DEVELOPING A TRACELESS CONSCIOUSNESS

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Let your mind be as it naturally is without trying to correct it. Now, isn't it true that all your thoughts, both subtle and gross, subside in themselves? Rest evenly and look to see if this mind doesn't remain calm in its own natural state.

Even though I haven't written the above text, I have neither quoted it nor cited it. The text, as does all human communication, rose from an individual's conscious mind. For the reader's reference, the mind from which the text was communicated was of Dakpo Tashi Namgyal. I'm not questioning Namgyal's ownership of the text in a conventional sense. According to all copyright law, Namgyal's name was undeniably published on the book in which the text was written; if I am to assume that the text was honestly, in the United States' context, published, I have no doubt that he owns it.

Namgyal was born in the early 16th century, indisputably before rigid concepts of US copyright law. In an academic institution, nonetheless, his work is pressed within a US copyright law structure. If I was to incorporate his writing into my own, without any acknowledgment of its origin, I would be charged with plagiarism. That being said, I wonder if Namgyal himself, as a practicing Tibet Buddhist scholar, would claim any such attachment to this body of work.

Copyright, needless to say, plays a useful role in our modern society. Copyright allows for textual collaboration without charges of "stealing;" it allows for readers to reference and to explore the networks of texts from which other texts were born. All that being said, copyright creates a bizarre dynamic in which an individual's consciousness legally owns the information that it "produces."

As humans, we are all born within a unique web of collective narratives and information. Carl Jung understands this concept of collective narratives as archetypes. In Jung's words,

archetypes are not an “inherited idea, but rather a mode of functioning, corresponding to the inboard way in which the chick emerges from the egg.”[1] In other words, they are metaphorical cultural pools from which we embryonically form and rise from.

From a Buddhist perspective, archetypes tie into the understanding of consciousness as a fluid and ubiquitous substance. In Sanskrit, several terms translate to consciousness and, thus, form consciousnesses as a multi-faceted entity. Consciousness, as expressed in relation to the five aggregates, is conveyed as namshe, the primary mind.[2] Consciousness can both be tied to an individual body, in a conventional sense, but can also float as a pervading energy[3] — the consciousness that streams through samsara.

Dr. van Vugt, a Buddhist neuroscientist, elucidates that “consciousness is everywhere like energy is everywhere. There is this paradigm that energy is never created a new and never lost, it just goes through energy transformation... there is a certain kind of energy that has this nature to process information through this self agency capacity.” [4] Like the principle of the conservation of energy, so too may consciousness reveal as a more ultimate entity, permeating throughout existence.

To relate back to Jung, consciousness seems to be the common embryonic fluid that carries archetypes. If we all float and emerge from this shared fluid, how can any of our consciousnesses be independent? Moreover, how can any ideas of ours be truly original and worthy of copyright? I’m not trying to intentionally rave about copyright law, rather I’m trying

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[1] "The Jungian Model of the Psyche," Journal Psyche, , accessed May 1, 2019, http://journalpsyche.org/jungian-model-psyche/.
[2] "Geshe Lobsang Tenzin Negi," interview by author, June 25, 2018.
[3] "Morika Hensley," interview by Caroline Wilkinson, June 11, 2018.
[4] "Dr. Marieke Van Vugt," interview by author, June 14, 2018.

to illustrate our flawed understanding, particularly in the US, of the idea ownership. Of course individuals can discern unique ideas, but the ideas rise out of a shared interconnectivity. Even Shakespeare co-opted almost all of his narratives from previous works.

The concept of "logos" further reiterates the inherent interdependency of our collective human narratives. Logos is the Christian concept of "the Word," but it also explains our shared human explanations of the world — our repeating Gilgameshes, our Buddhas or Jesuses. Logos are the narratives that amalgamate and proliferate within archetypal pools.

The formation of the internet, in a sense, can be understood as the digital realization of our shared human interconnectivity. Through the vast expanse of interacting and replicating ideas, the internet resembles a collective human pool of consciousness.

Within this wild world wide web, questions of individual ownership, yet again, arise. The direct implementation of a copyright-mentality exists through blockchain technology. Blockchain technology maintains a ledger that tracks the transactions of data. Through the use of cryptography, blocks of data can be definitively traced and owned. Although there are many opportunities for blockchain technology, they do uphold our cultural understandings of ownership and definitive rights on intellectual material. Blockchain reiterates an isolationist conception of consciousness.

