Leibniz, Deleuze, and the “Red Book” Mandalas of C.G. Jung
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In its classical form, the Tibetan Buddhist mandala is a historically important site of psychological and spiritual contemplation. When considered in tandem with Western psychological practices, the prioritization of the “center as a locus of orientation and meaning” has significant implication for conceptions of the self in relation to the greater macrocosmic universe\(^1\). In this paper, I seek to explore the mandala as a rich site of enfolding and unfolding aesthetics through three main frameworks. First, using the Deleuzian notion of “cupola” articulated by Deleuze in “The New Harmony”, I will investigate the presence of enfolding/unfolding aesthetic mechanisms in primary visual engagement with the mandala object\(^2\). This initial analysis is significant, in that it accounts for viewer engagement with the mandala at a mechanical level, outlining the predominance of enfolding and unfolding aesthetic theory prior to a contextual investigation, at the level of affective response. Secondly, I will apply Leibniz's notion of “vinculum”, or substantial chain to delve further into interpretations of the mandala as a representation of the human organ of sight\(^3\). The relation of the artistic mandala form to human biology is ideal in its illustration of vinculum as a ubiquitous phenomenon that Leibniz claimed to be the main organizing force of monads in the universe. Finally, I will consider parallels between the Deleuzian description of “harmony”, and notions of harmony used within Tibetan Buddhist dialogues to describe the meditative and psychologically expansive potential of the mandala as an exercise of enlightenment among its practitioners\(^4\).

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This paper will focus specifically on the “Red Book” Mandalas of Carl Jung (1914-1930). The complete piece, an 11.5x14.5 inch red leather bound book is an extensive collection of Jung's mandala images, and his subsequent reflections upon the images in ornate calligraphic font. The circular diagrams in the book are based upon Jung's capacious documentation of his own dreams and “explorations of his own unconscious”\(^5\). Jung began work on his series of mandalas during a deeply troubled time in his life. Under the influence of depression and psychic unrest, it is reported that he took to creating mandalas as a means of meditation and peace-seeking. In their classical form, Tibetan Buddhist mandalas operate within religious practices as a means to enlightenment, thought to represent both the inner and the outer cosmos. Jung would ultimately extrapolate from this religious contextualization, positing the additional significance of the mandala as a resource for the study of “archetypes, [the] collective unconscious, and the process of individuation”\(^6\). From a psychological perspective, Jung perceived similarities in mandala imagery among varied times, geographical contexts, and individuals as proof of an innate collective repertoire of imagery possessed by each individual. This observation would drive him to conduct investigative research around the shared consciousness of individuals in society; he believed the mandala represented “a bridge between our ancient origins and modern consciousness”\(^7\).

In addition, Jung's ultimate elaboration upon this mandala collection as evidence of “collective consciousness” furthers the available area for analysis according to a Leibnizian illustration of the monad as containing the contents of the entire circular universe. The “Red Book” of mandalas is also unique in that it reflects an outsider's engagement with the religious imagery of Tibetan Buddhism.

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\(^6\) Ibid
\(^7\) Ibid
The applications of Deleuzian and Leibnizian aesthetic theory to the formal qualities of the mandala are significant in consideration of the rich history of the mandala as both a spiritual and secular artistic form. Within the domain of Buddhist mandala construction, as Maggie Grey articulates, three broad models have been presented, each of which have significant implications towards Deleuzian and Leibnizian models of monadic relationships. The first of the proposed frameworks is that of universal representation. Within this analytic framework, the mandala form is believed to be a reflection of the extensive outer universe and its relation to the singular individual, formalizing the relationship between macro and micro perspectives. This first framework is in particular agreement with Deleuze's discussion of The New Harmony.

The perception of the mandala as a relational representation between the “one” and the “multiple”, demonstrates important alignment with the notion of the cupola, which Deleuze expands upon based on his reading of Leibniz. The notion of cupola describes a conical universe, wherein the point of the cone represents one “luminous point of view”; the articulation of one possible selection from among the infinite. Deleuze describes the “base” of the cone as a “broad material base, lost in vapors”. Contrastingly, the point of the cone, a point of view, appears as a discrete apex. Deleuze emphasizes the dual nature of the “law of cupola”, stating that the base is “a vast ribbon, at once continuous, mobile, and fluttering”, while the cone's point is immobile and introverted. The mandala illustrates this relationship clearly. On the one hand, the discrete centre of the mandala represents the “one”. Simultaneously, the form stretches outwards toward an infinite perimeter which itself encompasses a diverse collection of smaller wholes. While the total mandala is representative

