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PART ONE

Chapter One Introduction

1.1 The Circle's Captivating Qualities

What are the integral qualities of the circle which enable it to capture and hold one's attention for several years? It is, after all, just a simple shape. The answer lies precisely in this simplicity, which allows such free rein for the imagination. The blank slate provided by the lack of detail leads to any number of associations and thoughts which are as interesting or as dull as the imagination dictates, thereby conferring on it the powers of the imagination which are the true source of the shape's captivating qualities. This research is thus concerned not only with the circle, but also with what it has led people to imagine, to conjure and create. Why, out of the simple shapes available, is the circle so fascinating as a research focus? Why not the triangle or square?

The historical enthusiasm held by human beings for the shapes of each of the circle, triangle and square can be identified in the forms of Stonehenge, the pyramids of Egypt and Machu Pichu, and the rectangular Acropolis. The sheer creative energy invested in the design and execution of Stonehenge indicates dedication and conviction, and the imagination involved in its creation could well be matched by modern speculation regarding its intended purpose and method of construction. A similar degree of interest continues to surround the construction of the pyramids, the method of which likewise baffles the minds of modern archaeologists, historians and tourists. Rectangular buildings tend to be less perplexing, with the possible exception of the aesthetics and logic of multi-storey car park design.

The power of the three shapes to captivate the imagination is not limited by time or scale. Their forms continue to grace architectural designs and, in recent years, all

three have lent their properties to the comparatively tiny tea bag. Having established that the shapes can be intriguing to people from all walks of life, and raised more questions than provided answers in the process, the next step in the search for what is so special about the circle looks to the properties which the three shapes are able to represent.

The square's four straight lines of equal length, together with its four corners of equal angle, permit it to represent any concept which consists of four equally significant points. The cardinal directions of a compass can be associated with its corners, and it can also represent the alchemical elements of earth, air, fire and water. Whatever is divisible by four, the square can represent.

The triangle likewise symbolises anything divisible by three, and is a valuable architectural structure due to its strength, as made visibly apparent in its duplicated form throughout the Eiffel Tower's ironwork. It represents the Christian trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit well, as it does the yogic balance of mind, body and spirit. Any other spiritual concept which is dependent on an equal balance of three parts can be similarly represented by an equilateral triangle. The acute angles of its corners also lend themselves well to arrows indicating direction, hinting at potential movement.

The circle rivals the triangle's architectural strength, and, though the square readily represents the points of the compass, the navigational tool's form is most commonly circular. In addition to representing associations which are attributed to the triangle and square, the circle is able to symbolise qualities such as unity, infinity, equality, cycles, total balance, symmetry and integrity in its identical appearance from any rotational perspective, and the potential to move in any direction, as opposed to pointing to just three or four. The circle thus possesses the potential to represent more than either the square or triangle, and hence it generates the greatest enthusiasm for this

author due to the increased exploratory and creative opportunities it provides for one's imagination. A concise tour of its extant associations will explain how just one of these provides an expansive focus for research.

1.2 The Associations of the Circle Unfold

The apparent supremacy of the circle's significance is not an original view. Cézanne believed that forms in nature should be represented "... by the cylinder, sphere and cone," (Cézanne, 1941:234) by which he meant that, according to his artistic beliefs, the shapes found in nature could and should be reduced to these basic shapes. The results of this dictum's execution awarded him not only respect as a pioneer of modern art, but also the highest praise of Read, who writes that

... the course of modern art is inconceivable without the achievement and example of Cézanne, and no other artist stands in such a significant relationship to his successors.
(Read,1995:20)

His importance to the course of modern art is not questioned here, but rather the degree of truth in his belief that everything in nature should be represented by circular forms. From a two dimensional perspective Cézanne's reasoning appears to contain a certain degree of logic. A cylinder from its front elevation resembles a rectangle, as does the cone a triangle. Although such a reductionist opinion could be considered to be an over-simplification of the complexity of nature, conversely, it might also be that it has not been taken far enough.

The basis of Cézanne's theory hints at a much more complicated possibility, the content of which is well illustrated by the Pop Art of Lichtenstein. His style of employing enlarged dots of colour to mimic the printing techniques of comic strips, as in the example of *Drowning Girl* shown in Plate 1.2.1 (a section of which is enlarged



Plate 1.2.1: *Drowning Girl*, (1963)

Lichtenstein, R.

Acrylic on canvas

(Hughes, 1996:352)



Plate 1.2.2: [Detail of] *Drowning Girl*, (1963)

Lichtenstein, R.

Acrylic on canvas

(Hughes, 1996:352)

for illustrative purposes in Plate 1.2.2), means that the shapes contained within the image are comprised of hundreds of small circles. On this scale, the mathematical principle of triangular and square numbers becomes clear, as demonstrated by Figure 1.2.1 below.

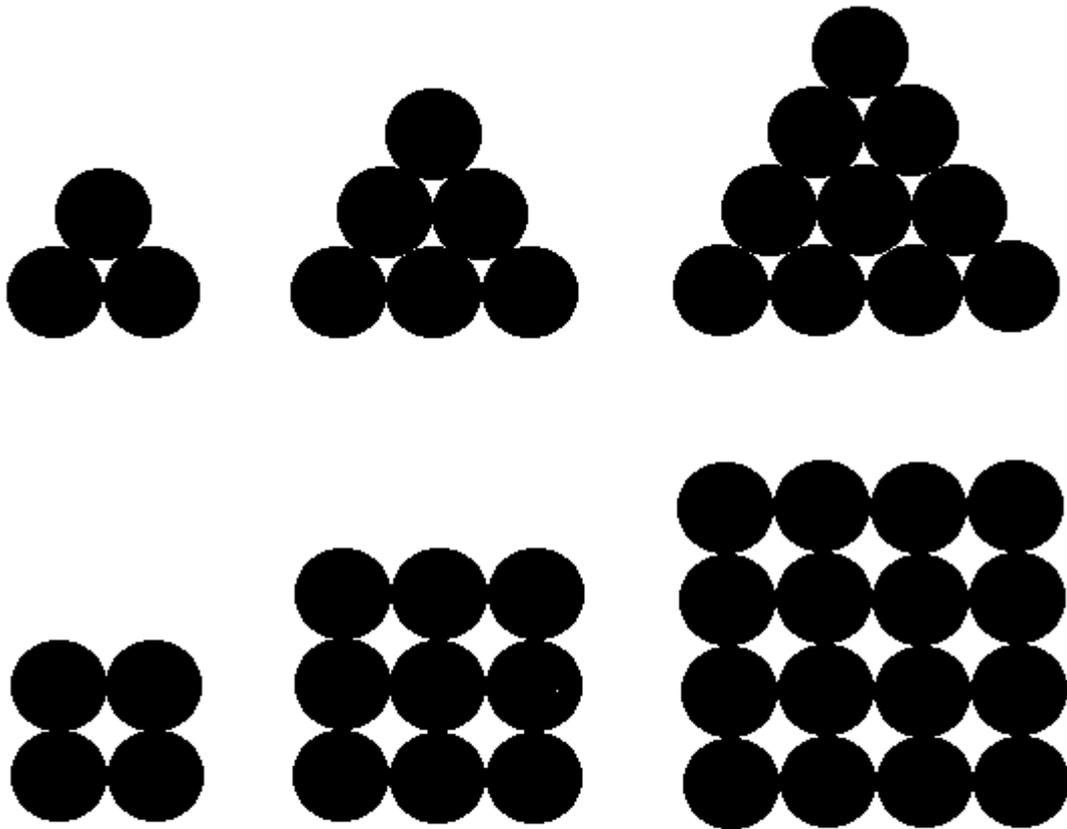


Figure 1.2.1: Illustration of Triangular and Square Numbers in Circles

Three circles placed appropriately can form a triangle, as can six, ten, and so on following the mathematical series. With each increase in the triangular number of circles comes an increase in the size and linear definition of the resulting shape. The same principle, as demonstrated above, applies to squares. Four, nine and sixteen

represented as appropriately placed circles are also able to create increasingly large and clearly defined squares.

However, this progression from Cézanne's belief is apparently flawed in the assumption that it would have to be circles which represent the numbers, triangular or square. Tiny triangles or squares could make the same shapes with a similar degree of accuracy. This is countered by the problem of attempting to create a circle from either triangles or squares. The results would be as visually unsatisfactory as a jagged circle drawn with the pixels of a computer screen, such as those illustrated in Figure 1.2.1. It would take a high starting number of either tiny squares or triangles in combination with a small image to create an illusion sustainable to the human eye, which tends to be a generous instrument of measurement.

This leads on to a second possibility to explore. From the perspective of a person with little formal scientific training, it appears that there is some scientific support for the notion that everything could be comprised of circles. This requires developing the concept of all shapes being composed of tiny circles, as illustrated in Lichtenstein's paintings, and reducing it to the scale of sub-atomic particles. Assuming that an electron's spin does not follow a path with any corners (and that sub-atomic particles therefore spin on circular axes) and atoms are the basic component of all things physical, then it would follow that everything is essentially made up of circles. The large dots in Lichtenstein's work thus serve as a simple illustration of the sub-atomic structure of his subjects.

The theory that the circle might be the most significant shape for any or all of existence requires some consideration of its practical application. Is there any evidence to support it? The next step in the imaginative process is therefore to turn to life itself to seek physical affirmation of the shape's importance.

1.3

The Importance of the Circle to Life

Among the places at which one might commence a search for circles significant for life, perhaps the most obvious is the start of life itself. From here the logical progression is to follow circles through the evolutionary process and human growth. The cycle is completed with the circles which continue to be as important now as they were for the start of life on Earth. The following explanation of the imaginative process reflects this order.

The widely accepted theories of evolution which were arrived at independently by Darwin and Wallace (Clark, 1996) suggest that all of life on Earth has evolved from the first life forms. The imaginative journey then begins in the primeval pools of warm, nitrogen-rich water in which, according to this theory of evolution, the first single celled organisms lived. The radiolarian skeleton photographed in Plate 1.3.1 shows the clearly circular form which is common to many single celled organisms, and is thus likely to represent the form of Earth's first life.

Abbreviating the evolutionary story to exclude the millions of years which describes the progression from these to people, the historical significance of our slimy ancestors is echoed in vital elements of the human body to this day. Essential oxygen is carried to all parts of the body in red blood cells which are circular in shape. Bones combine strength with low weight thanks to the circular structure of their hollow interiors, and humans are totally spherical for the short period of time after conception whilst microscopic blastocysts, as can be seen in the third cleavage of embryonic cells shown in Plate 1.3.2. On a still tinier scale, deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) contains all genetic information about a person, and could therefore be said to contain all the physical information required to describe a human being. It is circular in shape from two perspectives, at either end of its spiral form, which is illustrated in plate 1.3.3.

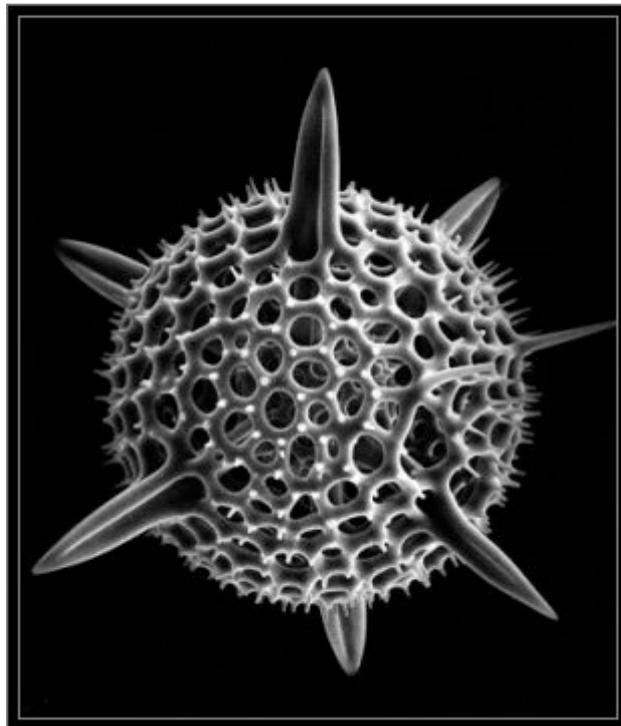


Plate 1.3.1: *Radiolarian1*, (2002)

Columbia University

Photograph [online image]

(Robinson, 2002)

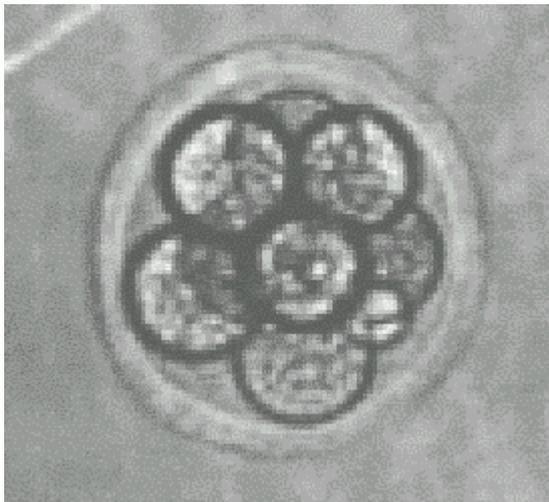


Plate 1.3.2: *Cleava52*, (2002)

O'Day, D. H.

Photograph [online image]

(O'Day: 2002)

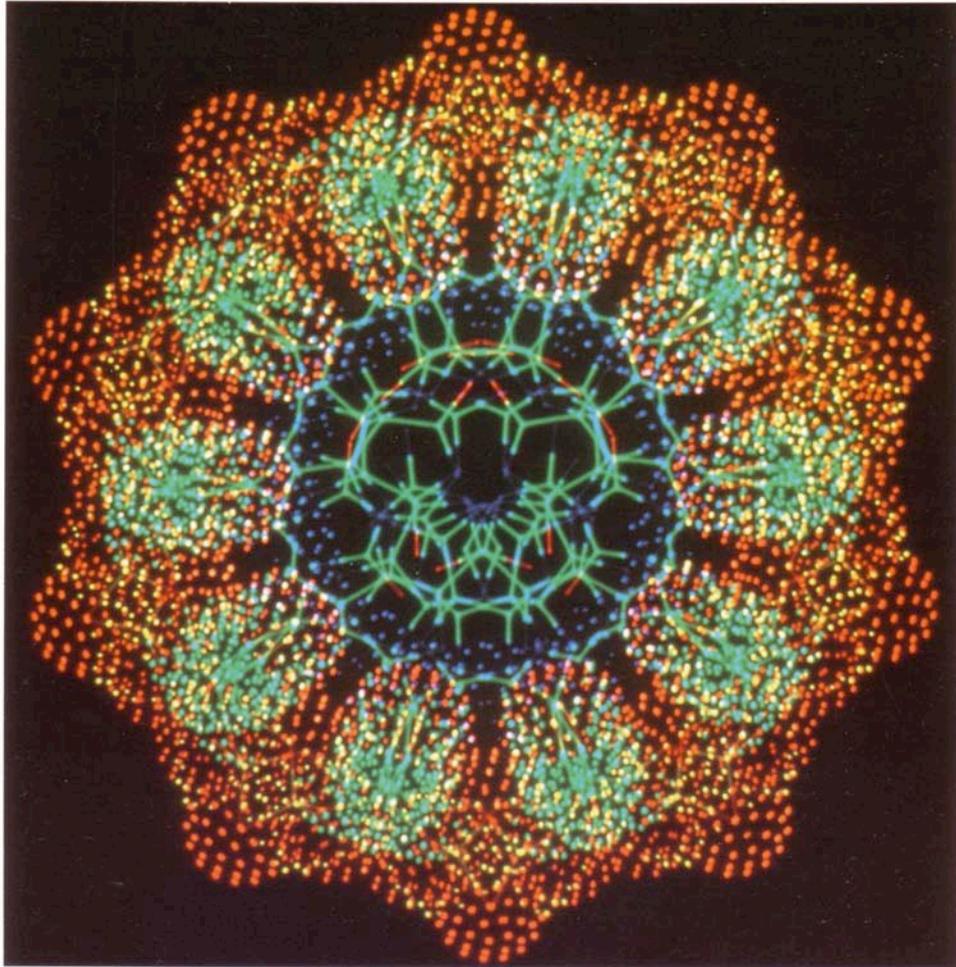


Plate 1.3.3: *Computer Simulation of Spiraling DNA Ladder as Seen from the Top,*

(undated)

Langridge, R.

Computer Simulation

(Briggs, 1994:97)

Progressing on from the microscopic aspects of human life to the merely small, the umbilical chord which carries all nourishment to an embryo is circular in cross section and leaves a roughly circular scar at the navel as a permanent reminder of this. Following birth, nourishment continues to arrive in circular form through nipples on rounded breasts or the teats and bottles which mimic them. The teething process allows for the introduction of yet more circular sources of food to the diet such as fruits, vegetables, seeds, pulses and grains, many of which if not spherical are circular in cross section. The flowers which produce the seeds themselves are also commonly circular, as are many of the plates and bowls on which humans regularly serve food.

The dependence on water of these (and all other) life forms is made evident by the method of searching for life on other planets, which is to look for signs of water. If no water is present, it is assumed that there can be no life present. This brings the path of the imaginative process back to the circles which are as important now as they were to the first primitive organisms. To link water with circles requires only the sight of a single droplet. It takes the most physically efficient shape on its downward journey, this being the form of a sphere. From here, if it lands in a body of water, it creates ripples which travel outwards in concentric circles from the point of impact, as shown in Plate 1.3.4.

Water not only supports life, but in the case of people, comprises more than seventy per cent of the body's physical mass. This statistic brings the moon's influence into the picture of the circle's influence on life. Though they cannot be seen in great detail with the naked eye, even its craters are circular, as can be seen in Plate 1.3.5. Due to its mass, the power of its gravitational pull is such that from its great distance it can control the female reproductive cycle. The oceans which cover the majority of the planet are also moved in tides by this important circular object. Plants, too, are affected



Plate 1.3.4: *Droplet*, (undated)

University College London

Photograph [online image]

(UCL Chemistry Department:2004)



Plate 1.3.5: *Gibbous Moon*, (1996)

Oates, M.

Photograph [online image]

(Oates, 1996)

by the moon, shrinking and swelling in time with the tides and tending to grow faster during its full phase than any other (Downer, 1999). Given these credentials, there would seem little shame in being labelled a lunatic. If the moon does what it will with the sea, why should there be any embarrassment in crazed behaviour under its apparent influence?

Perhaps because fewer people are scared of the light than the dark, its heavenly counterpart, the sun, has not been attributed such sinister attributes even though its extended heat on the head is far more likely to make one unwell. This heat, coupled with its light, causes plants to photosynthesise and grow, and enables life to exist as we know it. The sun's effect on the oceans is that of evaporation, leading to clouds and then rain, completing yet another circle within the imaginative process.

Finally, of course, is the Earth which supports such a diverse range of life forms. Its spherical form was proven by its movement in relation to the sun, moon and stars long before anybody was able to see this with their own eyes as clearly as astronauts. The crew of *Apollo 17* took the picture shown in Plate 1.3.6 by way of visual evidence of this fact. Certainly, sunlight and water are essential to life on Earth, but without the planet, its life would quite literally be nowhere.

With a long list of profound representative qualities which combine with the circle's dominance among the forms of important, natural objects, it comes as little surprise that the shape has been associated with a number of powers throughout the ages. Some, like Cézanne, believe that everything reduces to circles. Others associate the circle with more spiritual properties, with examples such as the protection afforded by the casting of a magic circle in witchcraft (Horne, 2001), and the healing powers believed of Native American medicine wheels.



Plate 1.3.6: *AS17-148-22726*. (1972)

Crew of Apollo 17

Photograph [online image]

(Fraser, 2001)

It is because of the circle's apparent ubiquity that this last association of healing is most intriguing. The cultures which have attributed spiritual healing powers to circles are themselves widespread throughout the world and time, as noted, for example, by the psychologist Jung (1971), who states that

We know from experience that the protective circle, the mandala, is the traditional antidote for chaotic states of mind.

(Jung, 1971:10)

In this instance he is discussing the occurrence of the circle as one of the mind's strategies for attaining mental order in relation to the visions of a Swiss mystic, Brother Klaus. Though Jung (1971) refers here to circles appearing in such visions throughout the world, the same statement could equally readily be applied to the shape's common global association with spiritual healing.

The questions of why the circle is consistently associated with spiritual healing, and why it is the circle rather than any other shape, warrant further exploration and provide the motivation for this study's research. It is therefore an eagerness to gain greater insight into how and why circles have earned this reputation and perform this function which provide its rationale. The adaptation of this rationale from a lifetime's quest into an appropriate structure for academic research formulates the questions raised above into the following aims of the study, which are:

1. To trace the trajectory of the circle as a central symbol within key belief systems in relation to its association with spiritual healing.
2. To document the spiritual healing associations ascribed to the circle as a visual art form within the primary contexts of key belief systems.

3. To undertake a case study of a specific healing context involving the circle as a visual art form, as a basis for exploring why the circle, above all other shapes, is associated with spiritual healing.

1.5 Methodology

The focus of the research directed by these aims thus falls into the area indicated in the centre of the Venn diagram (see Figure 1.5.1). At this central point, the subjects of art documentation and history, architecture, art therapy, psychology, alternative healing, medicine, spirituality, sociology and anthropology overlap.

