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Mandala: On the Logos of Place

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Suddenly, during the night, one awakens while dreaming – aware that this is a dream. The “rules” of action, reaction, and of form itself are not that of the waking state – one might leap in the air and fly, transform one’s body into any number of forms, reach up in the sky and grab the sun and clouds, pulling them to the side, bringing forth a canopy of moon and stars. The entire scene, in the lucid dream, has a heightened sense of radiance and joy, vitality and freedom.

Imagine this sense of lucid dreaming is occurring right here and now, dream-like imagery co-arising with sensory nature: especially subtle sight, sound, and feeling-sensations. That there is co-arising -- right here and now -- a sensory environment with luminous imagery as the very opening or clearing for sense of place.

Let’s take it a step further - dropping the imposition that one is in a lucid dream, yet retaining the sense of the non-sensory luminous imagery continuing to arise, in discernible certain ways woven with the sensory – for example, a luminous figure standing on the paved road. Envision this becoming more and more vivid, more and more ongoing in your waking life, approaching the new normal of dwelling

Sound outlandish?

It is the plea of this paper that contemporary philosophy make room for expansive modes of experiencing world as sensory and as self-showing elemental light, consequently reshaping various philosophical inquiries, such as our deliberations on the *logoi* of place.

We shall broach three modalities of this co-arising in the waking state of sensory and luminous phenomena, shifting the terms to what in Ken Wilber's Integral Meta-Theory (in its own adapting of terminology from Vedantic teachings) are the gross and subtle domains of manifestation. From the outset, to get a more concrete feel for what is at stake, I want to sketch quickly these modalities -- as a very preliminary typology -- before diving into more focused philosophical themes.

First Modality: In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition of Vajrayana, tantric practitioners engage in sustained, repeated, and systemic exercises of visualizing the world as a mandala - a radiant dwelling of elemental lights. In common with other Buddhism traditions, a number of the lineages within Tibetan Buddhism see reality as comprised of three kayas or dimensions: the *dharmakaya* (no-thing, empty cognizance, primordial awareness itself); the *sambhokaya* (the visionary sphere proper to the five elements); and the *nirmankaya* (the everyday perceptible world of the waking state). It is through Vajrayana practices called "deity yoga" ("deity" a misleading translation of the Tibetan term "yidam") that one visualizes oneself as a divine being of translucent elemental light and in a like manner one's environment as a populated sacred palace (mandala). Over time, through sustained practice of the generation and completion phases of the given tantric *sadhana*, these constructed "fantasies" come to enact themselves as direct expression and energies of the *sambhogakaya*. All arises as enchanted in a specific mode of the conjoined spacing of the *sambhogakaya* and *nirmanakaya*, of subtle and gross.

Second modality: The so-called shamanic traditions in their more originary ways, as explored in the scholarly writings of Mircea Eliade and Roger Walsh -- these qualifications of "shamanic"

and “originary” problematic if not entirely invalid for our purposes. A core practice in many of these lineages is the shamanic journey, often conducted in group with eyes closed, to the rhythmic beat of a drum, the coming forth therein of imaginary worlds, especially the underworld, where one encounters all kinds of beings including so-called power animals. Couple with additional trainings, the envisioning of the shamanic journey comes to fold everyday life, affecting a magical sense of nature, populated by local subtle beings within the spacing of earth and sky – a weaving of gross and subtle in the waking state, if distinctive from that of Vajrayana.

Third modality: I am aware of several practice contemporary practice communities (including one that I participated in) that are exploring what might turn out to be yet a third modality of the twining of gross and subtle in direct experience, a mode that, following the immensely useful and suggestive terminologies from Integral Meta-Theory, might be called “third tier configurations” or for shorthand “third tier.” More on such third tier configurations below, the short report for now being that it includes both the tantric and shamanic ways while including an intensification of individuation in Jung’s sense, such that the world as mandala is not only generic, proper to that given tantric *sadhana*, but also unique to a given practitioner, proper to the unfolding of the capital “S” Self, stretching towards a non-dual sense of what, to employ Nishada’s terms, is choric *basho*.