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9 Ibid., p.126
10 Ibid., 124.
of the “multiple”, it is contingent upon the fixedness of the “one” in the centre – mimicking
the necessary mathematical relationship between the “one” and the “multiple” suggested by
Deleuze in “The New Harmony”. When unfolded, the perimeter of the conical shape reaches
outwards towards universal infinity and draws the eye inwards towards the discrete central
apex, a “summit as its closed interiority”\(^{11}\). This inward direction of the gaze towards the
central apex is, however, only one possible mechanical engagement of the viewer with the
mandala. Just as the viewer of the mandala may find their gaze drawn inward, it is also
possible for the gaze to mobilize from the center of the mandala to its outer perimeter. In a
mechanical sense, this duality in visual response is akin to the inverse relationship that
Deleuze outlines between God and monad and their mathematical relationships to infinity. In
the process of looking inwards, as previously described, there is a visual sense of “one”,
precipitating from the “multiple” in a manner that can be visualized mathematically as an
infinite numerator (multiple) and a finite denominator (one).

Particularly if conceptualized as a human being, Deleuze imparts further addendums
upon the "apex" of the cupola model. He proposes that in the case of the human monad, the
point of the cone might well be thought of as rounded rather than acute; an inserted “concave
surface” representative of a more discrete, yet still “infinitely folded” form\(^ {12}\). This caveat is
important in recognizing the continued existence of folds within the individual monad,
however reduced from the infinite universe it may be. If the apex of the mandala is a human
monad, then it can be represented (according to Deleuze and Leibniz) as the simplest
number; that is, “the inverse, reciprocal, harmonic number... the inverted image of God, the
inverse number of infinity”\(^ {13}\). Likewise, as implied by the allegory of God as 1 over infinity,

\(^{11}\) Ibid., p.124.
\(^{12}\) Ibid., p.124
\(^{13}\) Ibid., p.129
the potential direction of the gaze from the center of the mandala outwards, communicates a boundless broadening of clarity, from the finite to the infinite; the domination of one over all; God.

A second interpretation of the mandala form takes into account the “actual physiology of the eye, itself a mandala”14 and expands upon the implications of this parallel to notions of human consciousness. In relation to the human monad, this second model can be unpacked in a manner that parallels a philosophy of the body addressed by Deleuze in *The Fold*. In “The Two Floors”, Deleuze expands upon the importance of the body as a possession of each conceivable monad. He states that among other requirements, “each individual monad possesses a body that cannot be separated from it”15. The monad's possession of a body constitutes a primary fold, because as Deleuze states, “to posses is to fold”16. Significantly, there are dominated monads that, despite possessing their own bodies, work together to compose more complex aggregate forms. The human body is one such example. Despite each monad possessing its own body - a cell for instance - it is necessary that groups of monads cooperate to subsequently compose increasingly dominant arrangements of monads; from cell, to organ, to body. The unity of grouped monads in this instance cannot be guaranteed merely by the proximity one monad to another. There is another, more cogent rationale behind the grouping of monads under this necessary process of domination. Deleuze first makes reference to this notion in his assertion that “masses of monads are inseparable from infinities of material parts to which they belong...these material parts make up the organic composition of a body, whose vinculum...assures its specific

16 Ibid., 110
unity”\textsuperscript{17}. By introducing the concept of vinculum, Deleuze identifies the force that ensures cooperation among masses of monads in a more substantial sense than mere proximity.

Leibniz describes vinculum in the clearest detail in his letters to Bartholomäus Des Bosses (1712-1716). According to Leibniz, vinculum is a “substantial chain”, which explains how “simple substances can come together to compose a genuine composite substance”\textsuperscript{18}. He argues that complete substances cannot be composed of monads alone, because monads constitute “not something one per se, but only a mere aggregate, unless some substantial chain is added.”\textsuperscript{19}. Leibniz finds it necessary to incorporate the notion of vinculum, or substantial chain, when one considers that monads themselves cannot perceive their true geometrical relations to each other. Rather, it is God who can perceive “the reality of relations and of truth”\textsuperscript{20}. As such, it is within God's capacity to impose vinculum upon monads that He perceives truthfully to be of similar appetites, and optimal compatibility. Once superadded by God, Leibniz claims, vinculum arises from “the unity of the passive power of the monads”\textsuperscript{21}. He notes that vinculum itself is not a soul, “it is in perpetual flux”, while the “soul stays the same, remaining the same subject”\textsuperscript{22}. Vinculum as the source of cohesion among monads is imperative to the notion of dominated and dominating monads precisely because monads, as parts of bodies, should no more touch each other than souls do.