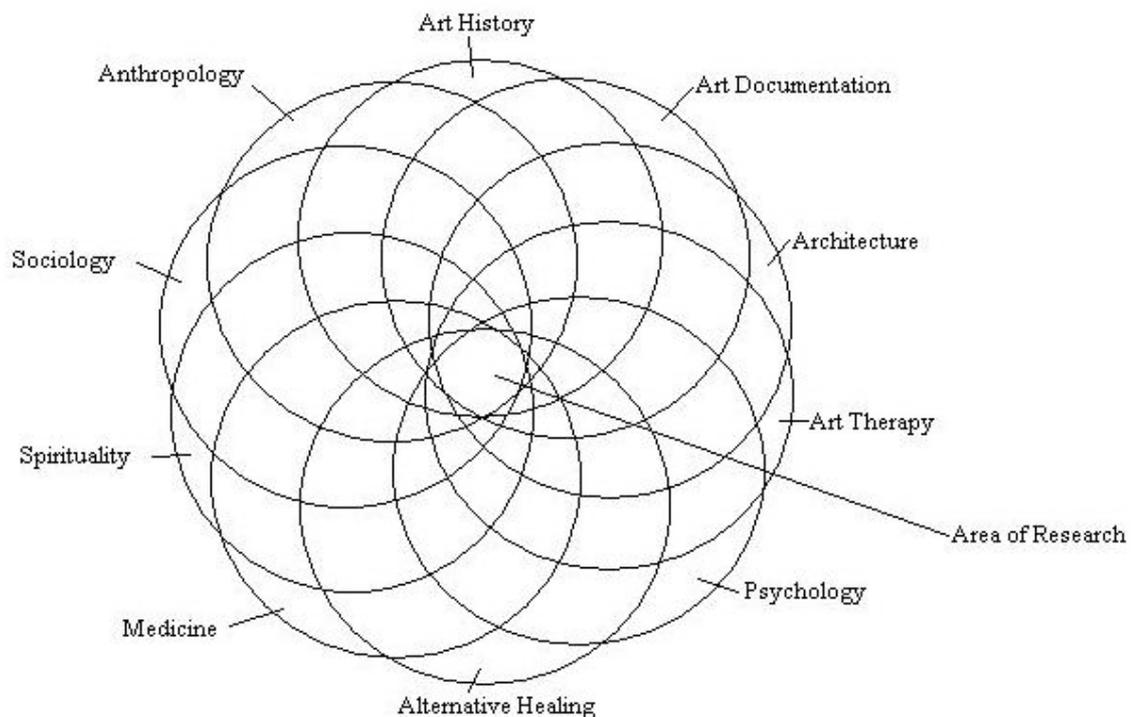


Figure 1.5.1: Venn Diagram (not to scale) Illustrating Research Area

The aims of the study also suggest the logical structure of the research, which will be implemented in three phases. The initial phase will take the form of an overview, which traces the circle's global and historical spiritual healing associations. In order to take the research to the next level of specificity, the second phase of the

study will narrow the field to circles within the recognised spiritual traditions in which it is or has been associated with healing. It is from the insight(s) gained from the exploration of these that the research will progress to its final level of specificity in the form of a case study of a specific healing context involving the circle as a visual art form. Figure 1.5.2 presents the three phases.

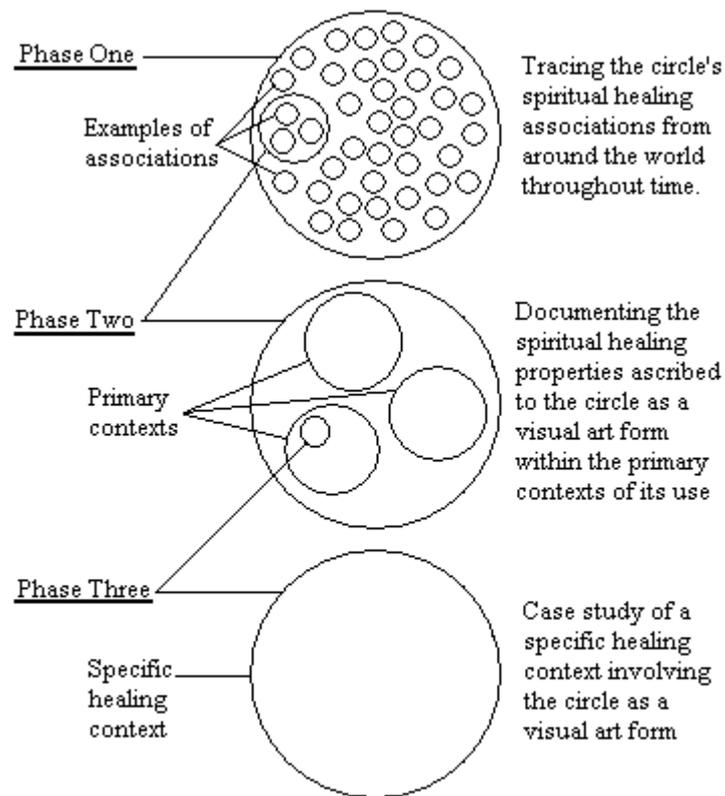


Figure 1.5.2: The Three Phases of the Research

The methodology for Phase One will be to collect data from existing literature sources, both printed and online¹. The rationale for this choice is that it is an efficient means of gathering information which will readily provide the general overview

¹ The problem of providing a page number for a reference cited from an online source is addressed throughout this thesis by the accurate consideration of each web page as a published document. The author and date which direct the reader to bibliographical details thus obviates the need for page numbers in such a case.

required to address the study's first aim. Creating such a global scan from what is claimed to be an enormous volume of material raises the issue of the method of selecting examples for inclusion. There is a strong random element to the distribution of associations, and the complete content of the material can neither be known nor encompassed in this circumstance.

Hence, in order to map the literature with direction and purpose, examples will be selected on the basis of availability, and past experience informed by intuition. In combination, these factors will filter relevant literature sources, initially through their application to the reading of titles and tables of contents. This intuitive, experientially informed sampling does not pretend to be scientific – and nor is it. Nevertheless, in terms of demonstrating reach, it is considered likely to afford an efficient method of identifying illustrative instances.

Upon completion of the study's first aim, the examples included in this trace will be employed to establish which are the primary contexts of the circle's use for spiritual healing for the purposes of the second phase of the research. This selection will be effected by the challenge of each context presented in the trace to fulfil each of the criteria of *spiritual, healing, circle* and *visual art form*.

The same method of data collection will remain in practice for the documentation of the circle's associations with spiritual healing in Phase Two. Due to the increased depth of investigation, in addition to noting the consistency of the content of the consulted literature in each context, a means of establishing whether the evidence provided in the consulted literature sources corresponds with contemporary experience is also desirable. Such corroboration can be achieved efficiently via contact with current spiritual practice within each context, since practitioner experiences will be either more or less consistent with the consulted literature.

This corroboration will therefore take the form of personal communications such as conversations and public workshops, which, due to the nature of identification of such opportunities, will be accessed as and when the opportunity arises. Workshops attended will be recorded in note form and documented after the event. This avoids copyright issues from recording public speech, yet will allow for adequate concentration during the workshops and permit the inclusion of comment on and analysis of the direct experience gained.

The case study in Phase Three will be chosen from the contexts studied in Phase Two. Since inconsistency in the consulted literature necessarily leads to a situation in which experience differs from this literature's content, a context of the circle's association with spiritual healing, about which there exists a considerable body of literature which tends to express consistency of content, is not likely to contribute significant new material regarding this association. In comparison, an example whose public acceptance has varied throughout its history, the existing literature for which likewise expresses inconsistency, though is sufficient in volume to provide adequate material for the purposes of the research, is much more likely to yield fresh insight. Such incongruence has the potential to serve as a highlighter for the associations which have been overlooked in literature on the subject of the circle's spiritual healing associations published to date.

The ideal case study would therefore be an occurrence of the circle which fits the description of visual art form, has been associated with spiritual healing, documented, received an inconsistent public response over time, and about which there exists an adequate literature base from which to develop a case study. The data collection for Phase Three will employ whichever of the above methods will provide the most appropriate information to address the third aim. Since the given method of

selecting a case study leads to a situation which requires no further corroboration with contemporary practice, as the inconsistency is established in Phase Two, it will therefore be literature review which will provide the material for the final phase of the research.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

A number of the study's key terms are somewhat abstract in nature and thus open to interpretation. A range of interpretations of the words in question are neither denied nor disputed. However, for ease of interpretation, the operational definitions are presented here. Definitions are taken from *Chambers 21st Century Dictionary* (Robinson, 1999) and *The Compact Oxford English Dictionary* (Bradley *et al*, 1994).

1.6.1 Spiritual Healing

Spiritual healing is the first term which needs to be addressed, and requires a number of clarifications to complete its definition. The majority of these relate to the word *spiritual*. Of the several possible meanings of the word, those to be used within the context of this study are: relating, belonging or referring to the soul, spirit, mind, or intellect, and religious, sacred, holy or divine (Robinson, 1999). As the terms *soul*, *spirit* and *mind* are ethereal in nature, their definitions are in turn necessary to gain a complete understanding of the word *spiritual*.

Firstly, Robinson's (1999) definition of the word *soul* refers directly back to *spiritual*, asserting that it is

... the spiritual, non-physical part of someone or something which is often regarded as the source of individuality, personality, morality, will, emotions and intellect, and which is

widely believed to survive in some form after the death of the body ... (Robinson, 1999:1339).

The definition of *spirit* which is applied to the word *spiritual* is almost identical to that of *soul*. Indeed, referring to the same dictionary finds another reference to “an independent part of a person, widely believed to survive the body after death,” although further to this is a description of “the animating or vitalizing force that motivates, invigorates or energizes someone or something” (Robinson, 1999:1354).

The *mind* may also refer to the *soul*. It is not a physical part of the brain, but the name given to the considered origin of a person’s thoughts, feelings, creative reasoning and intellect (Robinson, 1999). The word *spiritual* may refer to any or all of these definitions throughout the thesis. The explanation of its use in conjunction with *healing* will follow clarification of this second term.

This word’s origin will play a significant part in its interpretation. The verb *to heal*, and the adjectives *whole*, and *holy* all stem from the same Old Saxon root (Bradley *et al*, 1994); a fact which is reflected in the chosen definition. *Healing* can, in the light of this evidence, be a *making whole*, which in itself is an act that is *holy*. Throughout the thesis, *healing* will therefore mean any return towards a state of wholeness or an ideal state of being. In terms of physical health, wholeness will mean a state of good physical health. In terms of spiritual health, wholeness need not lead to good physical health, and potentially quite the contrary. This apparent paradox can be better understood when it is considered that anything alive is progressively dying. From this perspective death ends the physical dying process and hence can be considered to be a healed state.

The first interpretation of *spiritual healing* is thus physical or emotional *healing* in a *spiritual* manner, and will apply throughout the thesis. (This compares with *healing*

in a conventional fashion with medicines such as antibiotics.) The second interpretation to be employed throughout the thesis is the *healing of the spirit*.

1.6.2 Visual Art Form

Whilst it has the potential to constitute a lengthy thesis in itself, the term *visual art form* ought also to be defined. This is for the purposes of this study rather than as an argument to end all debates on the subject. *Visual art form* will thus be taken to mean any permanent or semi-permanent visual representation in either two or three dimensions. The circles which constitute the *visual art forms* referred to in this thesis will adhere to these material definitions closely, excluding those of a metaphoric nature, such as a circle of friends.

1.7 Organisation of the Study

The thesis is divided into three parts. The first and second phase of the research comprise Part One, the third phase of the research comprises Part Two, and the final analysis and conclusion of the thesis comprises Part Three. Within this structure, the aims of the study are addressed in numerical order, and the chapters are ordered by their thematic links in the interest of readability. Chapter Two answers the study's first aim and, from its trace of the circle's global spiritual healing associations, the primary cultural contexts to be studied in the second phase of the research are identified as Tibetan Buddhism, Shamanism and Western Spirituality.

These thus constitute the subjects of Chapters Three, Four and Five respectively. Tibetan Buddhism commences this second phase of the research due to its contextual explanation of the term *mandala*, which is essential to the understanding of much Western commentary on the research topic since the term's introduction to the English vocabulary. Chapter six compares the circle's associations documented in each of the

three preceding chapters, and identifies the visions of Hildegard of Bingen as the most appropriate example of the circle's documented relationship with spiritual healing to be analysed in the case study of Phase Three.

Part Two thus commences with Chapter Seven's introduction to the context of Hildegard of Bingen's visions. In Chapter Eight the associations which Hildegard ascribes to the circle in her first book of visions are documented, followed by Chapter Nine's documentation of the same in her second and third books of visions. Part Three commences with Chapter Ten's examination of Hildegard's visions for insight into the rationale underlying the circle's association with spiritual healing. This is followed by the comparison of the properties associated with the circle by Hildegard with those documented in the chapters on circles in Tibetan Buddhism, Shamanism and Western Spirituality. The thesis concludes with Chapter Eleven; an explanation of the implications of the research and suggestions for further study.

Chapter Two The Circumnavigation of Spiritual Healing

Circles

2.1 Following the Line of the Circle Around the World

The ubiquity of the circle's spiritual healing associations was briefly introduced in Chapter One. This chapter's purpose is to probe this ubiquity further in a trace of the spiritual healing associations of the circle around the world and throughout time, in answer to the study's first aim. It will serve as an introduction to some of these associations, and take the form of a scan of the subject circling the globe. This overview is intended to be broad rather than deep, and its sampling will thus map the reach but not the extent of the circle's ascribed spiritual healing associations. The identification of the primary cultural contexts in which the circle is associated with spiritual healing will follow this trace, in accordance with the study's methodology.

The random element of the distribution of examples denies a logical order for their presentation. Although it would be feasible to arrange them by continent, date or relevance, the preference for a fluid text decides that they shall instead be presented in an order dictated by their thematic links. This almost inevitably rules out commencing with the earliest example and finishing with the most recent, thereby eliminating an obvious starting point. However, such endlessness is one of the features of the line which describes a circle, and the nearest description of its start or finish is its line's weakest point. The trace will therefore adhere to this model, and begin with some of the examples which are least strongly associated with spiritual healing, following the line of the circle from there.

The association thus chosen as the circle's beginning is that of circles used for protection. According to the description of healing presented in Chapter One's

definitions, protection bears the same relationship to healing as preventative medicine does to its curative counterpart. Whilst healing is defined as an act which brings about a state of wholeness and therefore health, protection maintains the wholeness which already exists. This does not deny its importance, as anyone destined for a country for which vaccinations are recommended will testify. Who, after all, would want to place themselves in a position which is likely to make one unwell when there is a viable alternative? Circles used for spiritual protection are thus the spiritual healing equivalents of conventional inoculations and the more holistic Echinacea.

2.2 Circles of Spiritual Protection

The circle is a particularly suitable shape to employ for protection thanks to its rounded edge which has no corners, protuberances or any sharp feature on which one might injure oneself. This feature makes it ideal for physical protection in the forms of bubble wrap, polystyrene and even the giant-sized balls made popular recently as seats or exercise aids. This physical attribute translates into a spiritual property with no reported loss of function.

Perhaps the best known example of spiritually protective circles is the circle of salt. Its absorption into and acceptance within mainstream culture is demonstrated (with perhaps the emphasis on *demon*) by its inclusion in an episode of the X-files (Wright, 2004) for the purpose of protecting against zombies or other, more scientifically explicable, threatening characters. All one has to do, apparently, is draw a line of salt around oneself in a circle on the ground and this will ensure that there is no possibility of being lunched upon by this subsection of the undead.

Whilst factual accounts based on personal experience of this tool's efficacy are somewhat limited in number, the same tool is well documented for its employment in witchcraft. The salt is used for its physical properties of purification and, when placed

in the shape of a circle, offers protection to whoever stands within. Whilst salt is clearly significant in this instance due to its associated properties, the circle is made more clearly responsible for the protective properties by its additional uses in witchcraft. One of the fundamental spells which commonly precedes all others is the casting of a protective circle. According to a contemporary witch calling herself WyLdFyRe, the ritually cast circle keeps out negative energy, and will hold in any ritually raised energy until it is time to release it. It will also “provide protection” (Wildfyre, 2002)², as well as create what she describes as a meeting place between the worlds in which communication with the Goddess and God is possible.

First hand experience of the spiritually protective property of the circle is also reported by Pritchard (2001), who has created a course of study teaching the art of astral projection. In the fifth of eight lectures on the topic, he details various methods of protection, one of which is the conjuration of a circle. In his description of this circle’s function, he asserts that it “forms a barrier that stops any evil entity from entering ...” (Pritchard, 2001:5) and that it is drawn using the powers of the imagination in combination with the work of the elementals of nature, claiming that this “makes the circle strong and sustains it” (Pritchard, 2001:5). The course, and its content, is based on his direct experience of astral travel. He has found from this experience that a circle conjured in this manner will keep out all negative entities, as long as they have been dispelled in the first instance. Nevertheless, it is noted that he makes no reference to literature to support the course material and nor does he make any apology for this fact. There is thus no means of confirming or disputing the accuracy of the information without access to relevant experience in the astral.

² The reference to this online document includes the page number in the address provided in bibliographical details. This protocol is employed throughout the thesis.

A significantly greater written lineage supports the circle's use for protection in the form of King Solomon's Seal. The symbol features a geometric star pattern enclosed by a circle, this latter feature credited with enhancing the symbol's attributions of supernatural powers (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1999). The legend, which is found in Christianity, Islam and Judaism, tells of King Solomon praying to God for aid in building a great temple in Jerusalem. God's response was to send the archangel Raphael to deliver "the gift of a magic ring with the power to subdue all demons" (Daniel, Ramer and Wyllie, 1992:37). Providing the symbol on a signet ring doubles the circular content of the seal, effectively making it a circular form carried on a circular form. The *power to subdue all demons* becomes allegorical; the story referring to the wise man (Solomon) building an inner temple and making himself holy and therefore healed, as signalled by the manner of the symbol's delivery. The archangel Raphael is associated with healing not only in other biblical stories about him, but also in his name, which means "God Heals" (Daniel, Ramer and Wyllie, 1992:192).

2.3 Circles in Christianity

God's ability to generate healing is a theme which recurs throughout Christian literature. On occasion, this healing is associated with the circle, as in the case of Hildegard of Bingen. As an Abbess in Twelfth Century Germany she had many psychic visions which she describes as coming from God. She was unwell for a number of years, and attributes a considerable healing effect to the *process* of having her visions recorded in written and visual format, making the illuminations available for all. The form of the circle dominates the illuminations as illustrated by the prime example of Plate 2.3.1 which depicts the nine choirs of angels in concentric rings.

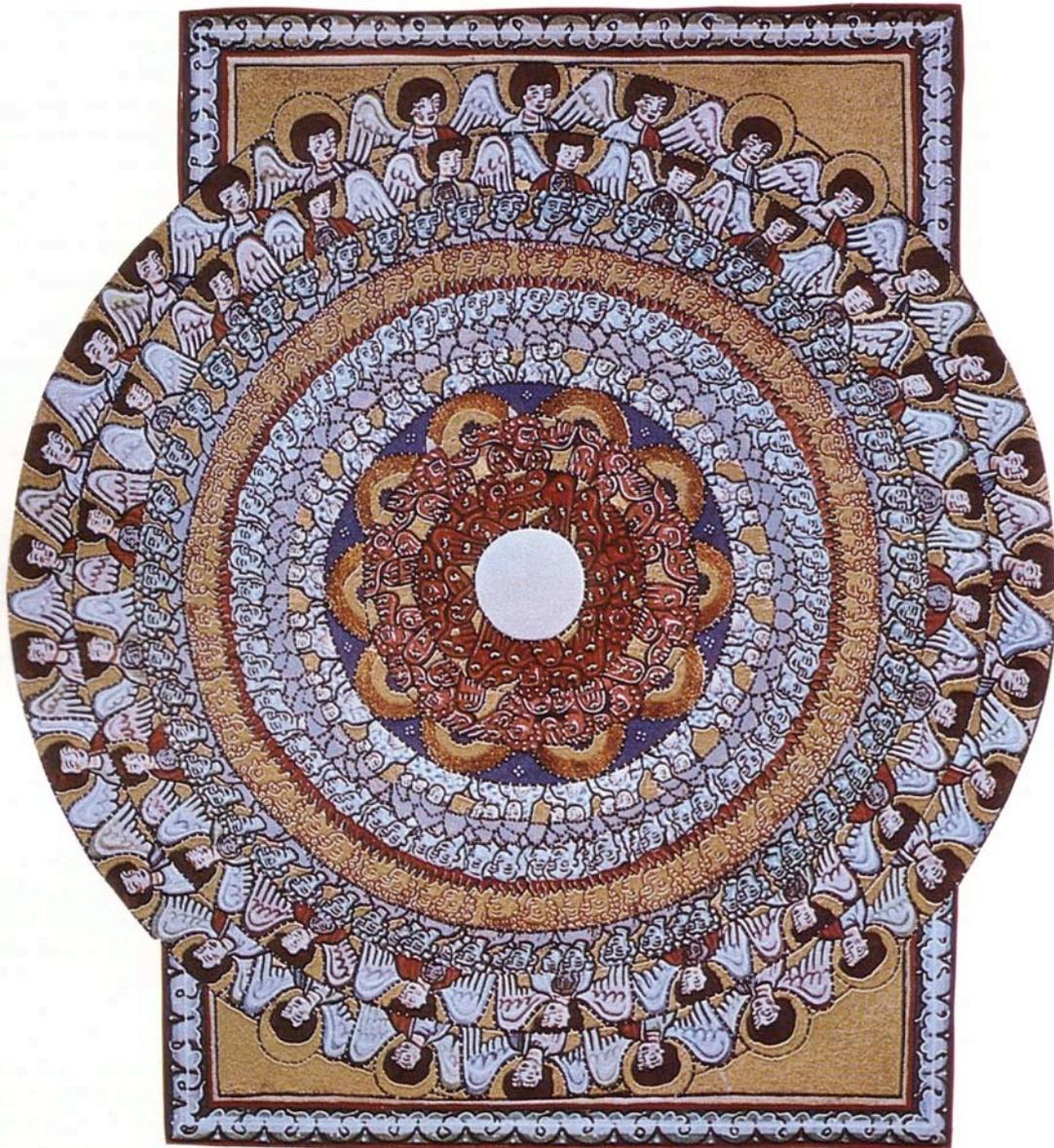


Plate 2.3.1: *The Sixth Vision of the First Part of Scivias* (1141-1151)

Hildegard of Bingen

Mixed media on paper

(Fox, 1985:74)

The benefit gained from such visions might normally be anticipated to be limited to the individual, yet Hildegard's example represents all others particularly well in this global scan, as its healing associations continue to the present day. Fox (1985) thus argues that, through her illuminations, Hildegard "awakens the psyche to the cosmos and thereby offers healing to both" (Fox, 1985:20).

