techniques were known, who is to say what malefactors might want to do? I can easily imagine a viral advertisement that sneaks into the brain to make every memory and thought of Disneyland warmer and fuzzier, or changes my taste buds to go positively orgasmic when I suck down a Coca Cola.

These are not the kind of ideas that Michael Chorost has examined in this book. What he has presented is a first peek at that world, and one that is heavily biased towards the positive.

Caveat lector.

*(Review at the New York Times, *Imagining a World of Total Connectedness, and Its Consequences.*)*

Volkan says

As I write, Google Glasses is receiving wide coverage for their bold move to make wearable computers commercially viable. In *World Wide Mind*, Michael Chorost draws upon the recent developments in neuroscience and internet technology to paint a plausible future where human computer interfaces are not only wearable, but embedded in our brains. In that (near) future -- only a couple of decades from today! -- telempathy stretches the boundaries of perception between human beings, making instant mind-to-mind communication a reality, complicating issues of love, trust and friendship. Who would you allow access to your most private memories and thoughts? Can you imagine creating a Facebook filter to your brain for your coworkers? The new technologies in brain science, especially optogenetics, will make your thoughts more public and eliminate some neural diseases, such as Parkinson's, by allowing scientists to manipulate your nerve cells simply by shining a pale blue light. Looking beyond the brain, Chorost prophesies that new methods of brain-to-brain communication will invite new forms of organization in the grand scale, threatening established hierarchies and teetering creaky dictatorships, as Twitter and Facebook already showed us can be done. To sum up, *World Wide Mind* is a remarkable work that should be read by every brave soul as a travel guide to our collective future.

Bret says

Read this book this past weekend. I really liked how Michael interwove the scientific and personal. He created more questions than answers...fortunately he was on our campus, yesterday, and I was able to get many of my questions answered. Michael and I discussed some possible future topics and ideas. A great author with interest in listening to feedback.

David Steele says

This is an excellent, entertaining book. It alternates between popularizing new technology, ruminating on the likely direction and consequences of that technology, and intimate personal revelations. He makes a good case that direct brain to brain communication will soon become a reality, but his claim that the Internet itself will become conscious (and even self-conscious) seems unsubstantiated. He equivocates a lot on some of his key terms, using "intelligence" and "awareness" in different ways at different times, sometimes with strange results, as when he says that an ant colony is aware, when clearly it is not. The technology is explained clearly, but not very fully. I would have appreciated more on the nuts and bolts.

James says

Some nice expositions of ideas, innovations and technologies (<2010) with humanistic elements thrown in.

Enjoyed the chapters on Optogenetics and Chorost's narratives on Cochlear Implants, Human Connection Workshops and Perceiving Cats.

Disagreed a fair bit with his assumptions about people, technological assimilation and something about his writing style tended to annoy me (Maybe it's because the train I'm on smells like piss?).

Roger Wood says

My subject for the year? The Singularity

<http://bit.ly/RCWsubject2011>

Meredith says

This author is a friend of mine, but I can honestly say I love this book. I've wanted a world wide mind since 1999, when I realized my new long commute to work would be much improved by being able to communicate with my chat room friends as I drove. (As Mike points out, this would actually be quite dangerous, but it seemed like a good idea at the time.) But what seemed like a neat way to pass the time is actually far more complex than that, with implications as far reaching as law enforcement, disability rights, and beyond. Mike explores not only what the world wide mind can do for us, but also what it will do TO us. It would be interesting to see what future historians make of these ideas - whether they're right on target, or way off the mark!

Antonio Gallo says

Tutti sappiamo che cos'è Internet. Sta per "International Network". Alla stessa maniera conosciamo il significato di WWW - "World Wide Web" acronimo per "Grande Rete Mondiale". L'autore di questo importante libro avanza una prospettiva che può fare paura oppure entusiasmare. Quella di una rete che ha per acronimo WWM - "World Wide Mind". Come dire la "Grande Mente Mondiale", l'integrazione tra umanità, macchine e Internet. L'autore esplora le conseguenze che possono sorgere dal contatto non più tra siti ed indirizzi dai quali la Rete è formata, bensì tra "menti" diverse e distanti tra di loro. Il libro esplora la possibilità di una tecnologia che possa mettere in collegamento i nostri corpi e le nostre menti in modo da acquisire una coscienza collettiva. La WWM - "World Wide Mind" potrebbe essere la prossima rivoluzione del genere umano. Fantasia? Utopia? Provocazione? Non tanto, se si pensa che l'autore Michael Chorost ha dei computer nella sua testa, due trapianti cocleari. Non sapete cosa sono? Allora non siete pronti per essere collegati alla futura rete della mente universale. Quando avrò riletto bene il libro ne parlerò più a lungo. Accontentatevi di questo per il momento. Oppure comprate il libro.

Natalie says

Excellent writing, honest, funny, personal, understandable, absorbing...

The thought of being able to grow as a human, by:

- a.) facing your destiny with grace and dignity,
- b.) make the best of it, and
- c.) by adding/implanting the available technology to your persona. Accept it as part of you, with humor is a great lesson for us and our future, that is what I took from it.

It is up to us to redefine what being human actually is all about. Are we less human because we have an implant, a prosthetic limb or a pacemaker? Or does that even clarify the question and make us better then the sum of our parts? Should we fear the technology we invented, or embrace it?

Read this book, think about it, and we will see...

skips says

At first I thought this book would cater too much to "pop" psychology and engineering, but I was surprised that it didn't. His alternating chapters cover both his life with cochlear implants and the potential for this kind of technology in other mediums. Definitely a refreshing kind of science book.