Let this sketch for the moment three overlapping modalities of the co-arising of gross and subtle phenomena in the waking state. To be sure, none of the three modalities in their subtle aspects are merely “subjective,” but invite and are available to “intersubjective” engagement and

interpreting: one can speak with another about the arising imagery in similar ways as one would with regard to any arising gross phenomena. Moreover, these are time-tested and practically repeatable modes of experience and comings forth of actualities. Two of these have more than a millennium of practice results; the third, while emergent, grounds itself in the pre-modern lineages on the one hand, and on the other has been coming forward in a number of contemporary practice communities independently of one another, with the beginnings of cross-community inquiry and validation-checking.

While themes of non-duality have entered into comparative-continental philosophy, as well those of the elementals, that of the elementals ripening into a mode of what we shall be calling, echoing John Sallis, their self-showing (as the explicitly subtle domain) has not. The specter of mysticism still haunts philosophy and its ontological presuppositions; even as philosophy is only beginning to take up, with explicitness, what Peter Sloterdijk calls the Renaissance-inaugurated and modern-popularized call for anthropotechnics: the vertical development of human capacities in both already known as well as novel ways; which brings us back to Foucault's humbling reminder, in one his later interviews, that in the pre-modern world of philosophy and theology, *askēsis* was the precondition for acceding to matters of truth. That one might have to cultivate access to the self-showing of the subtle domains does not mean they are to be excluded from our ontologies and from philosophical consideration.

What then about place? What might we make of these senses of subtle mandalas arising, woven with the waking state flow of everyday sensory life, for reflections on philosophical questions of place – and further for reflections on the *logos* (as meaningful gathering) of such

place/emplacement? Placing the suggestive, highly abstract, almost conceptual, articulations by Heidegger of the fourfold, to the side, let us note that in general philosophical theories of place most often presuppose gross beings and domains as what show themselves as the precondition for questions of place. But what happens when a different schema of the imagination arises in direct experience for our deliberations on such themes? - that is the main theme today.

Three philosophers who importantly consider the issue of place are Nishida Kitarō, Edward Casey, and if less obviously John Sallis. Each offers important insights, although fuller exploration of each of their approaches, and how these matter for the arising of mandalic actualities, is beyond the scope of the present paper. In this paper I shall focus on the work of Sallis.

Indeed, Sallis' philosophy of the imagination is a crucial resource for the sense of the logos of mandalic place. In most accounts of place, there are suppositions about a pre-given space-time. In the wake of John Sallis' notion of the logic of the imagination, which as we shall see in a moment is a logic of schemata prior to that of understanding, a prior question is not simply about place as if the space-time of manifestation is pre-given, but about the question of place proper to any given space-time schema. What Sallis' work does is bring forth two themes of philosophical import for exploring the senses of place of mandalic and like -- that of the elementals and that of the imagination, both explored in an exemplary manner in Sallis' recent writings. In two books, the titles of which echoing one another – *Force of the Imagination: The Sense of the Elemental* (2000) and *Logic of the Imagination: the Expanse of the Elemental* (2012) – Sallis enacts a twisting free of the metaphysical binary of the intelligible and the sensible, into an immanent

field of the senses of sense, exploring in the first study the conditions of the determination of the self-showing thing. The upsurge of presence of the mere image, suspended between own and other, hence “in-different,” is gathered into the more determinate sense of a thing with the coming forth of speech as logos. This dynamic determinancy, against a background of the indeterminate, is intensified through three horizons – lateral, peripheral, and operational (and I would add, in part echoing remarks that Sallis himself has made, the systemic). The lateral horizon is the unlimited store of profiles of the thing. The peripheral horizons are the visible surround and background to the focal thing. The operational horizon, in its instrumental moment, is the network of equipment in line with the analysis in *Being and Time*. (The systemic horizon is the patterned iterations of and amongst the operational horizons, constituting system, where the nexus of operational practices and systems are unable to be reduced to one another without significant remainder.) All these horizons, along with speech and the in-different image, are constitutive moments of the thing’s self-showing.