The circle's association with spiritual healing in Christianity extends beyond the occurrence of visions from God. For example, the rose window of the Gothic period was believed by its medieval creators to harness a host of beneficial powers. The light which falls through them was attributed the power to transform the soul in itself. Combined with this, the complex radial structures of the roses are likened to the many paths to "the centre of the soul" (Cowen, 1979:11). Worshipping in the light of a rose window thus offers an almost effortless form of healing. The work of soul transformation is performed by the light on behalf of the worshippers; a feat which is accompanied by a map containing directions to spiritual wholeness.

One of the rose window's contemporary architectural features provides spiritual healing directions which are even easier to follow. Beneath the rose windows of Chartres Cathedral lies a paved labyrinth, shown in Plate 2.3.2. In the Middle Ages, it was walked or crawled as a substitute for pilgrimage to Jerusalem; a certain number of traversals of its path were considered to be equivalent to the journey (Hykel Hunt³). Like an exercise bike for the soul, it offered the pilgrim all the spiritual cleansing without the change in scenery. The reputation of the labyrinth for its association with healing has developed to such an extent that its form currently graces the floors of various hospitals (Westbury, 2001).

³ This reference comes from this author's personal communication in the form of a conversation on 19th June, 2002 with Mary Hykel Hunt, who chooses not to hyphenate her two surnames, which is reflected in her reference here.

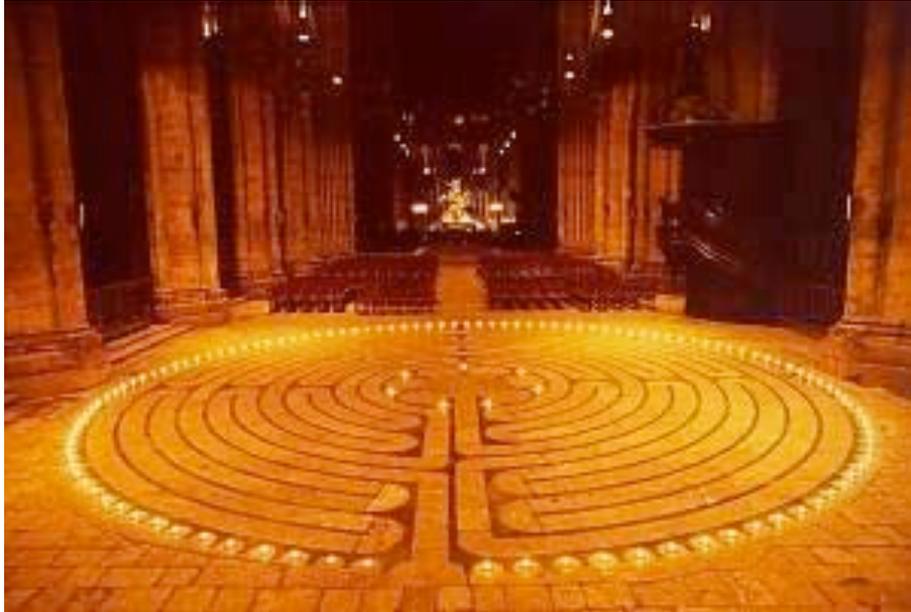


Plate 2.3.2: *ChartresLabyrinth* (date not provided)

Anon.

Photograph [online image]

(McCormack, 2004)

Labyrinths are thus not exclusive to Christianity, but the symbol appears to have been adopted from shamanistic culture, together with elements of its healing association. Given the Church's habit of adopting and adapting indigenous spiritual practices or festivals (such as the pagan fertility celebration at Easter), this need not be surprising. Shamanistic practice is not limited to the Americas; its trans-continental history reveals itself in the origin of the word *shaman*, which is of Russian origin and likely to be derived in itself from Sanskrit (Robinson, 1999).

2.4 Circles in Shamanism

The Shamanism of North America includes two examples of the circle's association with spiritual healing. The first is the very medicine wheel which defines the shamanistic spiritual way of life, which is not merely a tool for healing, but represents everything in existence. As Storm (1972) describes its absolute power and importance, he asserts that

All things are contained within the Medicine Wheel, and all things are equal within it. The Medicine Wheel is the Total Universe. (Storm, 1972:5)

From the perspective of healing as defined in Chapter one, the predominantly circular images of Navajo sand paintings are created for the specific purpose of healing. From the Navajo perspective, sand painting rituals form an integral part of life which is not distinguished within the culture as healing, though the belief is that the redressing of balance will be effected through ritual contact with the image (Gold, 1994).

2.5

Circles in Tibetan Buddhism

Ritual contact with circular art forms is also associated with healing in Tibetan Buddhism. The circular images within this spiritual tradition are, as in the instance of the sand paintings described above, commonly made out of sand on the floor, although this is not an essential element of their construction. Each traditional image or symbol has specific associated qualities, as in that of Plate 2.5.1 which depicts the *Lapis Lazuli Radiance Tathagata*, or the *Medicine Buddha* (Gnosticmode, 2003). It is believed that the act of producing, contemplating and or meditating upon one will bring its properties into one's life. An image symbolising healing will therefore bring this quality to reality when used appropriately.

Within the same tradition, comparable spiritual powers are attributed to prayer wheels, as in that shown in Plate 2.5.2. In this case the circular form is employed as a means of prayer enhancement. A prayer wheel is believed to send to heaven whichever prayer or prayers are written down and placed within it on scrolls. As every physical spin is equal to one verbal recitation of each prayer within, much time is saved on their repetition. It is thus possible to recite and repeat literally hundreds of prayers at a time, depending on one's physical agility. Although the spiritual gains to be made through the use of such a tool seem obvious, Lama Zopa (2003) makes the potential benefits clear when he asserts that

Anyone with a disease such as AIDS or cancer, whether or not they have any understanding of Dharma, can use the prayer wheel for meditation and healing. (Lama Zopa, 2003)



Plate 2.5.1: *Lapis Lazuli Radiance Tathagata* (2003)

Anon.

Online image

(Gnosticmode, 2003)



Plate 2.5.2: *Table Top, Hand Painted Prayer Wheel (2003)*

Anon.

Mixed media [online image]

(Four Gates, 2003)

Given the longevity and constancy of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, it is not surprising to find its considerable influence on the writings of Jung (1971) (1964) (1972) (1973) (1974), who wrote about the circle's healing associations from the perspective of psychology in the twentieth century. The Sanskrit word for circle is *mandala*, which is the term employed in Tibetan Buddhism to describe the sand images mentioned above, and which also features in the title and text of Jung's *Mandala Symbolism* (Jung, 1973).

Contained within *Mandala Symbolism* (Jung, 1973) is an edited chronicle of the case studies which led Jung (1971) to his conviction that the mind spontaneously produces circular images as a strategy to bring harmony to the inner state, as cited in Chapter One. He includes the "squaring of the circle" (Jung, 1971:388) among the *archetypes*, which are the symbols of the *collective unconscious* which he believed to be innately available to every person. The same "squaring of the circle" is described by Jung as being "the *archetype of wholeness*" (Jung, 1973:4), making obvious its healing association. Further to this he describes the circle as representing one of the symbols of the Self (Jung, 1964).

His work with mandalas relating to healing now forms the basis for the work of many psychologists, such as Fincher (1991), who states that

Healing, self-discovery, and personal growth are invited when we make a spontaneous creation of color and form within a circle. (Fincher, 1991:25)

For Jung (1973), as for his followers, it is important that these images should arise independently of external influence. Jung (1964) demonstrates his respect for such natural occurrences when he comments that "Even a man [*sic*] of high intellect can go

badly astray for lack of intuition or feeling” (Jung, 1964:92). The possibility of an intuitive source for the circular healing image could provide a starting point for an explanation of why and or how the circle seems to be associated with healing in a variety of disparate places, times, cultures and circumstances.

2.7 Circles in Hinduism

Jung (1964) would thus have had no cause to question the origin of the tattwas (or tattvas), the source of which is attributed to the visions of yogic seers approximately 2000 years prior to his observations. The tattwas are five shapes which represent the primal energies underlying the elements of spirit, fire, water, air and earth in Hindu philosophy. The circle, or sphere, is one of these essential shapes, and is described by Hulse (1993) as representing the element of air.

In this circumstance, the intuitively acquired symbol of a circle is not directly linked with healing, although its associations of vital breath, circulation, movement and a state of consciousness beyond waking offer indirect comment on the phenomenon. Rather than suggest that the circular image might have a healing effect on the person who experiences an intuitive perception of it, instead it provides a possible explanation of why it is the circle which appears in a healing context, what the shape might represent, and subsequently how it heals. According to this tradition, to gain access to the vital breath needed for life in a state of consciousness beyond waking would automatically lead to the vision of a circle, since it is the shape which represents their exact primal energies.

Information which is intuitively received is not awarded a comparable authoritative level of credence within Western culture. Its academic bias toward science and reason contrasts with Hindu culture which affords sufficient credence to the yogis’ intuitively sourced information regarding the tattwas to record, respect and protect it for



Plate 2.8.1: *Target with Plaster Casts* (1955)

Johns, J.

Mixed media

(Hughes, 1996:339)



Plate 2.8.2: *Mysteries: Ice Fire* (2000)

Noland, K.

Acrylic on canvas [online image]

(Bernard Jacobson Gallery, 2003)

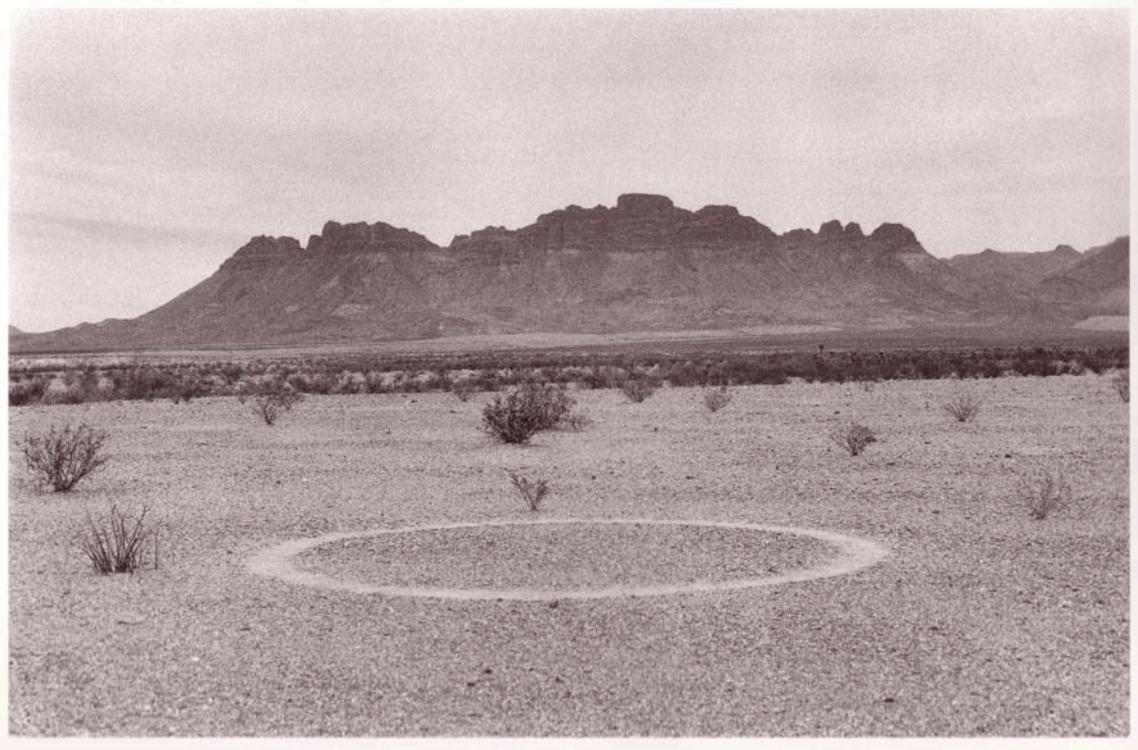


Plate 2.8.3: *Chisos Circle: A Ten Day Walk Along the Rio Grande and in the Chisos Mountains: Big Bend Texas (1990)*

Long, R.

Photograph

(Long, 1991:14)

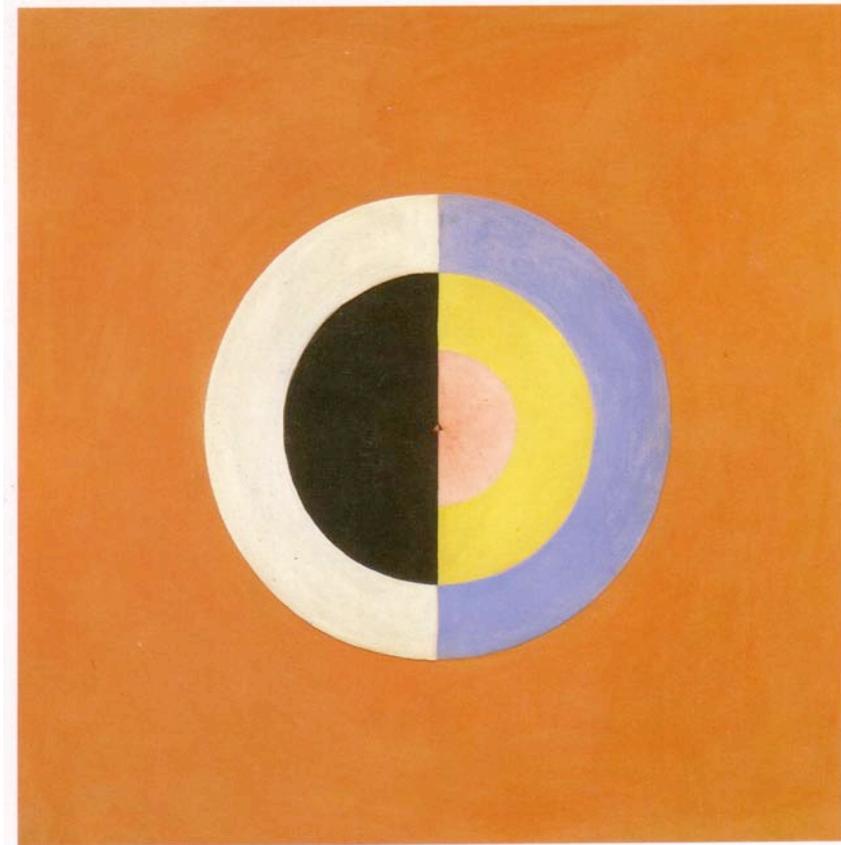


Plate 2.8.4: *Untitled No. 17 from the Series S. U. W. / Swan* (1914-1915)

Klint, H. A.

Oil on canvas

(Tuchman, 1986:159)



Plate 2.8.5: *Several Circles* (1926)

Kandinsky, W.

Oil on canvas

(Whitford, 1967:68)

Why does the circle fascinate me? It is (1) the most modest form, but asserts itself unconditionally, (2) a precise but inexhaustible variable, (3) simultaneously stable and unstable, (4) simultaneously loud and soft, (5) a single tension that carries countless tensions within it. The circle is the synthesis of the greatest oppositions. It combines the concentric and the excentric [*sic*] in a single form, and in balance. Of the three primary forms (triangle, square, circle), it points most clearly to the fourth dimension. (Kandinsky, cited in Whitford, 1967:36)

There can be no doubt from this of his conviction regarding the circle's properties, yet the above passage has no basis in science. From its contextual indicators such as paradoxical symbolism, the fourth dimension of which he writes is likely to be the spiritual plane rather than time, compared to the three physical dimensions of length, breadth and depth. The circle, for Kandinsky, is thus the shape which signifies matters of spirituality.

This leaves the circle's spiritual power for him unarguably clear. With regard to the shape's healing association, his description of the circle as representative of the *synthesis of the greatest oppositions* reflects and pre-empts Jung's (1971) conclusions that the circle provides the antidote to chaotic states of mind in cases such as the mystic visions of Brother Klaus mentioned in 1.4. Kandinsky's belief reflects an intuitive recognition of the circle's spiritual power without necessarily acknowledging the healing potential implied in his own statement.

There is a controversial category of modern artists whose predominantly circular work is, intentionally or otherwise, associated directly with spiritual healing. This controversy lies with both the artists themselves and the public reaction to their works.

The media in question is that of crop circles. It is absolutely certain that a large number of crop circles are hoaxed, as evidenced by Pope (1997), by which it is meant that they are created by people rather than aliens or natural phenomenon. It is these hoaxes which may be described as art works (although alien creations could quite conceivably be included in this genre if they exist) due as much to the skill required for their successful completion as their beauty and resulting public response. Whilst no comment is intended about the glyph's source, Plate 2.8.6 illustrates an arresting grace which is typical of crop circles, and sufficient to provoke spiritual reflection in itself.

The healing association of crop circles comes from their interpretation as a plea for help from the Earth rather than from the hoaxers. When shown photographs of crop circles in Wiltshire, England, a group of Hopi Native Americans responded by stating that "Mother is crying" (Pope, 1997:100). Whether or not this call for planetary healing was intended by the circles' creators, and regardless of who or what made them, it places the symbols firmly in the realm of spiritual healing. There is no other way to interpret a cry for help from the Earth since the communication of such a message assumes the planet's personification.

Glyphs such as that depicted in Plate 2.8.7 need not conflict with the above association if it is conceived to be possible that the same message might come from the alien origin alleged by the image's content. The image shows what appears to be an alien portrait holding a disc which has been widely interpreted as containing a coded message, faked or otherwise (Dike and Fussell, 2003a). It is surely as plausible that extra-terrestrials might attempt humanity's chastisement from afar as it is that the Earth might speak up for itself. The general location of the circles serves to strengthen the credibility given to such ideas, as demonstrated by the example of Pope (1997), who writes that

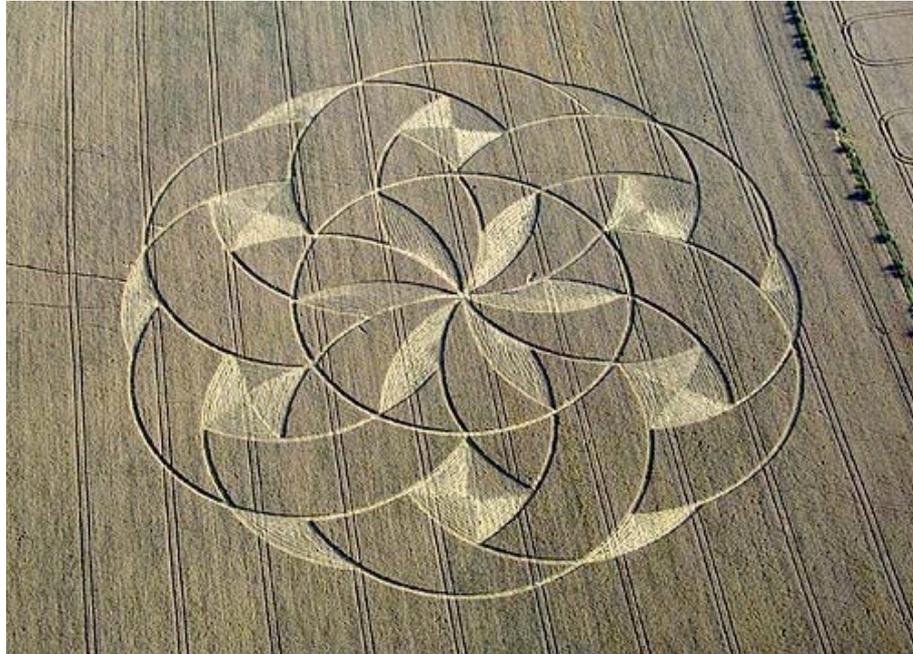


Plate 2.8.6: *Nursted Crop Circle, Reported August 11th, 2002 (2002)*

Anon.