In thinking about the creation of art, art often springs from greater traditions and movements — impressionism, dadaism, cubism, etc. Although art emerges from an individual's consciousness, art often carries with it artistic archetypes. In fact, the declaration of art even occasionally evades the implications of copyright. Looking at Andy Warhol specifically, he took

the “imagery of pop culture” and reinterpreted it represented it in a nearly identical, yet uncannily “unknowable manner.”[5]

Famously, Warhol “often did multiple paintings and replicable prints”[6] — fluorescent Marilyn Monroe, the iconic Campbell's soup can, a screen printed Jackie Kennedy. Through this repetition, Warhol hoped to “[achieve] emptiness by avoiding narrative and focusing on the banal.”[7] Warhol skimmed the shallow end of culture and withdrew the most memetic images. In a sense, Warhol defined a modern logos. He defined the unspoken religion of pop culture, the cult of Marilyn.

In thinking about consciousness, Warhol challenges the ownership of culturally shared concepts. Warhol clearly did not develop the imagery of much of his art, yet he reinterpreted it through his own lens. Warhol applied his consciousness to an established concept and birthed something new and original. As viewers, in turn, consume Warhol’s art, they also apply their respective consciousnesses. Viewers contribute their perspective through their consumption and join the collective conscious interpretations of the piece.

Warhol flattens an image to the extent that it enters Baudrillard’s simulacrum. Within Baudrillard’s simulacrum, an image, a virtual realm, has “no relation to any reality [or actual] whatsoever.”[8] The image is not only the collapse of the representation and the thing represented, it is the entire replacement of the thing represented by the representation. The image of Marilyn becomes a thing separate from Marilyn.

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[5] Eric R. Kandel, Reductionism in Art and Brain Science: Bridging the Two Cultures (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 168.
[6] Kandel, 171.
[7] Kandel, 171.
[8] Baudrillard, Selected Writings, 216.

In contrast to Warhol, a mandala, a Buddhist artistic manifestation of a microcosm of the universe, engages with viewers through depth rather than surface. The Tibetan word for mandala is "*kyilkhor* which means 'center and surrounding environment."[9] The mandala exists three-dimensionally, rather than, as Warhol achieves, two-dimensionally.

The mandala is a "pictorial manifestation of a tantra."[10] Although mandalas are often depicted in a two-dimensional form, the student should interact with them in a three-dimensional manner. In other words, the student should "'enter into the mandala'" through their consciousness. The mandala is an entryway into the palace of a deity.[11]

Both the creator and the student of the mandala must enter a meditative state. Through a meditative state, the creator, or more precisely the actualizer, of the mandala can manifest the realm of the mandala. The actualizer of the mandala does not perceive himself or herself as "creating" the mandala, but, rather as "reconstructing a representation of something that already exists."[12] Similar to Warhol's artistic process, the actualizer of the mandala retreats into an inspirational pool and focuses upon a particularly transcendent trope, and translates it into a shared visual realm. Neither the actualizer of a mandala nor Warhol can claim conscious ownership over the original form.

Within a meditative state, a student can approach the realm of the deity. In the Kalachakra tantric practice specifically, the mandala is "a two-dimensional representation of the five-story palace of the Kalachakra deity."[13] The Kalachakra deity "represents omniscience, for

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[9] Barry Bryant, The Wheel of Time Sand Mandala: Visual Scripture of Tibetan Buddhism (San Francisco: Harper, 1992), 21.
[10] Bryant, 21.
[11] Bryant, 21.
[12] Bryant, 25.
[13] Bryant, 24.

he is one with all time and therefore knows all."[14] Through entering the Kalachakra mandala, an individual seeks "a meditative path towards enlightenment."[15]

The mandala introduces a fascinating dynamic between consciousness and dimensionality. In essence, the two-dimensional state of the mandala demands a three-dimensional interpretation. Even though the mind visually interprets the mandala as a two-dimensional thing, one must train the brain to understand it three-dimensionally. I will come back to the mandala's specific approach to dimensionality farther down.

In art, any implementation of perspective is the two-dimensional interpretation of a three-dimensional thing. We understand visual imagery in terms of the third-dimension. We can watch a two-dimensional movie and understand how the actor move within space because we understand them within a three-dimensional world.