The imagination, marginalized in the tradition, comes forward as tractive, prior to subject and object, like a gift of being itself, drawing the horizons around the focal thing, the retention and pretension of all the prior conditions or moments, in a hovering of determinate self-showing; thinghood stretched within and against the indeterminate. And beyond the peripheral and systemic horizons lie another constitutive factor of the thing’s self-showing: the elementals. As the elementals are the *from which* of manifestation, encompassing horizons and things as an unfathomable medium that in exceeding the things of nature, also belongs to nature as hyper-natural. The elementals, unlike things, have no profiles; they do not reveal themselves the way things do, drawn as they are around the various horizons by the tractive imagination. All

elementals lead back to two that are primary: earth and sky. Earth shelters, supports, and withdraws, a self-closing that resists disclosure. Sky opens as an absolute recession that grants expanse, a pure shining that enables light as condition of the visible. Elementals and things intersect, overlap, and envelope one another in any number of manners. The imagination draws the elementals, as encompassing, into the determination of the self-showing thing.

In the subsequent study, the sense of the imagination deepens with Sallis' advancing of the tradition from a logic of the understanding to a logic of the imagination; such that one can allow for formal logics that adhere to the principle of non-contradiction and exorbitant logics that do not. In its drawing together and holding apart the constitutive moments of self-showing, imagination deploys schemata that are the *spacing* of things – spacing itself as the ontological event-ing of the space-time of beings (schemata in their specificity inseparable from manifestation, hence neither empty containers nor mere formal dimensions). There are three kinds of schemata: (1) those comprehensive of manifestation (the type that philosophy addresses); (2) those that are more local or restrictive; and (3) those proper to fantasy and the sensible. Schemata, unlike in the Kantian view, become unhinged from submersion in any kind of transcendental subjectivity, imagination characterized even more strongly than in the first volume as non-subjective; a condition of any modality of what might be termed “subject.”

Sallis expands the senses of the elementals in their encompassing. Not only are there natural elementals such as earth, sky, tempests, and fire, but there are extra natural elementals as well, where these distinctions hinge on the articulation of human finitude centered in the *proper*: the proper as one's own mostness. Sallis explores four proper elementals: the (1) natural elements,

(2) seclusion as sheltering retreat, (3) birth, and (4) death. The natural elementals indefinitely exceed the human while, but through absorption in our senses, recoil back as constitutive of our being in the world. Seclusion is a depth that exceeds presence without being a subjective interiority (these singular accounts reminiscent of the empty fecundity of “causal voidness” discovered through Buddhist and Vedantic practices – worthy of an entire comparative inquiry). Birth and death are characterized with regard to corporeity, the latter as lived capacities; life stretching out between these two extremes, neither of which are present but as encompassing elementals bestow and delimit one’s own most possibilities of existence. The interplay of these four elementals of the properly human is complex - more so than is directly said in this volume – leaping beyond Heidegger’s own act of overcoming subjectivism as found in the latter’s classic articulations of Dasein. Finally, in addition, along with the natural and the proper elementals there is a third kind, that of an elemental cosmology; where philosophy’s wondrous engagement with the universe is re-awakened, immanent vision expanded by technologies that disclose a vastness of the heavens never dreamed of in the ancient world; imagination able to travel throughout the cosmos and its expansiveness.

Sallisian philosophy helps us to begin articulating the logos of place of mandalic dwelling and its variants. All three modalities are related to Sallis’s third type of schemata. With one main difference – that in each the elementals, as natural and hypernatural, are not only encompassing of the gross without profiles, but are the “matter” themselves of subtle manifestation and enter into a mode of self-showing, their reserve in this respect not that of profiles but of another kind (one that would require an extended philosophical interrogation of the subtle domain).

Regarding the first of our modalities, that of Tibetan Buddhism, the Vajrayana practice of deity yoga and mandala visualization have a variety of training purposes, depending on the phase in one's training as well as determined by its place in a given lineage's order of training. One of the purposes of these meditations is to "purify" perception and the solid and self-standing sense of manifestation. Seeing one's body and the environment as translucent elemental energies of colored light dissolves the sense of solidity of manifestation, opens up the sense of the lack of inherent existence, and achieves a more unified sense of all arising in and as the mandala, as this enhances the direct experience of co-dependent origination. Whereas visualizing processes in this way empty the gross, opening into recognition of form into emptiness, the reciting of mantra, especially silently or semi-silently enacted, attunes one to the emerging of form from seeming nothingness. The anticipated results of the practice of deity yoga is for the elemental energies and their wisdom potencies to become unfurled, the five poisons transmuting into the five wisdoms of compassionate and skillful action. All beings arise as the yidam, all beings dwell in the sacred mandala, all is radiant and beautiful so to affect a reverence for everyone and everything that brings forth and intensifies four immeasurables. The world becomes enchanted, inclusive of differing topoi or places – wild places, confined places, nature, built environments -- all of these emptied of solidity as they manifest as aspects of the mandala and its environs. In point of fact, the mantric training of sound from seeming nothingness into something, from emptiness into form, never quite makes it all the way with full energetic force to the gross domain, while the visualizing empties the gross into subtle translucency. The enchantment of the world is in part achieved through a dampening of the full force of the gross domain – emptiness never comes entirely back into its gross-form potencies; places of all kinds tend to take on a more generalized sense of the mandala and its self-showing elementals.