Photograph [online image]

(Dike and Fussell, 2003b)

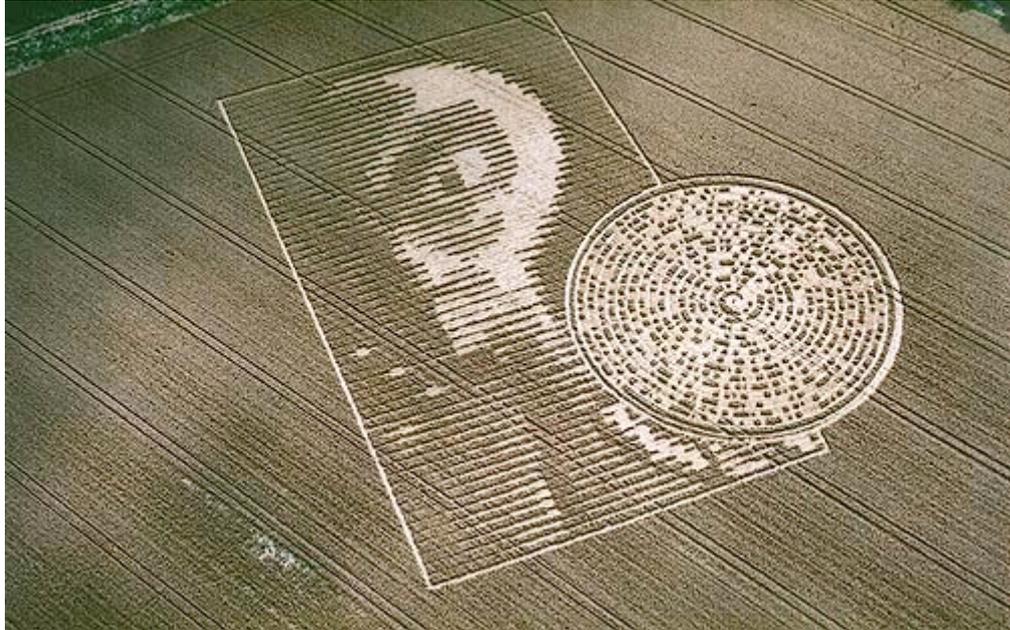


Plate 2.8.7: *Crabwood Farm House Crop Circle, Reported August 15th, 2002 (2002)*

Anon.

Photograph [online image]

(Dike and Fussell, 2003a)

A large number of crop circles have appeared near ancient burial grounds and sites that were sacred to our ancestors. No fewer than twelve ley-lines converge on Stonehenge and some of the most extraordinary circles of 1988 were found very close to Silbury Hill.... Is it an accident that the shape of most crop formations is identical to that of the standing stones at Stonehenge, Avebury and elsewhere? (Pope, 1997:104)

Salisbury Plain and the surrounding areas have carried a spiritual significance for thousands of years, and this has perhaps influenced the prolonged public interest in crop circles. It is an area in which spiritual experience and practices have literally shaped the landscape. The local history of credence afforded to beliefs irrespective of physical evidence leads the way by example for the area's modern inhabitants to follow. Pope's (1997) above comment suggests that the glyphs tend to be round for the same reason as that chosen for the shape of henges, without proposing any such reason beyond the dowsed energy fields underlying their geographical position.

2.9 Circles in Druidism

Stonehenge, and henges in general, are themselves worthy of attention in an overview of the circle's spiritual healing associations. There is little that can be known for certain about Stonehenge save that it bears a definite physical correlation with the position of the sun at the midsummer solstice, captures the attention of thousands of tourists a day, and was believed to be adequately important for whoever created it around five thousand years ago (Burl, 1976) to put considerable effort into hauling monstrous megaliths from Wales to Salisbury Plain. From this point onwards, the standing stones' story must depend on modern interpretation and imagination.

It is probable that the creators of the henges were druids (unless the alternative of alien intelligence is once again considered), who left no written records chronicling their beliefs or motivations. Modern druids may provide valuable insight in this matter, though it has to be recognised that their spiritual practice does not necessarily correlate exactly with their ancient counterparts. According to an online document written by a contemporary English druid, a typical ceremony involves

... entering the circle, blessing and purifying it, opening the quarters and creating sacred space. (Druid Ceremony, 2003)

This is followed by the night's rituals, and ends with the circle's closure, which is to be compared with simply exiting the ring. Whilst the existence and energy of the twelve ley lines which intersect at Stonehenge are relatively undisputed, it is unclear from such descriptions whether the power of *sacred space* owes its origin to location, circular shape, or the druids themselves.

2.10 Circles in Sufism

As an instance of a circle's source of spiritual power being open to interpretation, the example above is not an isolated one. Another can be identified in the example of circular dancing. In the case of a Sufi dance circle, in which participants form a single circle which rotates as the group dances, there is a healing association identified by Siegchrist (2003) who asserts that

Sufi dancers fall effortlessly into an innocent and joyful meditation. As they stand together between each dance, closing their eyes and holding hands, they continue to feel a powerful harmonious energy sweeping through the circle, washing away their thoughts and leaving their minds flooded with pure light....

It's impossible to leave a Sufi Dance feeling depressed.

(Siegchrist, 2003)

Whilst he later makes it clear that such an effect demands appropriate intent and reverence from the participants, he does not explain whether the spiritual power of which he writes stems from the shape of the circle or the people who stand or dance within it. A total lack of reference to the dance's location indicates that it is not of relevance to spiritual power, since any such condition would be included with appropriate intention as a functional requirement. The possibility that both the circle's shape and the participants' intentions might each contribute to the resulting sense of harmony is not one which should be excluded since there is no reason to believe that there should be only one factor without the other.

2.11 Circles in Australian Aboriginal Culture

Circles in Australian Aboriginal art provide yet another example of the shape's association with spiritual power, the source of which is not readily understood by those unfamiliar with the intricacies of the culture. This has to be largely attributed to the degree of censorship exerted on the information provided to the uninitiated (as, it has to be assumed, are the general public). It is the least significant meanings of images which are revealed to this group. With this in mind, Caruana (1996) informs his readers that in Aboriginal art, circles may be employed to signify fires, sites, camps, waterholes, and also that they are believed to function as a ceremonial doorway which

... provides the means for the ancestral power which lies within the earth to surface and go back into the ground. (Caruana, 1996:99)

This belief describes considerable spiritual power for the shape, especially given that his audience is the uninitiated.

In a culture for which the circle's use as a wheel was rendered irrelevant before reaching invention by the mastery of a spiritual means of rapid travel (Amadio, 1986), the shape was historically only ever employed in art and ceremony, the two inextricably linked to one another. With such facts, it is unlikely that an outsider might imagine the full extent of what else the circle could be used for.

2.12 A Completed Circuit

This brings the line of the circle back to the point at which it commenced, which is a weak link in terms of spiritual healing association. While a complete history of these associations was neither intended nor attempted, the goals of providing an overview and outlining the spiritual healing circle's impressive reach around the world have been achieved by the examples above, which speak for almost every continent and span thousands of years.

From this point it is now possible to review the information gathered thus far and from it ascertain the primary contexts of the circle's use for spiritual healing on which to focus in the study's second phase. As explained in the methodology in Chapter One, these are the recognised spiritual traditions in which the circle is or has been associated with healing. In order to identify these, the examples described thus far in this chapter will be grouped into their ascribed sub-headings (e.g. 2.2 Circles for Protection) and their content challenged by the four criteria of *spiritual*, *healing*, *circle* and *visual art form*, which are also identified in the methodology.

Table 2.12.1 shows this elimination process clearly, identifying the contexts which are appropriate for further exploration in Phase Two by the fulfilment of all four criteria. The sub-headings which describe the contexts within this chapter are placed along the table's vertical axis, and the criteria to be met along the horizontal. The letter Y in a box indicates that the context described in this chapter meet the criterion with

which the box is aligned. A blank box indicates that the context described in this chapter does not completely satisfy the criterion with which the box is aligned.

A glance at Table 2.12.1 makes it clear that from the cultural contexts discussed in this chapter, there are four from which all examples fulfil all four criteria, and six whose examples do not satisfy all requirements. Of these, circles for protection are not deemed to fulfil the criterion of *visual art form* due to the intangible form of their use in astral projection. They also lack a “Y” in the box corresponding to *healing* because their use is to protect rather than to restore good spiritual health. The criterion of *healing* also remains un-checked in the boxes corresponding to circles in Hinduism, Modern Art, Druidism and Australian Aboriginal Art as there were no examples identified during the research for phase one in which the circle played an intrinsic functional role in the healing process. As made clear in the instance of circles in Aboriginal Art, there may be such associations for which information was unavailable to the researcher at the time, and therefore fall beyond the boundary of the study’s first aim.

Circles in Sufism, like those for protection, are not deemed to fulfil the criterion of *visual art form* because this definition does not accurately describe a dance circle, most obviously in the realm of visual permanence. This leaves the four sub-headings of Christianity, Shamanism, Tibetan Buddhism and Jungian Psychology, as the categories which fulfil all criteria, and from which primary contexts for further study will be selected.

Table 2.12.1: The Fulfilment of the Criteria of Visual Art Form, Spiritual, Healing and Circle by the Cultural Contexts Documented in Chapter Two

| | | Criteria for Narrowing the Field of Study | | | |
|---|---|---|------------------------------|--|---------------------------|
| | | Permanent or Semi-Permanent Visual Art Form in Two or Three Dimensions | Spiritual Association | Plays an Intrinsic Functional Role in the Healing Process | Circular in Format |
| Sub-headings Describing the Cultural Contexts Documented in Chapter Two in Order of presentation | 2.2 Circles of Spiritual Protection | | Y | | Y |
| | 2.3 Circles in Christianity | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| | 2.4 Circles in Shamanism | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| | 2.5 Circles in Tibetan Buddhism | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| | 2.6 Circles in Jungian Psychology | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| | 2.7 Circles in Hinduism | Y | Y | | Y |
| | 2.8 Circles in Modern Art | Y | Y | | Y |
| | 2.9 Circles in Druidism | Y | Y | | Y |
| | 2.10 Circles in Sufism | | Y | Y | Y |
| | 2.11 Circles in Australian Aboriginal Culture | Y | Y | | Y |

2.13

Selection of Primary Contexts for Further Study

The construction of Table 2.12.1 has made such a selection simple, as designed. The cases of Shamanism and Tibetan Buddhism need no justification to be described as recognised spiritual traditions in which the circle is or has been closely associated with healing. As each of them possess the qualities of constancy and longevity combined with total fulfilment of the criteria in Table 2.12.1, this renders their statuses as primary contexts of the circle's use for spiritual healing indisputable.

It is for precisely these reasons that the remaining two sub-headings of Christianity and Psychology appear to require some consideration, since they seem to possess comparative qualities of inconsistency and youth. Yet this need is resolved by their placement in the primary cultural context of Western Spirituality. Under this umbrella there is longevity and an adaptive constancy, as in the case of Christianity's aforementioned absorption of Pagan festivals. The way in which the beliefs of Western Spirituality afford an interpretative influence on daily life compares with the way in which the beliefs of Shamanism and Tibetan Buddhism shape daily life in the same way that principles for living compare with precepts for life.

From the promising perspective shown by their performance in Table 2.12.1, Shamanism, Tibetan Buddhism and Western Spirituality are thus the primary contexts which will be probed in greater depths in the proceeding three chapters. Due to its contextual explanation of the term *mandala*, which has since been absorbed into English vocabulary, these shall commence with the context of Tibetan Buddhism.

Chapter Three Circles in Tibetan Buddhism

3.1 Introduction to Buddhism

It is said that Buddha once gave a sermon in which he spoke not a word, but held up a single lotus flower for all to see. Enlightened, lazy or crazy, his sermon consisted of a natural and beautiful object of circular form. Without prior knowledge of Buddhism, it would be reasonable to assume that at least one of the lotus flower's shape, scent, texture or representative qualities were profoundly significant in order to merit an entire sermon on its subject. As it turns out, it is both the shape and the qualities represented by its form in the lotus flower which are significant components of the Buddha's message.

The message says, in terms of the spoken word, quite literally nothing. How then does one establish what is meant? Herein lies a truth about Buddhism; it is impossible to understand fully the meanings of isolated objects, events or rituals because they are a part of a way of life. To appreciate the fuller meaning of such things, one has to know about the Buddhist way of life.

Buddhism begs to be described as a way of life and not as a religion because religion may only affect one's worship. This may be a few hours of one's life, once every week, and still fit a description of faith in a particular religion (the writer's past experience of attendance at church and observation of people being the source of this assertion). A Buddhist is one who follows the teachings of the Buddha, with the goal of reaching the same state of enlightenment attained by him. This is not a goal which can, as a general rule, be achieved on the cumulative effort exerted for a couple of hours a week. Rather, the teachings of the Buddha are precepts for life which are followed

every hour of every day, applied to all activity, and are therefore defined most accurately as a religious way of life rather than simply as a religion.

This can be demonstrated a number of ways. Perhaps the simplest is to consult a beginner, such as Gere (2003). After ten or more years of following a Buddhist path as a layperson (rather than a monk), he describes himself as a beginner at the point of his first Kalachakra initiation in 1984. He makes it clear that he means this literally in his confession that His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama⁴ had derived some amusement from his neophyte status, even though the continual state of wonderment and newness integral to a beginner's state of mind is encouraged as a means of treating experiences as though they are the first of their kind. Writing nearly twenty years later, he continues to consider his status as such, as he states that

... I remain that beginner today, after decades of holy teachings and personal practice, and seven more Kalachakra initiations all over the planet. There is a dense and truly bottomless wisdom inherent in Vajrayana Buddhism, that constantly leads to further discovery, further exploration, on and on. The only end point of learning is Buddhahood itself; total clarity, compassionate selflessness, and complete liberation. (Gere, 2003:ix)

By describing himself as a novice after such apparent experience, Gere (2003) suggests that the scale of Buddhist learning is, from his perspective, a lifetime's constant practice for anyone who undertakes it.

⁴ His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama presents a fundamental challenge to concise referencing. His name was changed from that of Lhamo Dhondrub, given to him by his family, because he was recognised (as in the case of every Dalai Lama) as the reincarnation of the Buddha of Compassion. He was officially renamed Jetsun Jampel Ngawang Lobsang Yeshe Tenzin Gyatso (Holy Lord, Gentle Glory, Compassionate, Defender of the Faith, Ocean of Wisdom). Western convention is to call him His Holiness the Dalai Lama, whilst Tibetans refer to him as either Yeshe Norbu (Wishfulfilling Gem) or Kundun (The Presence). In the interest of ease of his identification by the reader, he shall from this point be referred to as the Dalai Lama throughout this document. Any of the previous thirteen Dalai Lamas shall, should occasion arise, be identified by their chronological number (i.e. The Thirteenth Dalai Lama).

His comment leads to another question, thanks to his naming of Vajrayana Buddhism. By adding a descriptive prefix, he alerts the reader to the fact that there are a number of different orders of Buddhism, and raises the question of the difference between them.

The Buddha was born over 2600 years ago in Nepal. Since then, his influence has spread considerably, and Nepal's neighbouring countries such as India, Tibet, and China have, within their borders, branded his teachings with their own distinctive marks. The basic teachings of the Buddha are condensed to reaching a state of peace and happiness and reducing suffering, and these are constant throughout every Buddhist discipline. This is explained by His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama (1992) who explains that

From the very beginning, the teachings of the Buddha have been concerned with fulfilling the wish shared by every living being to find peace and happiness and avoid suffering. Moreover, because all beings have an equal right to pursue these goals and because, even among human beings, there are wide differences of interest, character, and ability, the Buddha taught a vast array of methods. (Dalai Lama, 1992:xi)

It is this vast array of methods which has enabled the diversification of Buddhist traditions, which maintain consistency in following the Buddha's teachings whilst displaying considerable differences in practice.

Of these orders, it is Tibetan Buddhism, of which the Dalai Lama is the spiritual leader, which has the richest contributory source of beliefs and practices regarding the circle and healing. There are associations between the two in other Buddhist traditions, however, the observation that "... no other culture has raised the subject to more elegant

levels of complexity and beauty,” (Fisher, 1997:67) is one that is often repeated, though more commonly phrased with greater emphasis on depth of spiritual meaning than appearance. As the Buddhist tradition in which the circle has been developed to the greatest extent for ritual purposes, it will thus be Tibetan Buddhism on which this chapter will focus its attention.

3.2 Circles in Tibetan Buddhism

There are a number of circular art forms in Tibetan Buddhism, all designed to aid or enhance ritual activity on the path to enlightenment. Prayer wheels, as described in Chapter Two, send prayers to heaven or to deities with each rotation of the wheel. However, when the circle is described as having been developed to the greatest advancement in Tibetan Buddhism, it is the mandala which is the subject of discussion.

The Tibetan term for a mandala is *kyilkhor*⁵, of which one translation is “center and surrounding environment” (Bryant, 2003:21). It can be understood a little further by breaking the word down into its component parts, as “it is built up of concentric circles (*'khor*) and squares possessing the same centre (*dkyil*)” (Brauen, 1997:11, original italics). The fact that the Tibetan word and its translation of *mandala* are distinct from the word for *circle* alone is the first signal that such circles are not considered to be just circles. An introduction to mandalas ought, in the interest of accuracy, to be prefaced by consideration of a number of critical factors.

Mandalas have a “profoundly symbolic value” (Dalai Lama, 1991:7) and are regarded as sacred by Tibetan Buddhists. This means not that they merely represent the sacred, but that they are believed to be sacred. The difference between the two is essentially qualitative in terms of the distinction between an image depicting a deity and one believed to be a manifestation of a deity.

⁵ There is some variation in the spelling provided for this word, including *dkyilkhor* and *dkyil 'khor*.

This profoundly symbolic value has been protected by secrecy since its conception; explained according to initiatory level. This is explained by the Dalai Lama when he states that

Although some mandalas – for instance the symbolic representation of the Universe made of heaped grains – can be openly explained, most are related to Tantric doctrines which are normally supposed to be kept secret. Consequently, many speculative and mistaken interpretations have been published by people who viewed them simply as works of art or had no access to reliable explanations. (Dalai Lama, 1991:7)

It is a conviction which he clearly believes to be important, and worded succinctly, as he repeats it almost word for word in his foreword to Bryant's (2003) text on the subject of mandalas.

His own perception is that the publication of severe misunderstandings can do more harm than good, and he considers the “partial lifting of secrecy” (Dalai Lama, 1992:xii) to be the lesser of the two offences. To this end, he encourages the writing of more accurate accounts (identifying some for readers, with his own benediction included in publications such as those of Brauen (1997) and Bryant (2003), to be discussed later in the chapter), a statement which makes it clear that such are in existence.

These factors have noteworthy implications for the scope of this research. The Dalai Lama's (1992) caution, alerting one to the existence of unhelpfully inaccurate texts, in combination with his encouragement of the partial lifting of secrecy, result in a situation which provides a better chance of gaining an accurate understanding of the

spiritual significance of mandalas than previously possible from modern, secular literature.

The issue of secrecy also invites the observation that, since his encouragement of the publication of more accurate accounts, a devout monastic lifestyle is unnecessary for the presentation of an accurate account, since any further knowledge gained from monastic study would be bound by the traditional secrecy. This means that academic research on the subject of mandalas, from the perspective of visual arts, is eminently achievable, whilst maintaining awareness of and sensitivity to spiritual beliefs as a component of the art in question. With this distinction between the monastic and the academic made clear, the question can now turn to that of what, exactly, is a mandala.

3.3 What is a Mandala?

The translation of the Tibetan word for mandala has been broached earlier in this Chapter, and this serves as an introduction to its definition. Following this translation of a centre and surrounding environment, the definition will commence with the most basic, and spiral outward in circles of increasing complexity until as full a picture as practical is delineated.

As an example of a basic definition, that found in an English dictionary such as *Chambers Twenty-First Century Dictionary* (Robinson, 1999) is remarkably revealing.

A mandala is defined as

... a circular symbol representing the Universe, usually a circle enclosing images of deities or geometric designs, used as an aid to meditation. (Robinson, 1999:833)

This description covers, in general terms, the shape, representation and use of mandalas. It also calls for a brief definition of meditation for the sake of making this simple

definition as thorough as can be. The meditation to which this refers is “deep thought; contemplation, especially on a spiritual or religious theme” (Robinson, 1999:852).

This simplest of definitions is divisible into four sections. The first of these is its description as a symbol that is circular in shape. The second is this symbol’s representational meaning clarified as that of the Universe. A description of the visual content of the mandala is then addressed with the mention of enclosed images of deities or geometric designs. Finally, the mandala’s use is encapsulated as an aid to meditation. These four defining criteria provide a manageable structure within which to probe the definition in greater depth.

Commencing with the first criterion leads to finer detail on the mandala as a circular symbol. This, as will be seen, is a gross simplification made quite obvious by the word’s literal translation. Next in the progression of complexity of definition comes a description by Tucci (2001). As one of the earliest Western authors to write on the subject of the mandala (*The Theory and Practice of the Mandala* (Tucci, 2001) was first published in the original Italian in 1894), he provides a more detailed account of the visual appearance of the mandala than that cited above. He asserts that

In a general way, it may be said that a *mandala* contains an outer enclosure and one or more concentric circles which, in their turn, enclose the figure of a square cut by transversal lines. These start from the centre and reach to the four corners so that the surface is divided up into four triangles. In the centre and in the middle of each triangle five circles contain emblems or figures of divinities. (Tucci, 2001:39 original italics)

Whilst more complex as a description of the circular symbol defined by Robinson (1999), Tucci’s (2001) emphasis that this, too, is a generalisation must be noted.

At this point, pictorial examples might be useful for the reader, as visual references with which to compare such descriptions. Many of the features noted above by Tucci (2001) are present in the *Avalokiteshvara Mandala*⁶ in Plate 3.3.1, as does the *Five Chakrasamvara Deities Mandala* shown in Plate 3.3.2. They each display an outer enclosure and one or more concentric circles enclosing a square which is divided into four triangles of equal size. There is an emblem at the centre of each mandala, though in neither case are the emblems at the approximate centre of the triangles bound by circles. If all mandalas resembled these two images closely, it would be easy to understand the rationale underlying Tucci's (2001) generalisation. While many mandalas do follow this generic pattern, however, many do not. Neither the *Vajrakila Mandala* pictured in Plate 3.3.3 nor the *Mandala of Simhanada-Lokeśvara* of Plate 3.3.4 reflect any division into triangles at all.