With this understanding of vinculum, and the aggregate configuration of dominated monads within dominant monads, the relevance of the mandala form to the structure of the

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 113
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 201
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 199
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 198
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 198
human “organ of sight”\textsuperscript{23} becomes more readily apparent. The main stylistic feature of the mandala, the center of a circle, acts in a similar fashion to the pupil of the human eye, which “receives light and projects its images outward”\textsuperscript{24}. According to Western psychotherapists, the center of the mandala, by way of imitating the human pupil, is also akin to the foveal blind spot in the eye. This blind spot acts as a connector from the eye into “the visual system of the brain”, so that “by going out through the center, you are going into the brain”\textsuperscript{25}. The biological emphasis of this analogy privileges the notion of unifying structural cooperation, or vinculum, among the internal sections of the mandala, constituting a functional biological whole. The presupposition that the mandala's center may lead by extension towards another cooperative body part is also contingent upon the mandala's components having significant relationships to one another.

The notion of a broader corporeality leads us to a third related model of interpretation of the mandala. This model, concerned with the nature of the greater “mind-body continuum”\textsuperscript{26}, is derived from Hindu and Buddhist explorations of “divine inspiration” as a means to greater “psychophysical coordination and harmony”\textsuperscript{27}. The pursuit of harmony between the psychological and physical human faculties within the domain of perception is a theme that is carefully addressed by Deleuze in \textit{The Fold}, including certain revisions to the initial work of Leibniz. Deleuze acknowledges the criticism of Leibniz for having too broad a notion of harmony, and the assertion that the Leibnizian conception of harmony does little

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 10
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 10
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 11
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 11
more than operate as “a synonym of perfection”\textsuperscript{28}. To the contrary, however, Deleuze proceeds in his chapter to defend the complexity of Leibniz’s harmony, ultimately defending the concept as a complex process that begins with the creation of accord.

“ Accord” is used in the Deleuzian sense to describe the achievement of clear perception, wherein a monad apprehends connections between the “differential relations” that surround it in the plenum universe\textsuperscript{29}. In its “own portion of the world or in its clear zone”, each monad perceives clearly those stimuli with which it can forge relationships or “accords”\textsuperscript{30}. Meanwhile, the remaining, undifferentiated stimuli make up the unclear majority of the universe, perceived dimly “in a state of detached dizziness” by the particular monad\textsuperscript{31}. Deleuze explains in “The New Harmony” that perception will be different for each monad in the universe because each monad synthesizes its surrounding stimuli differently. By Deleuze's description, “major and perfect accords”, or “harmony”, occurs on the rare occasions that perfect, dynamic accords are created which are “integrated in a pleasure that can be continued, prolonged...that give us the force to go further and further”\textsuperscript{32}. It is clear that Deleuze holds the concept in high esteem, referring to martyrs and saints as likely subjects of the phenomenon. This description of “harmony” bears likeness to the coveted state under Hindu and Buddhist conceptions of the mandala as a tool for “elevating mundane perceptions”\textsuperscript{33}. Through the repetition of forms, and through the disciplined practice of mandala drawings, the meditative benefits of “psychophysical coordination” are contingent upon agreement between elements of the mind and the physical body. The ability to create

\textsuperscript{28} Gilles Deleuze, “The New Harmony”, in The Fold (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p.128
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., p.130.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 130
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 131
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 131
and perceive such agreement, the creation of accord, is thus directly correlated to the notion of harmony and perfect accord advocated by Deleuze.

Within popular discourse, identification of the mandala as a visual relation between the self and the infinite is abundant. As a prolific figure in Western psychology, Jung's enduring fixation with this form helps us to place notions of unfolding and unfolding aesthetics in their rightful place within popular discourse, bringing Deleuzian and Leibnizian conceptions into conversations with interdisciplinary contemporary dialogues. In his own account of his engagement with the mandala, Jung wrote self-reflexively, “the self, I thought was like the monad which I am, and which is my world. The mandala represents this monad, and corresponds to the microcosmic nature of the psyche”\textsuperscript{34}. Whether contemporary subjects find themselves in theistic contemplation of God's role in the infinite universe, or in the secular science of psychology, the significance of the mandala remains cogent, “[a] whole being - actively at work”\textsuperscript{35}.


\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., p.3
Diagrams:

Figure 1

Mandala: compacted cupola
top-view

Figure 2

Infinite
Vinculum
Dominant Monad
Dominated Monads
Selections from “The Red Book”: C.G. Jung (1914-1930)
Systema mundi polius.
Bibliography