The development of photography, in particular, allowed for the seamless and instant translation of the three-dimensional world as a two-dimensional representation. Photography, in that sense, created "an illusion of reality... the ability to convey the three-dimensional world on a two dimensional canvas."[16] Walter Benjamin insightfully analyzes this technological reproduction of art and the art's corresponding relationship to the viewer.

Benjamin claims that the reproduction of artwork in the technological age is fundamentally different from the reproduction of artwork by manual processes — "the technological reproduction of artworks is something new."[17] Technology, specifically the

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[14] Bryant, 24.
[15] Bryant, 24.
[16] Kandel, 63.
[17] Walter Benjamin, The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 2008), 20.

lithograph and the photograph, reproduce artworks in vastly different mediums at unparalleled rates.[18] The reproduction of art no longer remains tied to the medium in which the original art was constructed.

Through this change in form and quantity, Benjamin reveals that technologically reproduced art "enables the original [artwork] to meet the recipient halfway."[19] Artwork, in reproduced forms, becomes accessible to considerable masses. The new, egalitarian nature of artwork, nonetheless, simultaneously leads to the dislocation and identity loss of the original pieces. A reproduction alters "the here and now of the work of art — its unique existence in a particular place."[20]

For example, a photo of a "cathedral [can be] in the studio of an art lover,"[21] while the cathedral cannot be in the art lover's studio; both the physical nature and the context of the chapel change. This newly disjointed relationship between artwork, form, and context confronts "the concept of [the artwork's] authenticity."[22] Technological advancement breaks the barriers of the original artwork, but by doing so, "certainly [devalues] the here and now of the artwork."[23]

Although Benjamin amends the devaluation of artwork by promoting its new, equally-accessible nature,[24] he does not claim to ever recapture the original artwork. The modern state of artwork is both sculpted by and subject to endless reproduction.

Benjamin's understanding of artwork in the technological age reflects the state of narratives in the virtual, technological world. As information, in the form of narratives, enters the

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[18] Benjamin, 20.
[19] Benjamin, 21.
[20] Benjamin, 21.
[21] Benjamin, 22.
[22] Benjamin, 21.
[23] Benjamin, 22.
[24] Benjamin, 36.

virtual space, it is so irrevocably shared that it utterly detaches from its original form. Again, this harkens back to Warhol's manifestation of Baudrillard's simulacrum.

On a surface level, reproduced narratives can convey meaning, like a lithograph of a Marilyn can convey meaning, but the context and state of the original narrative are lost. As technology further reproduces original narrative, the gap between the virtual and the actual reality of the narrative grows. The reproduction of the virtual narrative, the signifier, no longer corresponds with the actual narrative, the signified. Virtually-conveyed narrative, therefore, becomes meaningless as it detaches from actuality; this is the entropic state of narrative.

Now — circling back to the mandala. The mandala transcends the loss of Baudrillard's simulacrum because, instead of endlessly reproducing a three-dimensional thing in a two-dimensional form, the mandala brings an intangible three-dimensional realm through a two-dimensional channel that, in turn, allows for three-dimensional transportation.

More simply, the aim of Warhol and the tragedy of Benjamin is that the surface completely detaches from the thing. Through the mandala, however, the surface, the two-dimensional representation, is a portal to an otherwise inaccessible three-dimensional realm. The mandala does not ask the student to understand a two-dimensional representation as a three-dimensional thing, but, rather to see the two-dimensional representation as a pathway to the three-dimensional thing; the mandala is both the representation and the thing represented.

Meditation allows for one's transcendence from a two-dimensional realm to a three-dimensional realm. In effect, the mandala exists as both a two-dimensional and a three-dimensional thing depending on interpretation.

The dynamic of the mandala illustrates the mutually-exclusive quantum relationship between measurement and manifestation. In terms of classical physics, the theoretical physicist, David Bohm, writes that "our senses in relation to outward actions" allow us to "manifest" the world.[25] We can only "manifest... what can be held in hand,"[26] or in more scientific terms, what can be measured. From the classical physics interpretation, only the two-dimensional mandala can be manifested, as a fleshly human cannot hold a three-dimensional mandala "in hand."