It is precisely this type of generalisation for which Tucci (2001) draws criticism from authors such as Brauen (1997). With the Dalai Lama (1991), however, supporting Brauen, it would be easy to dismiss Tucci's (2001) observations as unhelpful. Yet, since it is a generalisation which is sought in this case, Tucci's (2001) style proves robust in relation to such a task.

His observations may not all be as inaccurate as suggested by Brauen (1997). The image shown in Plate 3.3.5 is in accordance with the simple definition of a mandala set out by Robinson (1999), yet comes nowhere near fulfilling Tucci's (2001) criteria, corresponding only as far as the outer enclosure and circular shape. On this point, Brauen (1997) seems to concur, describing the circle as a mandala-like lotus disc as distinct from a mandala.

⁶ This modern mandala serves as illustration that artists of mandalas do not, in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, usually identify themselves or date their work. In this case the date of creation is known, and some older mandalas have been attributed approximate dates by experts in the field. Where no artist or date is provided in this thesis, it is because there is no given date or artist for the image in question.



Plate 3.3.1: *Avalokiteshvara Mandala*, (1991)

Anon.

Painting on Cloth

(Lipton and Ragnubs, 1996: 153)



Plate 3.3.2: *Five Chakrasamvara Deities Mandala* (circa 18th Century)

Anon.

Painting on cloth, borders of Sichuan silk.

(Lipton and Ragnubs, 1996:99)

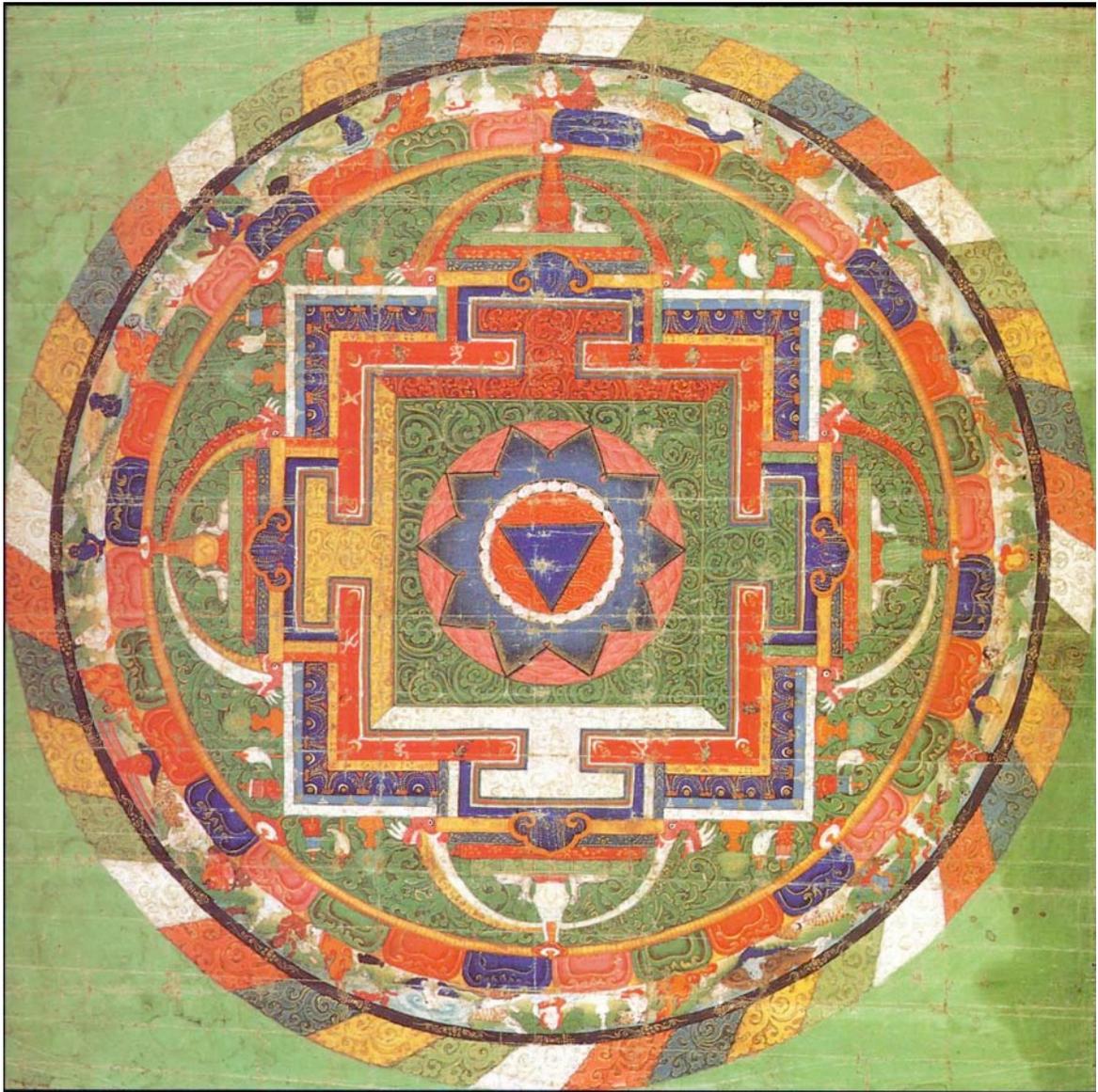


Plate 3.3.3: *Vajrakila Mandala* (undated)

Anon.

Painting on cloth.

(Brauen, 1997:34)



Plate 3.3.4: *Mandala of Simhanada-Lokeśvara*, (undated)

Anon.

Painting on cloth

(Brauen, 1997:43)

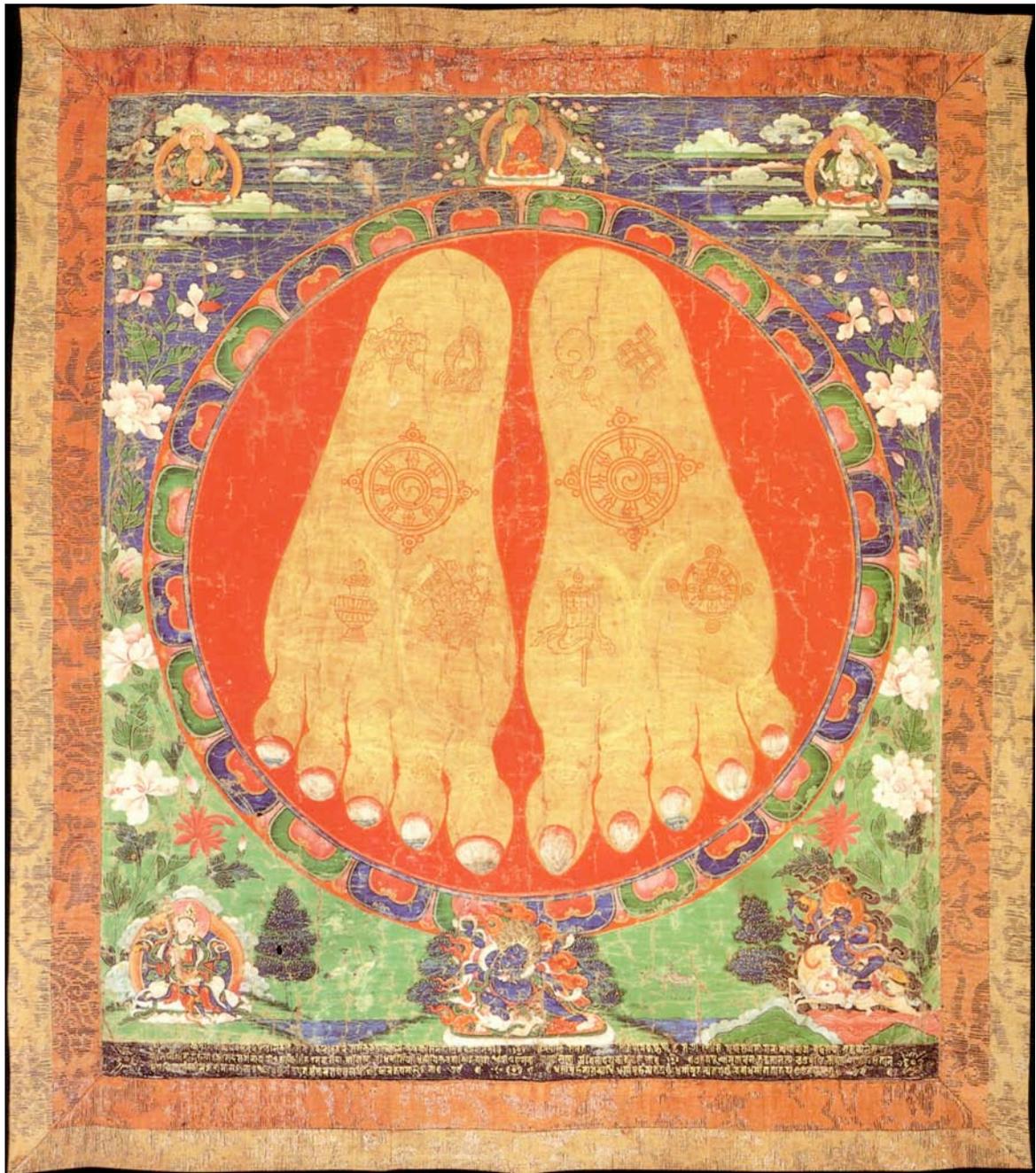


Plate 3.3.5: *Footprint of Buddha Śākyamuni on a Mandala-like Lotus Disc*, (undated)

Anon.

Painting on cloth.

(Brauen, 1997:33)

Further to this, in relation to the universal representation of the mandala as defined by Robinson (1999), Tucci (2001) describes the mandala as “no longer a cosmogram but a psychocosmogram” (Tucci, 2001:25). This is supported by the combination of Warner’s assertion that

According to Geshe Lobsang Tenzin, representative of Drepung Loseling Monastery in North America, the mandala sand painting is a sacred cosmogram representing the world in perfect harmony, (Warner, 2001:1)

and Hynes’ (2001) statement that mandalas function as “both a microcosm of the universe and as a guide or map of inner consciousness” (Hynes, 2001:4).

A cosmogram, by literal definition derived from the separation of the word into its composite parts, is a visual representation (*-gram*) of the universe (*cosmos*). Tucci’s (2001) addition of the prefix *psycho* to this term thus denotes that the mandala is a map of the mind and the universe, which also implies the possibility of the representation of the mind as a universe. This interpretation is supported by Warner (2001) and Hynes (2001) above, along with many other authors on the subject. Fisher (1997) demonstrates the truth of this when he states that

Literally a circle or arc, the mandala became a means in Tibetan Buddhism of representing the entire sacred universe.... all are symbolic expressions of Buddhist cosmology and serve as teaching devices for initiated practitioners. (Fisher, 1997:67)

Fisher (1997) here also highlights the complexity involved in providing a universally accepted literal definition of the term for a mandala. Since a mandala is so much more than simply a shape, it is hardly surprising that outside of its native culture there is no single term which encapsulates the total concept.

An illustration of this depth of meaning can be read in Fisher's (1997) statement above that mandalas are used as teaching devices. However, while he also points out that the meaning of Vajrayana literature is particularly elusive to one who is not an initiate, and identifies the cause of this as the delicacy required to protect and preserve secret and powerful practices, his description of the mandala's function as an aid to teaching does not do justice to the status of their encrypted pictorial messages. The assumption that a picture paints only a thousand words must be abandoned in the case of Tibetan Buddhist mandalas, as their utility to convey information to an initiate matches that of sacred literature.

Bryant (2003), moreover, makes this status perfectly clear when he describes a mandala as being

... a pictorial manifestation of a tantra. It may be 'read' and studied as a text, memorized for visualization during meditation, and interpreted. (Bryant, 2003:21)

Rather as the height of a gentleman's hat featured in a Victorian narrative painting would indicate his wealth to the contemporary viewer, along with further coded visual information, the details of which now elude today's average viewer, so the mandala is used to provide coded messages to the initiate in Vajrayana Buddhism. Bryant (2003) spells this out with a rigour which extends as far as making clear what is meant by *tantra*. His explanation confirms the validity of this writer's earlier description of Buddhism as a religious way of life and simultaneously addresses the inadequacy of literal translation between cultures when he asserts that

The literal translation of the Sanskrit word *tantra* is 'continuity,' although an exactly corresponding English word does not exist.

‘Way of life according to the teaching’ is a more comprehensive translation. (Bryant, 2003:11)

This definition of the mandala as performing the same function as scripture is not addressed by the general version offered by Robinson (1999) earlier. Due precisely to its generality, this comes as no surprise, but serves as a sign that the definition of the mandala has here reached the point at which cross-cultural generalisations are no longer sufficient. As there may be cultures in which the mandala does not serve the same scriptural role, Robinson’s (1999) definition is detailed enough for general purposes. From this point on, however, such generalisations shall be left behind in favour of defining qualities which move beyond the general qualities of mandalas to those specific to Tibetan Buddhist mandalas.

3.4 The Specific Characteristics of a Tibetan Buddhist Mandala

Robinson’s (1999) criteria, however, do continue to provide a workable structure around which to base this more detailed exploration. The third criterion of these to examine is that of its visual construction, which is noted as containing deities or geometric designs. The general appearance of mandalas is covered earlier in this chapter by reference to Tucci (2001), in relation to the shape of the circular symbol. Since this current progression in complexity of explanation could be summarised as the subject of the Tibetan Buddhist mandala’s appearance, it therefore warrants an account of the materials used in construction prior to a consideration of the finer detail of compositional structure.

There are a variety of materials employed in the ritual construction of mandalas in Tibetan Buddhism and, between them, they demonstrate that the concept of the mandala is much more profound than that of art for decoration, remuneration or political statement. This is made clear by Bryant (2003), who explains as simply as

possible that mandalas “can be drawn, painted, made of particles, or constructed by meditative concentration” (Bryant, 2003:21). In terms of the physical materials of these possibilities, he goes on to explain that

A two-dimensional mandala may be made of powdered and colored rice or flowers, particles of stone or jewels, or colored sand. There are also three-dimensional mandalas constructed out of wood, metal, or other solid materials. (Bryant, 2003:21)

Two dimensional mandalas may also contain powdered charcoal, coral or even gold and, at the opposite end of the mundane spectrum, the other materials to which he refers in the construction of three dimensional mandalas include butter.

Constructing a sculpture out of butter would have to be motivated by a particularly worthy cause. The skill required to achieve such a task within the bounds of malleability, rancidity, liquidity and temperature shows dedication at the very least. The mental image of working in a refrigerator is hard to keep from one’s mental image of such a process. A profane margarine sculpture in an affluent hotel’s restaurant allows the diners to feel valued and special. Since the practice is not common in budget accommodation, it is assumed that the chef is well paid for his or her efforts. Monks receive no pecuniary reward for their toils, and the devotion demanded by butter sculpture is therefore one indicator of the profundity of the beliefs which underpin the construction of Tibetan Buddhist mandalas.

By far the most potent illustrative example of these, however, is the belief that a mandala may exist without physical form. This extends further than image alone, and enters into the realm of conceptuality, as described by Fisher (1997) when he writes that “the human body is also a mandala, a microcosm of the universe” (Fisher, 1997:67).

Gold (1994) explains how this is believed to be possible in a detailed account, noting that

Tibetans use their term for mandala to describe any balanced, ideal system of ideas and energies.... Tibetans envision our ideal world reality to be a mandala and, therefore, the proper offering to give mentally to ideal beings – such as deities and lamas. Likewise, the place at which a ceremony is held is considered a mandala once it has been ritually purified of obstacles and a circle of protection has been marked out around it. (Gold, 1994:168)

One of the consequent assertions made by Gold (1994) is that the visualisation of the mandala through meditative concentration is the best way to experience one. By this he means that its efficacy as a spiritual tool is greatest when constructed in detail in the mind's eye, and that the physical form of a two dimensional mandala is, as he expresses it, “the grossest way of experiencing the mandala universe” (Gold, 1994:175).

This concept may be hard to understand from a materialistic perspective of art which can be bought, sold, and viewed in a gallery. It can be understood with greater ease when it is explained that the monks who make two dimensional sand mandalas do not consider their efforts to be a form of expression or creativity, but are rather “reconstructing a representation of something that already exists” (Bryant, 2003:25). This would be quite readily understood by a Western artist such as Kandinsky (1977) who believed that he translated his paintings from vibrations which existed first of all in his soul. The notable difference between the two situations is that Tibetan Buddhist monks consider the prior existence of the mandala to be totally independent of

themselves, whereas Kandinsky never acknowledged that his art works would have existed without his own body and soul in combination to bring them into materiality⁷.

Writing about art which exists only in the mind is necessarily theoretical. Since public demand largely influences the subject matter produced by commercial publishing houses, it is perhaps not so great a surprise that this intangible form of mandala art rarely, if ever, enjoys the luxury of a publication all to itself. Likewise, though it would, in the opinion of the writer, be intriguing to know of the culinary protocol following ritualistic butter sculpture, such an interest is clearly not considered to be substantial amongst the general public, and so it is not the most thoroughly documented of mandala rituals in Tibetan Buddhism. A butter sculpture installation in a large Western gallery might similarly not be expected to draw such crowds as a colourful and intricate sand mandala.

Given the Dalai Lama's (1991) approval of Brauen's (1997) selection of one particular mandala ritual on which to focus with the purpose of understanding mandala rituals in general, the remainder of this chapter shall focus on those mandala rituals which have received the greatest attention in the published literature and have therefore the most thorough and reliable documentary base. This approach will, it is hoped, lead to a better understanding of the Tibetan Buddhist ritual arts which do not enjoy the same volume and accuracy of documentation and hence opportunity for triangulation.

Within the domain of sand mandalas there are many variations of visual image, as well as their subject of representation. The choice between omitting any reference to some of these images and making generalised reference to details of them all is made by the still prevalent secrecy regarding the revelation of Tantric teachings, which means

⁷ A detailed exploration of the associations between vibrations and images can be found in *Real Good Vibrations, or Conceding the Spiritual in Art: An Investigation of the Links Between Spiritual Vibration and Image or Form in Art*, (Markwick, 2000), in which the belief of Kandinsky referred to here is discussed and supported by evidence from science, such as Jenny's (1974) cymatic images shaped solely through sound vibrations.

that the sand mandalas which have been explained in some detail remain few in number relative to the total. This number is, however, more than sufficient for the purposes of this study, and will provide ample information through which to gain an appreciation of how Tibetan Buddhist mandalas are made and how they are believed to function.

There are two components to the construction process of a sand mandala; the physical and the spiritual. Physically speaking, the structure of the mandala is carefully marked out according to exact traditional specifications using thread dipped in chalk. Once this outline has been laid out, the work of applying the coloured sand may commence, starting at the centre and moving outwards.

In the past, the sand would have been collected from hot springs which stained the grains naturally with the concentrated minerals in the water. Contemporary sand mandalas are made with custom dyed sand, which does not appear to have a detrimental impact on the images' function, yet Gold's (1994) assertion that a mandala of coloured sand made from powdered precious stones is best in terms of karmic merit suggests that the sand's origin does hold some significance.

The sand is poured by hand through an implement called a *chakpu*, which is rather like a piping nozzle with ridges along its length. Rubbing a metal edge along these ridges causes the sand inside the *chakpu* to flow as a liquid; the process demonstrated by the Dalai Lama in the photograph of Plate 3.4.1. If the thought of butter sculpture sounded to be intricate and time consuming, depositing grains of sand almost one at a time sounds to place still greater demands on dexterity (with less room for butter-fingers), yet the resulting detail shows remarkable shading and texture. The Kalachakra⁸ sand mandala photographed in Plate 3.4.2 was, as in the case of most sand mandalas, approximately two metres in diameter (until its ritual destruction). As a detail

⁸ There is some variation of the spelling of the word, including *Kālacakra*.



Plate 3.4.1: *H. H. the Dalai Lama Colouring the East Wall of the Mind Realm* (1985)

Brauen, M. Nebel, P. and R othlisberger, D.

Photograph.

(Brauen, 1997:87)



Plate 3.4.2: *Complete Sprinkled Kālacakra Mandala* (1985)

Brauen, M. Nebel, P. and Röhliberger, D.

Photograph

(Brauen, 1997:94)

of a Kalachakra sand mandala, the bull photographed in Plate 3.4.3 illustrates the delicate accuracy which can be achieved in the right hands. The peacock of Plate 3.4.4 demonstrates the variation of the dotted, circular symbols which are mounted on the animals' bodies, and are representative of deities.

This provides an introduction to the metaphysical structure of a sand mandala, which is described by Robinson (1999) as depicting deities or geometrical shapes. Taking the Kalachakra sand mandala shown in Plate 3.4.2 as an example, it represents the palace of the Kalachakra deity, showing it in two dimensions rather like a floor plan. Every sand mandala represents more dimensions than the two perceived, and the detail of the two dimensional image is such that it is possible to build it in three dimensions. A three dimensional interpretation of the *Shi Khro Mandala* is shown in Plate 3.4.5 to demonstrate the physical concept. The same concept also applies to metaphysical multi-dimensionality.