With regard to so-called “classic” or “traditional” shamanic trainings, the subtle beings appear within a domain opened up and concretized by earth and sky. They manifest as more tightly woven with the gross domain than in Vajrayana practice. The subtle manifestations are less a whole, less unified, in comparison to the mandala orderings of Tibetan tantric practice (although the shamanic element of the medicine wheel has important parallels). They are also more localized, often specific to this or that gross site. A unified sense of mandalic ordering and coordinating of all the beings as well as the emptying of gross manifestation yield to an intersection of gross and subtle beings in various loci without the force of the gross being dampened. The spacing is one in which the schema of the gross and that of the subtle are distinct and interact in not always immediately obvious ways. There is also a tendency for the reactivation of earlier modes of developmental cognition, proper to magical thinking its associational thought, which can readily become part of the gathering and meaning-making force of logos.

With regard to third tier configurations of gross and subtle, the schemata include features of both the tantric and shamanic lineages. There is an emptying of manifestation in a mandalic open wholeness of radiant elemental energies, along with the mattering of subtle beings for specific loci in the field such that gross is able to retain its full force. The cognitive weave of gross and subtle is the strongest of the three types we are discussing, emptiness simultaneous with an explosive fecundity and fullness. Places are at once generalized and also retain specificity – wild, etc. Most distinctively, the mandala and its characters have an enhanced reference to the individuation of Self in the sense of Jung. The beings that inhabit the mandala are at times

archetypes in the process of emerging and integrating into the Self -- the mandala not only as environmental but also as symbol (and actuality) of the evolving Self.

Third tier is enacted most effectively not in isolated meditation but in the company of another or others. The subtle imagery, woven into and as the first person immediacy of the environment, is seen by both practitioners; as they take turns speaking what is seen, articulating its sense, thereby empowering the bringing forward of the imagery in its unfolding, while there being the direct and explicit sense of the configuration exceeding any utterance (thus having parallels with Kant - - via Sallis -- on aesthetic ideas, such that the whole third tier configuration arises as actuality and as *symbol*, the world as an artwork, always already “aesthetic.”)

What then of place? In the first modality, places take on a general self-showing elemental sameness of luminous radiance and enchantment; without lapsing into abstract spaces, this movement towards a sameness of enchantment inclines action to benefit each and all, everywhere and always. In the second modality, places remain distinct, even more so than with the gross alone, as an intimacy of singularities of place accrue a sense of the magical. In the third modality, place is at once generic and specific, both topic-singular and choric-unified, the latter in the sense of non-dual Selfhood, with an effect of an unfolding evolutionarily, fiery dynamism. These brief remarks are intended to open up a wider place for reconsidering matters and senses of place that include subtle domains as actualized dimensions of our being in the world together. I have attempted, in a preliminary manner, to mobilize Sallisian philosophy of the elementals and the imagination, offering remarks on the three modalities as regarding: (1) the respective spacing of subtle-gross, (2) the general mood or fundamental orienting affect of the world, (3) the

respective force of unified/topical to regional/choric senses of place. What glaringly lacks from this account is: (1) sustained engagement with the complex temporalities of each modality, (2) hence no clear fulsome sense of the gathering force of logos, which is in each case has a distinctively exorbitant logic, (3) the ethics of emplacement for each, and (4) philosophical articulation of the non-dual field itself, as with an account like that of Nishida's choric *basho*. Nevertheless, may these limited reflections serve to open up lines of inquiry that might prove fruitful.

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