Within a quantum physics interpretation, Bohm writes that "the very effort to hold [the quantum world] produces thoroughgoing unpredictable and uncontrollable changes in it."[27] To "hold" the quantum world, in any sense, one must "regard a quantum measurement as a manifesting process;"[28] to measure is to manifest. In relation to the mandala, the simultaneous interpretation of the mandala as a two-dimensional and three-dimensional object forms a quantum state.

To understand, to measure, the mandala as solely a two-dimensional representation is to manifest the mandala in the two-dimensional world. To grasp the mandala as a concurrently two-dimensional pathway and three-dimensional realm, however, is to enter a quantum-like state of meditation. A meditative state in which, as Robert Thurman writes, is "without reality, [as] meditation is not to be perceived," or measured. To measure meditation is to alter the meditative state.[29]

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[25] David Bohm and Basil J. Hiley, *The Undivided Universe: An Ontological Interpretation of Quantum Theory*, 176.
[26] Bohm, 176.
[27] Bohm, 177.
[28] Bohm, 179.
[29] Karma-glin-pa and Padma Sambhava, comps., *The Tibetan Book of the Dead: The Great Book of Natural Liberation Through Understanding in the Between*, trans. Robert A. F. Thurman (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1994), 222.

The mandala resolves Benjamin's technological loss and Baudrillard's simulacrum state. The representation of the mandala does not replace the mandala, but allows for both actual and virtual states to exist. Within the mandala, the second and third dimensions can concordantly remain complete.

Additionally, the mandala allows for an ideal simulation state. Baudrillard believes that a "simulation envelops the whole edifice of representation itself as a simulacrum."[30] The virtual world of simulation inherently replaces and detaches from the actual world. In Baudrillard's system of loss, a simulated realm must always remain a surface state.

The mandala, however, enacts simulation without loss, but, rather with transcendence. The mandala realm allows for simulation, virtual reality, that enhances and fulfills the actual reality. Through the creation of mandala within a meditative state, the mandala assumes an "empowering energy."[31]

Returning to the Kalachakra mandala specifically, perhaps the mandala not only forms a realm of second and third dimensionality, but also fourth dimensionality. Kalachakra literally translates to "wheel of time."[32] "Kala," time, within the wheel of time is "not linear time but the flow of all events past, present, and future."[33] Furthermore, "chakra" refers to "not only the cycle of time but also the way in which the enlightened experience of great bliss radiates like the sun from the self to all sentient beings."[34] In other words, the Kalachakra mandala understands time as existing all at once.

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[30] Baudrillard, 216.
[31] Bryant, 21.
[32] Bryant, 24.
[33] Bryant, 24.
[34] Bryant, 24.

The Kalachakra interpretation of time recalls the structure of spacetime — all possible paths and interpretations of time existing at once. Through Kalachakra meditation, therefore, perhaps one can collapse the first, second, and third dimensions into the spacetime continuum of the fourth dimension. Ultimately, an enlightened state of consciousness.

Our modern and limiting binary of virtual or actual realms prevents us from understanding virtual and actual realms; realms that continuously integrate both realities and, inherently, eliminate loss. As we become an increasingly technological society, we must develop a relationship that is more mandala-like than Baudrillard-like. We must learn to cultivate a conscious state that can exist without measure and, thus, manifestation — an unimposing meditative awareness.

Ralph Waldo Emerson interprets this conscious, unimposing state from a transcendentalist perspective. In his seminal text, *Nature*, Emerson writes, "I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me."[35] In his essay, Emerson expresses his union with nature and, consequently, his loss of self. Emerson realizes a state of neither measurement nor manifestation.

Similarly, the postmodernist Jacques Derrida describes an ideal state as one without a trace — without a "mark of the absence of a presence, an always-already absent present."[36] From a quantum perspective, if we measure we leave a trace, we create a loss. Derrida, like Emerson, like the mandala-state craves a traceless consciousness.

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[35] Emerson, Ralph Waldo. Nature. https://archive.vcu.edu/english/engweb/transcendentalism/authors/emerson/essays/naturetext.html.
[36] Jacques Derrida, Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences(1970).

Returning to Dakpo Tashi Namgyal — we must practice "let [our] mind be as it naturally is without trying to correct it."[37] We must not measure and, therefore, manifest our conscious state. Finally, we must "rest evenly and look to see if this mind doesn't remain calm in its own natural state."[38] We must balance and attempt to exist within this unmeasured, unmanifested reality.

[37] Derrida.
[38] Derrida.

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