In the physical, it is possible for a two dimensional image to represent a three dimensional structure. By adding metaphysical multi-dimensionality, the possibility of the same image depicting a number of things becomes feasible. In this way, the Kalachakra sand mandala (Plate 3.4.2) represents not only the deity Kalachakra's palace in intricate detail, but is simultaneously believed to be the manifestation of Kalachakra in physical form along with emanations. Gold (1994) asserts that this type of mandala

... depicts a deity's body, emanations, palatial abode and grounds, and various rings of spiritual barriers around it. (Gold, 1994:168)

The multi-dimensionality extends further still as the mandala also represents "the whole cosmos" (Brauen, 1997:11). When it is considered that this mandala is believed to be the deity Kalachakra made material, the same deity's emanations, palatial grounds,

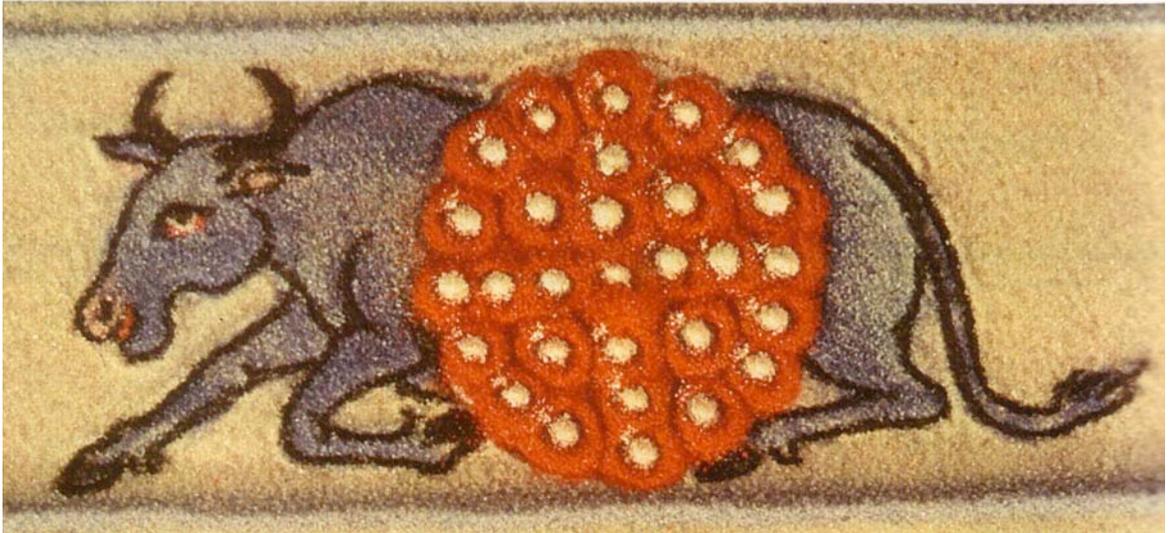


Plate 3.4.3: *Detail of Kalachakra Sand Mandala* (1988)

Durgin, G.

Photograph

(Bryant, 2003:222)



Plate 3.4.4: *Detail of Kalachakra Sand Mandala (1988)*

Durgin, G.

Photograph

(Bryant, 2003:222)



Plate 3.4.5: *Complete Zhi Khro Mandala Viewed from the South Side* (1990)

Nebel, P.

Mixed media.

(Brauen, 1997:47)

spiritual barriers and the universe, and that these representations or manifestations exist concurrently, the additional concept that the body is also a mandala, noted by Fisher (1997), makes the phrase *my body is a temple* less likely to conjure up mental images of a hippy in tie-dyed cheesecloth.

Costumes do, nonetheless, play a part in the other metaphysical aspect of the mandala's construction; that of the ritual process which brings the power to house a deity to the image. These rituals, for a mandala such as the Kalachakra, are extensive. According to Bryant (2003),

Painting the Kalachakra Sand Mandala in its ritual context traditionally takes six days, employing as many as sixteen monks. (Bryant, 2003:25)

This goes some way to providing a practical reason for the traditional anonymity of such mandalas' artists.

The rituals of this six day ceremony commence with consecration of the ground on which the mandala is to be created, and purification rituals for the initiated monks performing the ceremony as well as any persons attending the ceremony to receive it as an initiation. Personifications and transformations form aspects of the subsequent ritual elements, as in the case of the visualisation by all involved of the ceremonial leader as the deity in the flesh (Bryant, 2003).

Perhaps the most alien of rituals from a materialist perspective of art is its destruction upon completion. This finale to the entire ritual process is described by Bryant (2003), who states that

... four monks recited prayers requesting the 722 deities which they had invoked during the process of constructing the Kalachakra Mandala to now return to their sacred homes. The

monks adroitly removed the coloured sand which represented the deities and, within minutes, six weeks of painstaking labor was swept up and put into an urn. The urn was then carried in a ceremonial procession from the museum and the sand was poured into the river. (Bryant, 2003:35)

This act of pouring the sand into water, as pointed out by Brauen (1997), forms another mandala in ripples on the surface of the water, as can be seen in the photograph shown in Plate 3.4.6, taken following the ritual destruction ceremony of a Kalachakra mandala. This ripple effect is also, intentionally or otherwise, representative of the metaphysical effect of this ritual, which is intended to carry the beneficial qualities of the mandala to the world, using the water as their vehicle.

Given that the discussion of the sand mandala's construction has reached the point of its destruction, and that this broached the subject of the sand mandala's beneficial qualities, it is now time to address the fourth and final criterion of Robinson's (1999) definition; that of the mandala's use.

3.5 The Tibetan Buddhist Mandala's Purpose and Effects

Tibetan Buddhist sand mandalas form, as do all other ritually constructed mandalas in the tradition, an integral part of Tantric Buddhist practice. As a part of this religious way of life, their purpose is to facilitate the journey towards enlightenment. This purpose has a greater depth of meaning than the aid to deep thought or contemplation on a spiritual or religious theme defined by Robinson (1999) as the mandala's use. This increased profundity is made clearer still by the mandala's attribution of beneficial qualities which are distributed to the world upon its deposition into water.



Plate 3.4.6: *Where it Forms One Final Mandala* (1985)

Brauen, M. Nebel, P. and Röthlisberger, D.

Photograph.

(Brauen, 1997:93)

As an aid along the path to enlightenment, the purpose of a sand mandala can be synthesised as the reduction of suffering and the promotion of peace of mind, as explained by the Dalai Lama (1992). Specifically of the Kalachakra mandala, the Dalai Lama is quoted in an interview with Levenson (1997) as saying that “We firmly believe in its ability to reduce tension,” and that “we feel that it can create peace, peace of mind, and thereby promote peace in the world” (Levenson, 1997:12).

An exploration of the finer details of the mandala’s uses in reducing suffering and promoting peace leads naturally to a greater understanding of Tantric beliefs. Among the common themes prevalent in the translation of these beliefs for comprehension by a foreign culture is that of the mandala’s power to heal. Rather than being a sand mandala’s sole intended purpose, however, this effect is almost a by-product of its aim of accelerating the journey to enlightenment.

In order to understand this, the concept of enlightenment first needs to be clarified. Freedom from suffering and peace of mind are the final result, yet say nothing about the process of arriving at this point. In Tibetan Buddhism the state of being prior to attaining enlightenment is that of ignorance. The process of enlightenment is the transformation from the state of ignorance which is the cause of suffering (or the illusion of suffering) to one of wisdom and compassion, that is, enlightenment.

Since this state of ignorance is the origin of suffering, and this ignorance is the natural state of being for every person who has not reached enlightenment, the logical inference that the majority of people are in a constant state of suffering is reflected in Tibetan Buddhist beliefs. Baker (1997) refers to the opinion of Tibetan doctors when he states that

... until ignorance and craving are removed from the mind-stream, no matter how healthy we think we are, we are still ill.

This primordial affliction of contracted awareness is capable of being cured only through the supreme elixir of spiritual practice.

(Baker, 1997:113)

The subtext of this passage is that the path to enlightenment is a healing process. This suggestion is confirmed by the third Noble Truth taught by the Buddha, the theme of which is summarised typically by Baker (1997) as “Perfect health, the cessation of all suffering” (Baker, 1997:113). There are four Noble Truths in all, which demonstrate the significance of this cessation to the Buddhist way of life by their subject, being that of suffering in each case.

At this point it becomes easier to comprehend the motivation for taking days to construct a beautiful image and then to destroy it. The reward is not financial. Instead, the monks who create sand mandalas are “engaging in a process that benefits them and will also serve to benefit others” (Bryant, 2003:25). The destruction of the mandala is an important part of this process. Whilst visitors to Western galleries in which monks have been invited to create sand mandalas are commonly said to express exasperation or disappointment that such a compelling and beautiful creation is lost, the monks who create mandalas later destroy them precisely for the reason of fulfilling their purpose. The flowing body of water into which the sand is poured “will then carry the healing energies to the world,” (Warner, 2002:2) which is far more beneficial than allowing the sand to lie un-disrupted in one spot indefinitely. The essentiality of the sand mandala’s destruction is explained by Gold (1994) as being due to the belief that it “must be realized within one’s own bodymind, not kept external from it” (Gold, 1994:169).

3.6 How the Tibetan Buddhist Mandala Heals.

The internalisation of the mandala’s properties goes a long way to explaining how the mandala is believed to function, not only for healing, but for all of its spiritual

capacities. Just as Tibetan Buddhist monks believe that they are giving physical form to something which already exists when they construct a sand mandala, so the mandala's properties are believed to go on existing after its physical destruction. By giving it physical form, its qualities are brought into our perception of physical reality. The diligence and care taken by the monks in the construction of a sand mandala are vital, since it has to be made perfectly in order to bring the desired results into being with equal flawlessness.

Exacting standards such as these are deemed both necessary and worthwhile. As explained by the Gyuto Monks in an interview with Segal and Segal (2002), the mandala is "a symbol of a perfect world, in which you as an individual are already perfect" (Segal and Segal, 2002:12). If an image is to bring its metaphysical properties into physical reality and it is a symbol of a perfect world including a perfect self, then making the image as perfect as is humanly possible is simply a matter of common sense, independent of the spiritual beliefs which dictate the required accuracy. As Gold (1994) explains that as a result of a mandala ritual, one is "reborn / restored / transformed into one's own ideal state, the best version of oneself," (Gold, 1994:180) the importance of perfection is clearer still. In terms of healing, an imperfect mandala would manifest imperfect health.

The focus of intent in mandala rituals is not generally as self-oriented as is suggested by the previous citation. In Tibetan Buddhism the keen-ness to bring about the cessation of suffering encompasses the suffering of all. After all, the mandala is a symbol of a perfect world as well as a perfect self. The same healing is therefore brought to a much wider audience than those present at the mandala ritual, for reasons made explicit by Brauen (1997) when he argues that

The worldview of Tantric Buddhism denies the possibility of tackling impurities and faults selectively, postulating instead holistic action that takes into account mutual interrelations and the right to existence of the whole of nature. Thus, according to Tantric teachings, the person who wishes to purify himself [*sic*] must keep in view not just himself but all other living beings, and even include the entire cosmos in his efforts. (Brauen, 1997:124)

This worldview can be summarised as the belief that to reduce the suffering of the universe in total would reduce one's own suffering. This can be understood on a much smaller physical scale by the improvement of one's own quality of experience through the reduction of pain of those around one. If one's companions complain of headaches then one's enjoyment of the day can be seen to improve after their appropriate dosage of pain killers or better still, cure. Their increased comfort leads to a lessening in their grouchiness and thus improves one's own quality of life. Likewise, if one has been in bitter mood due to one's own pain, the healing of those around one may be a necessary part of one's own healing.

The healing of the entire cosmos thus explains how individual healing is effected, since the individual forms a part of the universe, albeit a tiny one. What remains to be clarified is how this healing is made possible in the first instance. According to Buddhist scripture, as explained on the Smithsonian Institution's introductory web page about Tibetan sand mandalas, they have the power to heal because they "transmit positive energies to the environment and to the people who view them" (Smithsonian Institution, 2004). These positive energies and their source are elaborated upon with the subsequent explanation that

While constructing a mandala, Buddhist monks chant and meditate to invoke the divine energies of the deities residing within the mandala. The monks then ask for the deities' healing blessings. A mandala's healing power extends to the whole world even before it is swept up and dispersed into flowing water ... (Smithsonian Institution, 2004)

This account identifies three points of significance to the mandala's source of healing power. The first is that the healing power originates from the deities. The second is that these are brought to the mandala from the deities by virtue of the monks prayers requesting their healing blessings. The third is that the mandala is believed to possess the power to transmit this healing as positive energies to its physical environment. Given that a sand mandala is also believed to be a manifestation of the deity it represents, this explains how the qualities of the mandala are brought into physical reality.

This covers the energetic manner in which a sand mandala heals, and the source of its healing power, but how do the positive energies perform their healing role? Aspirin relieves pain by reducing inflammation, so how do the healing energies of a sand mandala reduce suffering? In an interview with Segal and Segal, Tenzin Karma of the Gyuto Monks explains that the ignorance (which he delineates as not knowing or understanding) which is the source of all disease and un-wellness causes "disturbances of the harmony of the energy flow in the chakras" (Segal and Segal, 2002:14). The chakras are the energy centres of the body; themselves seen as wheels or vortices. When ignorance is removed or cancelled out, he says, "the result of the disease also gets removed and healing can take place" (Segal and Segal, 2002:14).

Since a mandala “serves as a tool for guiding individuals along the path to enlightenment,” (Smithsonian Institution, 2004) and the process of enlightenment burns away the ignorance which is the cause of all suffering, this suggests that the positive energies emitted to all by a Tibetan Buddhist sand mandala cancel out ignorance (or promote enlightenment) on an energetic level. Were this true, one would expect that a mandala would reduce the ignorance of those who view it. This effect is confirmed by Fallon (2001), who describes the beliefs held by the Gyuto Monks regarding the sand mandala. She states that

They believe that it is healing to the ordinary person and is the subliminal trigger of the visualization power of the initiate. They believe that anyone who beholds it with goodwill and faith will have the instinctive impure mental elements of ignorance, desire and anger transformed into the pure qualities of wisdom, loving kindness and compassion. (Fallon, 2001:5)

This clearly describes the process of enlightenment caused directly by the mandala’s healing power.

It has to be noted that any mandala is part of a ritual process, and the prayers and rituals which are interwoven into its physical construction are an integral part of this. That noted, the Tibetan Buddhist beliefs documented here regarding the mandala include its description as healing to the ordinary person who beholds it with goodwill and faith, as well as healing to the world as it is dispersed into water during its ceremonial destruction (regardless of the world’s awareness of the activity and associated belief). In essence, the comments cited in this section leave no doubt that, from the perspective of Tibetan Buddhism, the mandala is considered to possess significant therapeutic properties.

Given the elevated status this may appear to project onto the mandala, it must also be remembered that mandala construction is one of many ritual arts within the Tibetan Buddhist way of life. As it is evident that the mandala heals by promoting the process of enlightenment, and that this is the direction in which any person on the Tibetan Buddhist path will travel every day, it follows that the entire Tibetan Buddhist way of life must be a healing journey. Yet this should not belittle the importance of the mandala's role in healing, since its ritual construction forms a vital part of this way of life. This, together with an expression of profound physical healing potential, is made obvious by Bryant (2003) when he asserts that the Tibetan Buddhist path is

... very much an active process of continually purifying the activities of one's body, speech, and mind, by reciting prayers and performing various ritual practices and meditations daily....

Through such continued and prolonged practice, the atomic structure of one's very being is altered. (Bryant, 2003:131)

As one of the ritual practices to which Bryant (2003) refers, mandalas evidently contribute to such an alteration of one's atomic structure.

By bringing a change in atomic structure into the picture, Bryant (2003) raises the discussion of healing to a more tangible level. Until this point, all comments have been generic, confirming that a mandala has healing associations, transmits positive energies, and promotes enlightenment. To alter the atomic structure of the body makes clear that the way of life of which mandalas form a part has the potential to exert a remarkable physical impact on the health of one who follows it.

A belief in an energetic change in the atomic structure of the body has much in common with a belief in the cellular memory of the body, which is one widely held by what could be described as the new age community. Science is just beginning to catch

up with such beliefs. The new age belief that the cells of the body store a person's memories compares the human body with a computer. Just as the information required to run a computer and its programmes is stored on silicone chips, so the liquid crystals which comprise the human body store a person's memories, both good and bad. Unwanted programmes and files can be deleted from a computer's memory leaving no physical scar, and this is translated into a healing process for the body. Assuming that a bad memory stored in a cell results in that cell's ill health, so releasing that memory restores the cell to good health. Such a process is described by Bays (1999) as healing for the body and or the mind. The belief regarding a change in atomic structure is described by Bryant (2003) as performing in much the same manner, and may also therefore refer to healing of the body and/or mind.

This brings the mandala in Tibetan Buddhism close to the practical limit of its description here. Its appearance, meaning, representation and uses for healing have spiralled out from a basic and generalised definition at the centre to an outer circumference of multi-dimensional understanding. Beyond this point lies initiation and secrecy. The next direction is therefore to compare the information gained from literature with the perspective of a contemporary practitioner.

3.7 The Tibetan Buddhist Mandala in Contemporary Practice

All of the citations within this chapter have been from modern literature sources. It might appear then that there are no references of considerable age against which to compare consistency of content, yet this would be a misguided assumption. Warner (2001) states that

For centuries the Tibetans have relied upon mandalas and accompanying prayer ceremonies for healing and protection in times of tragedy and crisis, (Warner, 2001:1)

which is a statement derived from consultation with a Tibetan Buddhist Monastery. The two critical points of her assertion are that mandalas are used for healing, and that this has been the case for hundreds of years.

In terms of the mandala, Tibetan Buddhist practice has changed little over the centuries. The most significant alteration to the substance of traditional mandala rituals surely has to be the partial lifting of secrecy surrounding them, encouraged by the Dalai Lama (1992) in the name of raising awareness and support since the military invasion of Tibet by China in 1959. The monks who have survived but been driven from their country work hard to maintain their traditions and beliefs so that they are not lost to future generations, despite the destruction of many objects and buildings of significance. Whilst a tragic situation, the efforts of the monks to preserve their tradition serves as further confirmation of the elementally stable history of the Tibetan Buddhist mandala.

The ancient Tantric texts remain as valid today as ever, and are studied by initiates of the tradition. Thangka paintings of mandalas continue to be read and interpreted as sacred texts regardless of their age, as their content remains consistent, which is confirmed by Warner (2001). The reason that there has been no direct reference to ancient Tibetan literature in this chapter is twofold. Firstly, ancient sacred texts remain guarded by the secrecy which has endured for centuries, and secondly, the available modern literature is based on that content of this source which has more recently been revealed to the population at large, as described by the Dalai Lama (1992). This means that, although the publication dates of the literature referred to here are modern, the beliefs expressed within them reflect both ancient and current perspectives, as they are consistent.

A means of corroborating the currency of the consulted literature in contemporary practice was duly sought from Tibetan Buddhist practitioners. Within the timescale of the project's research, there was one serendipitous workshop (of which the writer is aware) presented within a travelling distance which was manageable in both time and budget. According to the methodology, this researcher therefore took this opportunity to validate the beliefs expressed in literature in terms of current practice. The workshop entitled *Mandala Art* was presented by Thupten Khedup and Lobsang Tsultrim, two Tibetan monks from the Gyuto Monastery, at the Art Gallery of New South Wales on 23rd January 2001⁹.

As expected from the enduring and unvarying nature of the mandala rituals described in the consulted literature, the introduction to mandala art from the current practical perspective of the two monks presenting the workshop confirmed the accuracy of the literature on every point raised. This commenced with a comment concordant with the view expressed by the Dalai Lama (1992), which was that they hoped that their involvement with the gallery's exhibition and presentation of workshops would raise awareness of their plight since their exile from Tibet.

Moving on to the specifics of mandala art, their initial comments confirmed that the accuracy of a mandala's creation is essential to its function. They explained that the proportions of the image bear spiritual significance and must therefore be adhered to with strict attention to detail. They also stated that the construction of a mandala brings its properties into physical reality. Applying these two concepts together, they used the example of the Peace Lotus Mandala, explaining that if it is not created with absolute perfection then this would bring about the experience of imperfect peace in reality.

⁹ Following attendance at the workshop, the monks granted permission to this author to refer to their communications during the workshop. All references to the monks' comments refer to this personal communication, which is abbreviated henceforth to (*p.c. 23rd January, 2001*).

The opportunity to add personal experience to those of current practitioners is one of the benefits brought by participation in a workshop. The monks led the attendees in the structural outline of the Peace Lotus Mandala. As time and materials did not permit the resulting sketches to adhere to the guidelines of accuracy, the drawing of the Peace Lotus Mandala produced by the researcher during the workshop is an imperfect representation of the mandala (see Plate 3.7.1).

According to the beliefs described above by the monks, the anticipated outcome of such a sketch would be the experience of imperfect peace. It is noted with hindsight that this could be described as consistent with individual experience following the drawing produced during the workshop. It is also acknowledged that this experience can not, however, be attributed to the imperfect mandala with any scientific rigour, as there is no way of comparing the same passage of time with the exclusion of the image's creation. Without such a comparison there is likewise no way of gauging the contributory effects of demands placed on the self such as postgraduate study.

The experience of imperfect peace is described in the consulted literature as stemming from the primordial state of ignorance, which is the cause of all illusion of suffering. Further to this, a properly constructed mandala possesses the power to reduce this ignorance and therefore suffering. The monks leading the attended workshop confirmed this, explaining that the lotus represents purity and brings the quality of wisdom into reality. To make their point clearer still, they stated that "Wisdom burns ignorance" (p.c. 23rd January, 2001), and drew attention to the rings of fire and diamonds, which carry protective qualities.

The monks elaborated on the mandala's healing associations, stating that the Peace Lotus Mandala "creates inner balance as you draw" (p.c. 23rd January, 2001). An example was added to illustrate this point, and it was thus explained that if a person was

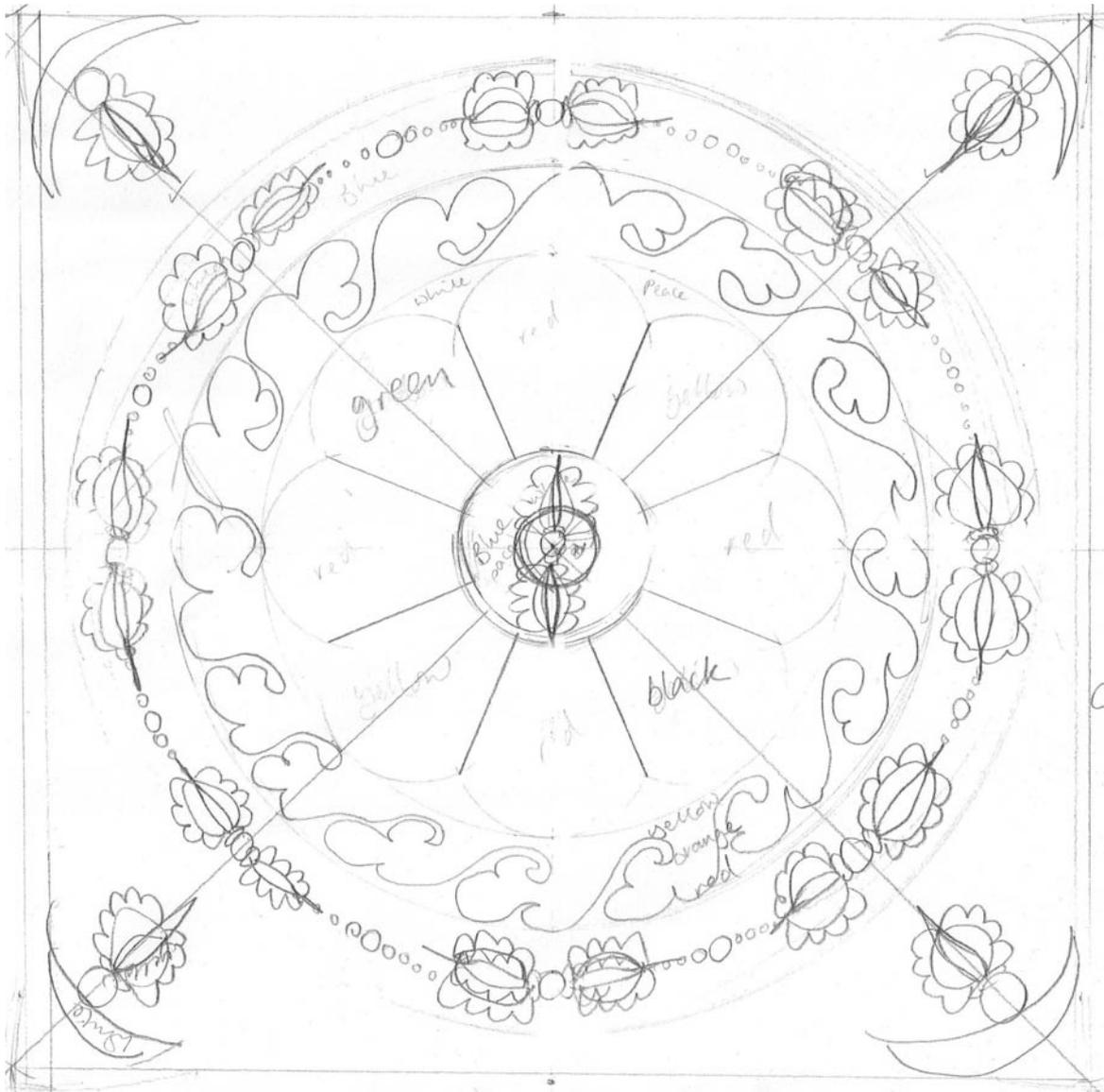


Plate 3.7.1: *Peace Lotus Mandala Sketch (2002)*

Markwick, L.

Pencil on paper.

Private collection of the author.

unhappy or depressed, he or she would be given the Peace Lotus Mandala to draw and would find inner peace as a result. This unique insight, as is the case for the workshop in total, confirms that the beliefs represented in the references from consulted literature are upheld in current practice.

3.8 Synthesis of the Mandala's Healing Role in Tibetan Buddhism

This confirmation provides reassurance that as complete and accurate a picture of the Tibetan Buddhist mandala and its role in healing as is practical has now been illustrated. The arrival at this juncture permits a point by point summary of the mandala's believed associations with healing, as follows:

- The mandala image has the ability to house a deity and be a deity's physical manifestation. It represents more than three dimensions.
- The powers of the mandala are those of the deity / deities or spiritual entity / entities.
- The mandala's powers are brought to it thanks to the prayers of the person(s) constructing it.
- It functions by bringing its properties into physical reality.
- It transmits positive energies to its environment.
- It heals by promoting enlightenment, or reducing ignorance.
- It is a representation of something which already exists.
- It does not have to have physical form in order to function.
- It forms part of a way of life which is by its very nature one of healing.

The final point of these is worth a little elaboration, or the reader might conclude that the mandala is the only Tibetan Buddhist answer to all health issues. There are deities such as White Tara to whom one might pray when in need of the healing

specialities for which she and others are renowned. Tibet also has its own traditional system of medicine, which it has to be acknowledged is heavily influenced by Buddhist practice and theory. As Baker (1997) describes this Tibetan art of healing, he writes that it

... leads through the labyrinth of human embodiment to reveal at the core of our physical being the perfectibility of the human spirit. (Baker, 1997:185)

This could as easily describe a mandala's representation of the self as perfect, to be brought into physical reality. It is also reminiscent of the potential transformation of atomic structure described by Bryant (2003).

The Dalai Lama (1997) describes the Tibetan view of healing as one of attaining or maintaining balance. This holistic stance is suggestive of the country's healing system in existence prior to the arrival of Buddhism in the seventh century. As explained by Bryant (2003),

Long before the common era, Tibetans developed a particular brand of shamanism that was ideal preparation for the arrival of Buddhism. ... (Bryant, 2003:78)

Like Tibetan Buddhism, Shamanism is a way of life for which healing is an integral part, and places high importance on the maintenance of balance. The congruence between the two cultures' healing beliefs runs deeper still, and the circle's healing associations within a shamanistic way of life are explored in the following chapter.

Chapter Four Circles in Shamanism

4.1 Introduction to Shamanism

While the purpose of this chapter is to discuss the circle's ascribed spiritual healing associations in Shamanism, a prior introduction is necessary to create the context. Given the word *shaman*'s derivation from Russian and Sanskrit as described in Chapter Two, coupled with its common use to describe a member of the traditional healing community of North America, the preconception of precisely what it means has the potential to vary greatly.

Shamanism is thus recognised as existing in a number of cultures, though for the purposes of this chapter, Native American culture will be the primary example under discussion, chosen from shamanistic cultures by default due to the utmost significance attributed to the circle within this culture, combined with its more recent documentation. While shamanistic culture is by no means limited to the Americas, the exclusion of other cultures is rather a reflection of the comparative insignificance of the circle in their healing rituals, combined with a lack of documentation, as determined by the methodology of this study.

Since the word *shaman* forms the basis of the word *Shamanism*, the former term's explication will facilitate the understanding of shamanistic culture. From its most basic perspective, the *Chambers 21st Century Dictionary* (Robinson, 1999) definition of a shaman is someone who is

... a doctor-priest or medicine man or medicine woman using magic to cure illness, make contact with gods and spirits, predict the future, etc. (Robinson, 1999:1288)

This definition is noted as applying particularly to “certain N Asian and Native American peoples” (Robinson, 1999:1288). Shamanism is thus described as “a religion dominated by shamans, based essentially on magic, spiritualism and sorcery” (Robinson, 1999:1288). The combination of these definitions is a useful basis from which to develop a fundamental understanding of shamanistic culture. The knowledge that a shaman performs the role described above is preparation for gaining insight into how he or she performs the job, both in terms of technique and culture.

On the same subject, Kollar (1995b) states that “It should be noted that shaman is not a word often used by American Indians ...” (Kollar, 1995b:660). The combination of the oral history of Native American culture and the academic credence afforded to published documents leads to a situation in which much currently available literature on the subject of Shamanism is authored from a Western perspective. Further to this, those publications written from an authentic Native American viewpoint can be challenging to understand. Storm’s *Seven Arrows* (1972) must, for example, be read as an entire text in order to understand its message. Writing for an audience from an opposing position, whilst more likely to represent cultural accuracy, can easily lead to incomplete comprehension of the text’s message. As long as this is acknowledged, the literature which is written from a Western perspective is therefore beneficial to the understanding of this culture, due to the familiarity of terms employed to explain the unfamiliar.

As an example of literature authored from an outsider’s perspective, Eliade’s (1964) *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* is often described as “the classic work on shamanism,” (Kollar, 1995b) or other similar phrases denoting high esteem. Eliade’s (1964) depiction of shamans as religious specialists who employ trance induced out-of-body experiences to gain insight from the supernatural world to be

brought back and utilised in dealing with problems in the physical world is the one that is most widely known outside shamanistic cultures. Whilst this certainly has merit in the introduction of the concepts important to such cultures to those for whom it might otherwise be totally unfamiliar, the accuracy of his description when applied to all tribes is limited. According to Kollar (1995b), Eliade's (1964) description remains close to the role of an Inuit shaman, though is quite different from that of one from the Northwest Coast Indians, for example.

Whilst noting some of the different ways in which shamans gain their status, including visionary experience, apprenticeship, inherited birthright and learned specialisations, Locust (1994) cautions the reader that

One must be very careful when using the terms medicine man or woman, healer, or shaman, because these are terms for concepts for which there are no direct translations from tribal languages. Each tribe has a particular title for its healers, a title that is not easily gained. (Locust, 1994:642)

Knowing that the description of a shaman here is thus, in essence, an approximate translation into a Western understanding of several roles from varying cultures, perhaps one of the most sensitive Western descriptions of a shaman comes from Meadows (1990), who defines a shaman as

... primarily a 'harmoniser', one who 'heals' at all levels – physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual – and in a particular way. (Meadows, 1990:220)

Robinson's (1999) description of a shaman as a hybrid of doctor and priest now seems simplistic and inaccurate by comparison, yet deserves further attention, as it nonetheless raises a valid point. In western culture, doctors and priests are certainly

accorded respect by the community, but the comparison is not equivalent. If you combine a doctor and priest in one person, this may double the respect and power afforded to the individual by his or her community, but still the comparison falls short of equivalence, for a shaman is often comparable with what, from a Western perspective, would appear to be the top authority in shamanistic culture. The descriptive term of *shamanistic* suggests this itself, as the name denotes the perceived significance of the shaman's role in the culture.

An elaboration of this comes from Kollar (1995b) who observes that "Shamans are essential to all tribes," which he qualifies immediately with the distinction that

... some are recognised and honored for their role, while others are feared and avoided for the power they possess (Kollar, 1995b:660).

It is thus the beliefs of the people in this power which cause them to respect the shaman (even if this is to respect the power and avoid the shaman out of fear). Initiation rituals, long apprenticeships and birthrights all form parts of the belief system. An outsider may witness the same tests of endurance, commitment and ability, but withhold the equivalent respect (including fear) because of lack of belief. It makes the power, the fear, and the physical, emotional and spiritual healings no less real for the *insider*; it is simply that the ability to foster what from a Western perspective is healing is not the only factor which commands respect.

The importance placed on belief makes it easier to understand that everything is considered to be spiritual within shamanistic culture. This does not merely mean that everything contained within shamanistic culture is considered to be spiritual, but rather that, from a shamanistic perspective, everything in life and the universe is considered to be spiritual, from a crow eating a snail to the grass growing on the plains. This

viewpoint renders everything equal within the universe in terms of importance, and denotes the respect bestowed upon the Earth as supporter of all of life on the planet, which is counterbalanced against the respect given to all the life which it supports.

This also means that illness is considered to be spiritual, since it too is part of the universe. It is shamanistic culture within which illness is often considered to originate from all or part of one's soul being lost (Markowitz, 1995c). Sometimes it is possible for a person to find that lost part without the help of a shaman, and sometimes it requires no conscious consideration. At other times, when self healing is too great a task, patients will go to a shaman and, in asking the shaman to perform the job of healing them, they are asking the shaman to find the part(s) of their souls which are lost. This is the point at which the inner spiritual journey becomes relevant.

In the example of *The Celtic Shaman* (Matthews, 1997) as literature written from a Western perspective in order to explain foreign concepts, Matthews describes some of these inner spiritual journeys. It is essentially a book to be used as a tool by a person who has felt called to become a shaman, but lacks contact with another shaman with whom to train. The book is a substitute tutor, and its title suggests a reason for its creation, as shamanistic culture is no longer prevalent in the area of North Western Europe historically inhabited by the Celts.

The journeys described are to be taken whilst sitting or lying motionless with one's eyes closed, as journeys of the imagination or spirit rather than physical travel, and come with a warning from the author not to undertake them lightly. He cautions the reader that the behaviour of someone undergoing training to become a shaman can easily present as madness from the perspective of the society of which he is a member. Communication with animals, plants and spiritual entities which are not visible to the human eye are typical of the behaviours he outlines, though it is the combined effect of

these, alongside the outwardly visible temperament of the shaman in training, which he notes as that most likely to have one sectioned.

It is the kind of warning which is frightening enough to make the reader consider closing the book never to open it again, but also intriguing enough to enthrall one with sufficient morbid fascination to read on in order to find out exactly what the writer means. What follows is a series of instructions for half guided visualisations involving climbing up trees as well as down through their roots, meeting animal totems which speak, and beings who hold importance comparable to gods (and with whom communication must accordingly follow strict rules of conduct).

It is from spiritual entities such as these that information about what is needed to find and retrieve the lost part of the soul is obtained once shamanistic training has been completed. This is a demonstration of the degree to which authority is bestowed upon spiritual experience. There is no scientific evidence advanced to support such responses, just as there is no such information confirming the existence of the soul, or that illness arises when a part of it is lost. The experience is sufficient authority for patients either to trust the shaman to complete the healing in isolation or follow the directions which result from his or her spiritual insight.

4.2 What is a Medicine Wheel?

The medicine wheel is commonly understood to be one of the tools with which a shaman gains such spiritual insight, although it is a great deal more than this. If compared to an object in western culture it would be life's dictionary. It is a tool with which children are taught about life, adults resolve their problems, and healing from illness is facilitated.

At its most basic physical description, it is a circle divided into fractional sections. It can be represented by an encircled cross, as in the Magic Eye™ medicine

wheel illustrated in Plate 4.2.1¹⁰. As an example, it demonstrates that the image itself is not solely what defines the medicine wheel, but what it represents, and how the viewer interacts with it. The circle indicates that the wheel is representative of everything in the universe, all encompassing as it is, and the two lines of the cross signify the cardinal points of the compass. From these, all other (non-cardinal) points of the compass are implied as present, and as a two dimensional representation, the fifth and sixth directions of above and below can also be interpreted as present.

The Magic Eye™ image has another layer of visual representation in the form of a repeated field of buffalo shapes reminding the viewer to look beyond the shape itself to the context of the image's use. Further to this is the requirement of altering one's visual focus, blurring everything else in one's regular field of vision in order to bring the medicine wheel into focus. This serves as a reminder that, in order for a medicine wheel to function as intended, the viewer must treat both the medicine wheel and life with the appropriate intent, and this requires seeing them both as consisting of more than appears to the eye.

The truth of this can be identified in written descriptions of medicine wheels. Their definitions vary from the purely physical to the entirely metaphysical, with few accounts embracing the two with equality. The emphasis is generally on one or the other, depending on the bias of the publication, be that factual or spiritual. The Provincial Museum of Alberta boasts that two thirds of all medicine wheels occur within its area of provincial interest, and its online publication describes them from a

¹⁰ Magic Eye™ images became popular in the 1980s as computer created images became more sophisticated with advances in technology. The basic quality which is present in all Magic Eye™ images is the multidimensionality of the image. Every Magic Eye™ image has a flat and commonly patterned appearance. To some, this flat, patterned surface is the only image perceived. However, thanks to the precise calculations capable of a computer, there is, hidden within each of these flat, patterned images, a three dimensional shape. In order to see this illusion, one must move the focus of one's gaze to somewhere between ten and twenty centimetres behind the flat, patterned surface. The three dimensional shape then appears in floating layers as if cut from cardboard. Plate 4.2.1 contains within it a three dimensional encircled cross, which may take some time and practice to see.

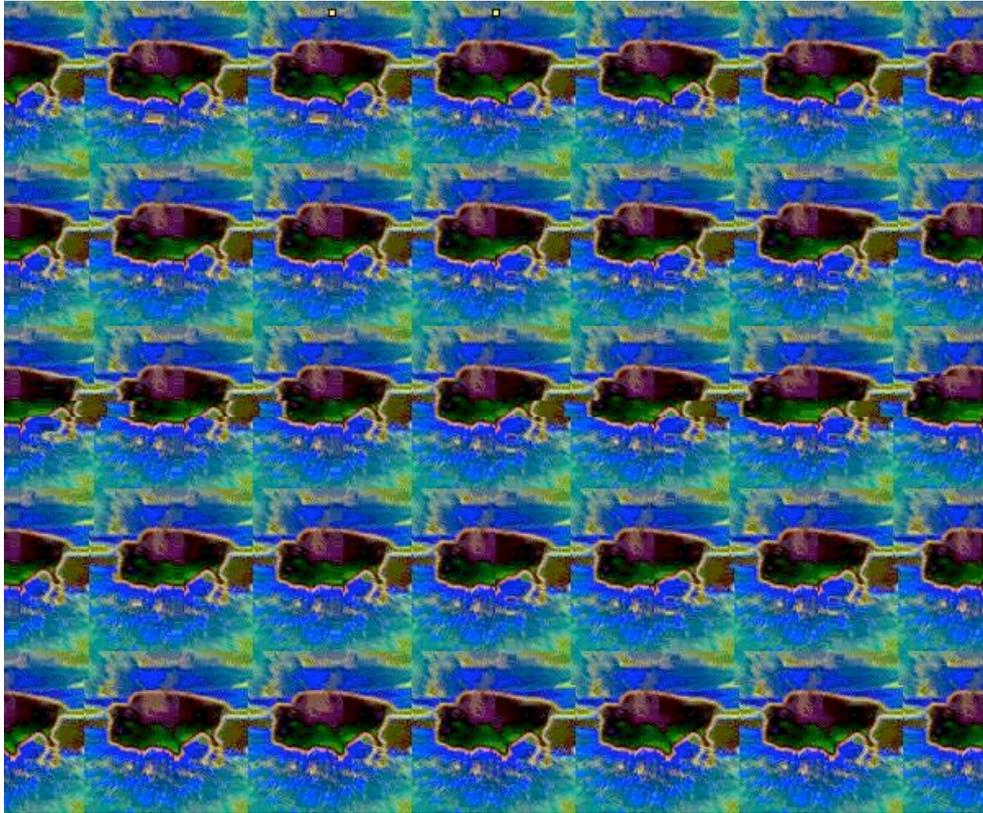


Plate 4.2.1: *Medicine Wheel* (2002)

Anon.

Magic eye digital image [online image]

(Bullrun, 2002)

primarily physical, and therefore factual perspective. In answer to the self directed question: *What is a Medicine Wheel?* the response commences with the description of a single example as follows:

The term 'medicine wheel' was first applied to the Big Horn Medicine Wheel in Wyoming, the most southern one known. That site consists of a central cairn or rock pile surrounded by a circle of stone; lines of cobbles link the central cairn and the surrounding circle. The whole structure looks rather like a wagon wheel lain-out on the ground with the central cairn forming the hub, the radiating cobble lines the spokes, and the surrounding circle the rim. The 'medicine' part of the name implies that it was of religious significance to Native peoples. (Provincial Museum of Alberta, 2001)

This is followed by a catalogue of varying stylistic types of medicine wheel, together with an illustrative diagram and drawings of existing examples, shown in Plates 4.2.2 and 4.2.3 respectively. As can be seen from these examples, the common feature is the circular form, though the cited document's author points out that they each consist of two out of three features, being a central stone cairn, one or more concentric stone circles, and two or more stone lines which radiate outwards from the centre.

Given the factual bias of the article, it is not surprising that the nod to the *religious significance to Native peoples* is accompanied by vague statements regarding the metaphysical definition of the medicine wheel, such as:

Alberta's medicine wheels ... remain an enigma. Research has suggested a number of functions for the wheels, and has

Type

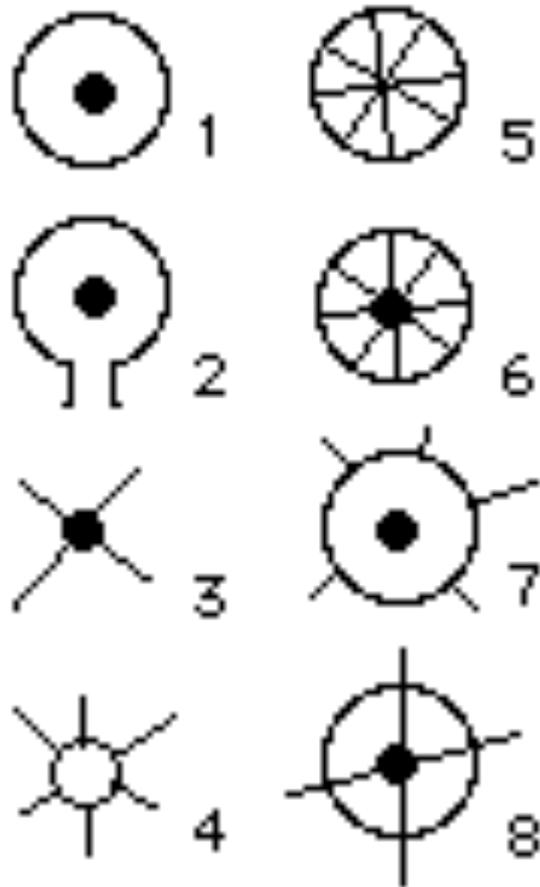


Plate 4.2.2: *Types of Medicine Wheels* (date not provided)

Anon.

Digital image [online image]

(Provincial Museum of Alberta, 2001)

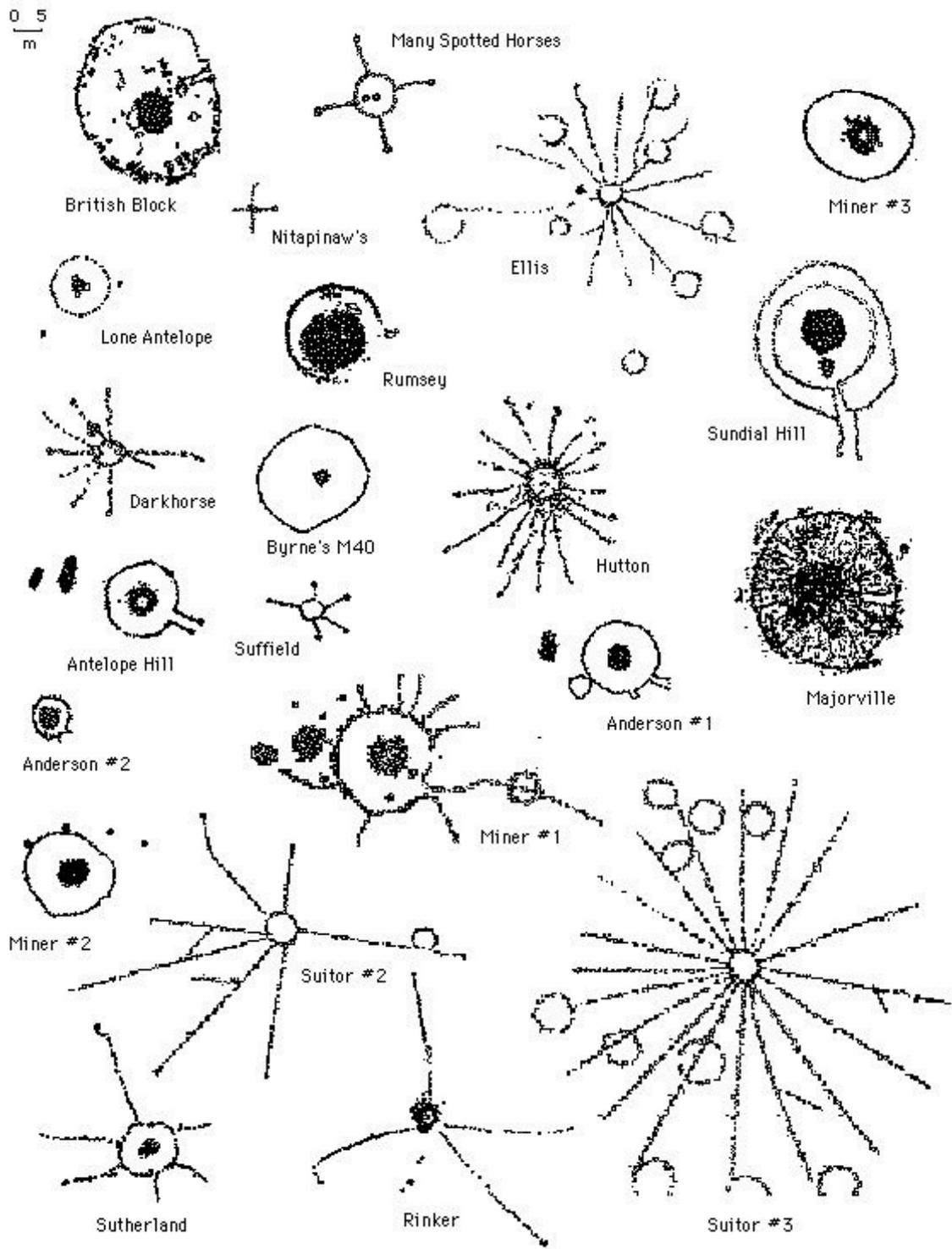


Plate 4.2.3: A Sample of Maps of Alberta Medicine Wheels (date not provided)

Anon.

Digital image [online image]

(Provincial Museum of Alberta, 2001)

indicated their use over a very long period of time. (Provincial Museum of Alberta, 2001)

There is at no point in the article any definite assertion regarding the precise religious significance referred to. The uses for and properties believed of the wheels are simply hinted as being present, whatever they may be or have been.

This description of medicine wheels may be archaeologically accurate, however, the term's usage demonstrates that it does not have to be a permanent fixture made of stone. This is demonstrated not only by the Magic Eye™ image depicted in Plate 4.2.1, but by many others, including the portable quilted version illustrated in Plate 4.2.4. The text which accompanies its context explains that medicine wheels vary in construction from tribe to tribe as well as in the representational association of the four or six directions (those of two or three dimensions, accordingly). The common principles noted are that

... life is a circle and that the four directions stand for North, South, East and West with Mother Earth being down and Father Sky being above; giving six directions. (Provincial Museum of Alberta, 2001)

However, this description conflicts in some respects with that put forward by the Provincial Museum of Alberta. Whilst they each concur that the wheel is circular in shape, and agree that there are variances in physical structure, there the similarity ends, as the representational meanings of the directions are broached by the second of the two cited sources.

The same document goes on to become markedly less pragmatic, as the statement that “A Medicine Wheel is a physical manifestation of Spiritual energy,”



Plate 4.2.4: *Quillwheel2* (date not provided)

Anon.

Mixed media [online image]

(Spiritual Network, 2003b)

(Tree-Song, 2003) clearly illustrates. In contrast to the visual qualities, those detailed include that it is

A mirror in which we can better SEE what is going on within us.
It is a wheel of protection and enables us, and allows us, to gather surrounding energies into a focal point and to commune with Spirit, Self and Nature (ALL elemental forces). ... It is a model to be used to view self, society, or anything that one could ever think of looking into. ... [I]t is a tool to be used for the upliftment and betterment of mankind, healing and connecting to infinite. (Tree-Song, 2003, original capitalisations)

At this stage it is clear that the physical structure, structural representation and attributed properties are all significant aspects of a medicine wheel, and each are needed to define what it is with precision. Its visual appearance is significant to archaeology and visual arts. Its structural representation is crucial to the properties attributed to it, and these properties are the perceived source of its associated powers such as healing. The question *what is a medicine wheel?* thus has to be broadened to include the questions *what does a medicine wheel represent?* and *what are the properties of medicine wheels?*

The latter two of these questions are addressed by articles in the style of the preceding citation. One reason for this is suggested by a strictly academic text which explains that

Medical knowledge was jealously guarded, for it was feared that a shaman could lose his or her power if the knowledge were divulged. (Ross, 1995:474)

This implies that sharing information about the source of power would effectively strip the confidant of his or her abilities. Such a fear would be bound to restrict common knowledge of the details of any spiritual tool or ritual to those who were deemed worthy of the information. Those least respectful of such information would be the least likely to be offered it, and although the balance is being redressed, academia in its Western form has been historically unsympathetic to such beliefs. This also makes it likely that any understanding of the healing powers attributed to the medicine wheel will necessitate some interpretation of the properties ascribed to it, rather than there being a documented, absolute definition of what causes the wheel to heal and how it does it.

4.2.1 What are its Defining Properties?

The properties of a medicine wheel which are employed to define it fall into several categories, which will be presented in an order chosen for its smooth progression from one to another, for ease of reading. The first of these is the quality of being all-encompassing. It is described on The Great Round's (2003) web site as representative of the total universe, emphasised by the statement that "everything has a place in the wheel, even infinity" (Great Round, 2003). This is rephrased by Moorey (1997), who writes that "all that exists has a place on the wheel," and that the medicine wheel "exists inside us and outside us – it makes up our being, and it makes up the cosmos" (Moorey, 1997:34). This forms a paradox, as the medicine wheel is representative of everything, and simultaneously everything consists of the medicine wheel. This she explains when she asserts that

... by its very essence it conveys the past, future, earth and sky,
here and there are all part of a cosmic pattern, and essentially
form a unity. (Moorey, 1997:34)

Meadows (1990) provides further enlightenment on this when he explains that the medicine wheel is

... a symbolic representation of the Universe and of the Universal Mind in which everything everywhere is connected and held in being by harmonic synchronisation. (Meadows, 1990:34)

Should symbolising, encompassing and constituting everything in the universe not be sufficient to explain any powers or attributions, there are further specific associations which are commonly delineated in the description of a medicine wheel. The sanctity of the space that is a medicine wheel is described as being as reverential as a cathedral by Baar and Kavasch (1999), the difference being in the name given to the metaphysical resident or residents. In contrast to naming God as the permanent tenant of churches, they state that medicine wheels are

... believed to be the residences of special spirits who can work directly with the higher world. (Baar and Kavasch, 1999:113)

On a web site belonging to an organisation devoted to art as healing, the medicine wheel is described as being “a sacred living object and a teaching tool,” which is “simply a way of making sacred space more real and more visible” (Art as Healing, 2003). Moorey (1997) also turns to the paraphernalia of Western religions for a spiritual comparison, stating that “the wheel is an altar ... a sacred space ...” (Moorey, 1997:34).

The limitations of a comparison with a cathedral are clear when the power of the wheel is discussed. Whilst the discussion of the medicine wheel’s attributed properties could be re-named as a discussion of its powers, it is more generally its power which is meant in this particular context. It is described as being “a power wheel, showing

separate forces in complete balance,” (Moorey, 1997:34) and more specifically, in academic terms, as

... a circle or spiral of generated power under the control of Mind that is multi-dimensional and multi-functional. (Meadows, 1990:34, original capitals).

The medicine wheel is also attributed a protective association thanks to this power. It is defined in an online document as being “a safe and protected place of love, a centered and grounding area,” (Spiritual Network, 2003b) with no nominated source of this protection. This source is identified by another author in a statement that “... it gives protection through its metaphorical power” (Moorey, 1997:34). This distinction makes clear that the medicine wheel itself has this power, and not that it is solely the person who uses it for protection who brings the power to the wheel.

Another of the attributes of the medicine wheel commonly proffered as an aspect of its description is its link with the Earth, and ability to extend this bond with the user. This is not simply a case of its representation of everything in the universe, as mentioned and cited earlier, but the specific quality of causing a connection with it. It is described as “a device for tuning in to the Earth’s psychic energies and to the unseen forces of Nature” (Meadows, 1990:xvii). The same point is both explained and elaborated upon slightly further in the assertion that a medicine wheel

... teaches us of ourselves and of all other living things. ... [I]t also connects us with a larger community which includes plants, animal, mouths of rivers and solar systems. ... (Great Round, 2003)

Since it can be used as a tool for building a connection with the Earth and its inhabitants and energies, it comes as little surprise that a further function is that of

showing one one's place within that world. The medicine wheel is attributed the ability to define "where we are in space and time and where we are going / have been" (Moorey, 1997:34). The qualities of showing one's position and providing directions are further alluded to when it is described as "a map of the mind and a chart of Life ..." (Meadows, 1990:34, original capitals), and "a map or compass to help us find our way ..." (Moorey, 1997:34).

This cartographical theme is particularly common. The previous citations demonstrate that the medicine wheel is considered to be a map for the people who use it and of the people who use it. It is also believed to function as an ordnance survey map of the spiritual landscape in which people live, as made clear by the statement that

The medicine wheel creates an axis and an atlas to sacred space.

It is a mapping of the sacred landscape [*sic*] we live in. (Art as Healing, 2003)

These directions associate the medicine wheel with the attribute of being able to show "the path we must all walk to be fully human," (Great Round, 2003) bringing the list of associations to perhaps the most pertinent to the subject of healing; that of wholeness. Described as being "powerful as a tool to bring us to a deeper relationship with ourselves ..." (Great Round, 2003), the healing effect of the medicine wheel is referred to directly when it is defined as "a Circle of Knowledge that restores wholeness and gives power over one's life" (Meadows, 1990:xvii). The medicine wheel is also referred to as a form of "The quartered circle, which is ... an ancient sign of wholeness – or 'holiness'" (Moorey, 1997:36).

The detail of how this healing effect is achieved is suggested in comments highlighting the significance of the centre, both of the medicine wheel and the person who uses it. The medicine wheel is described as "a centering device for our

consciousness” (Moorey, 1997:34), which “shows us the way back to our home, to our center” (Great Round, 2003). Still greater spiritual profundity is expressed in the assertion that

The center of the circle is the touching of the Spirit, the pure of heart, the truth as everything extends from the circle and everything comes together in the middle. (Spiritual Network, 2003b)

This is superseded in succinctness by the statement that “The center is the power point of the circle and where ALL comes from” (Spiritual Network, 2003a). Healing must, quite literally, be included in this centre since it is a part of *ALL*, as is everything else. This suggests that it is the combination of the medicine wheel’s attributed properties and the conscious effort applied by the person using it which is conducive to a healing effect. Being taken to the centre, which is the source of *ALL*, brings one to a point of knowing what is needed for healing, or restoring wholeness. Perhaps it could be said that the route required to attain this goal is contained within the centre with everything else, and is shown to the person who seeks it.

Such a hypothesis highlights the fact that, though the defining qualities of the medicine wheel documented thus far contribute to the healing context, none of them explain just how the medicine wheel heals. In order to satisfy the aim of documenting the spiritual healing associations of the circle within Shamanism in accordance with the methodology of this study, the healing function must be examined more closely to gain a greater understanding of these associations.

4.3 How is a Medicine Wheel Used for Healing?

The clearest written accounts of how a medicine wheel heals take the form of descriptions of how a medicine wheel is used for healing. This difference between the

two is subtle, and requires the reader to put effort into developing an understanding of how the medicine wheel is used, from which to deduce how it heals, rather than being told how it heals.

Such descriptions are naturally divided into two sections; those of group healing and solo healing. In *The Shaman and the Medicine Wheel*, Eaton (1982) documents an example of group healing. In her account she explains that a group of elders gathered together to form a healing circle, bringing their wisdom and experience together to produce an effect greater than the sum of its constituent parts. She ascribes to them a high level of experience as medicine men and women, with many years of healing between them.

In the event that she describes, the elders sat in the shape of a circle within an existing physical medicine wheel. Complementing its shape, their seating positions were evenly spaced and in effect created a second medicine wheel with their bodies. They are subsequently described as working together through the night. Precisely what this work consisted of is not detailed, although the impression given is that it involved meditation or inner journeying and sustained concentration on the healing purpose of the event. By the morning, the job had been completed to the best of their abilities. The physical achievement is not made clear, despite which, Eaton (1982) expresses that she considers it to be an awesome feat with powerful consequences.

Given the traditional guardianship of healing knowledge, the existence of a document containing explicit accounts of what each member of a group experiences during such an event is unlikely. An understanding of this activity can, however, be gained from the study of instructions and accounts of solo healing with a medicine wheel.

The principles behind using a medicine wheel for healing are constant. Each of the directions are representative of different elements, animals, minerals and plants. These themselves represent qualities, and the idea is to consider the qualities within each direction with respect to the issue to be resolved. In the explanation of the qualities of the representations within the directions, a common term to describe the function and means of employment is that of lodges. On The Great Round's (2003) web page, the term and its purpose is introduced thus:

Each of the directions may be thought of as a lodge. We must learn to be comfortable and to feel at home in each of the lodges. It is important that we not avoid the teachings and lessons of one of the lodges, however difficult they may be for us. ... Each lodge simply serves as a mirror and is intended to show us what we need to know about ourselves in relation to the entire universe. The purpose of this is to help us return to the home of the True Self in the center of our own internal wheel of being. (Great Round, 2003)

Whilst the variability of what is contained within each lodge amongst different tribal traditions is acknowledged, some consistency and repetition is recognisable in documented examples. The East is routinely described as the direction from which one enters the medicine wheel, and is commonly associated with sunrise, beginnings, creativity, fire, the colour yellow, Spring, eagles or other birds, and spirit. The South is typically associated with midday, Summer, strength, beauty, water, the mouse, the colour red, and emotion. The West is likewise associated with sunset, Autumn, endings, change, the snake, looking inward, the body, and the colour black. Finally, the North is commonly associated with the mind, knowledge, wisdom, the white buffalo, Winter,

night, and air (Meadows, 1990), (Moorey, 1997), (Great Round, 2003), (Moondance, 2002).

Whichever traditional tribal variation is examined, the associations of the directions consistently combine to create balance. There is always one direction for the mind, one direction for the body, one for the emotions and one for the spirit. The same principle applies to the seasons and the qualities of the animals who reside in the lodges. To take a health problem into a medicine wheel thus involves a consideration of the issue from each of these perspectives. Following the examples above, one would also consider how each of a mouse, eagle, snake and white buffalo would react to the problem, be that physically or metaphorically.

The implication of this practice is that the reason that illness occurs is that one's life is not in balance. There is a dominance in such a case of the traits of one or more lodges over the other(s). This might manifest in a tendency to see things only from the perspective of the body or mind, with disproportionate consideration of the emotions or spirit as contributory factors to a health problem. Taking this issue into a medicine wheel allows the user to gain insight into how to move out of the problematic pattern of behaviour through applying the qualities of each lodge to the issue. This brings the person back into balance, thus becoming whole again (healed), or, as cited previously, "return to the home of the True Self" (Great Round, 2003).

The implication of this in relation to how a medicine wheel heals is that all of the qualities represented or believed to be contained within a medicine wheel are included in its function as a tool for healing. It is the use of this tool which enables access to the information regarding the action required to implement a healing effect, though it has to be noted that knowledge of how to use the tool is critical to its efficacy. The application of this principle to group healing implies that the invested effort and

information gleaned are shared amongst the group. In the case of Eaton's (1982) account, each of the participating elders would contribute their own perspective and or the perspective of the spirits and or elements with which they communicate during the event.

Given the significance of the circle to Native American tradition in the form of the medicine wheel, it is not surprising to find that there are other circular symbols used for healing purposes within Shamanism. The search for such leads to the use of sand painting for healing within the Navajo (or Navaho) tribal tradition.

4.4 Navajo Sand Paintings

Whilst medicine wheels are described as affecting all tribes by Markowitz (1995b), sand painting is described as affecting only a few tribes by the same publication and many others. This is qualified with the statement that

Little is known about sand painting done by tribes other than the Navajo, either because they did not do sand painting to a great extent, the paintings vanished from use, or they were never recorded. (Markowitz, 1995b:693)

This means that, whilst the existence of sand paintings used for healing in other tribes cannot be historically denied, when sand paintings are documented it is largely the sand paintings of the Navajo region which provide the subject matter. For this reason the sand paintings discussed here will be those from within Navajo tribal culture.

In *Creating Mandalas for Insight, Healing and Self Expression* (Fincher, 1991), Fincher describes sand paintings as being entirely circular, as she states that

When a Navaho healer is asked to help a sick person, he goes through ritual activities that restore the natural balance. He

smooths a circular area on the ground and creates a mandala
with coloured sand. (Fincher, 1991:10)

The brevity of her description results in a statement which is both true and misleading. Many sand paintings are circular. Many sand paintings are mandalas. All sand paintings are used for healing of some description, though her account does not make clear that some sand paintings are rectangular in visible structure (Bahti and Joe, 1978).

What this suggests is that a circular shape may not be crucial to the healing function of sand paintings. It may, however, be crucial to the healing function of those sand paintings which are circular. Following the guidelines of those who have been brought up in the Navajo way of life, a glance in the direction of that way of life itself may provide valuable insight into this particular detail.

A circle may be represented by the four cardinal points within Native American culture. This is where a change in perspective is required for one who sees the four cardinal points as the corners of a square. Despite being raised in a culture in which the box dominates the home landscape, it is, nonetheless, a manageable change of perspective for any person who made pictures by joining numbered dots as a child. A three dimensional version is described as the Native American perspective as follows:

Space, time, and inner and outer worlds are all connected in the circle. Circles are sacred for Indians because they reflect and imitate shapes in nature. To be in harmony means to live as part of the circle. When a person stands and thinks of the six directions at equal points around him or her, the person is at the center of a three-dimensional circle.

It is in this knowledge of one's place in the circle that one realizes one's home. The horizon one sees from one's place in

the circle reflects that landscape which is home. (Kollar, 1995:659)

Given this insight, the reader is invited to examine the sand painting depicted in Plate 4.4.1, paying particular attention to the cross passing through the central circle, and consider whether it is more likely that the four points indicate square-ness or circularity from a Navajo perspective.

The number of different sand painting images is estimated by Markowitz (1995c) to extend as far as six hundred, equalling the number of chants or ceremonies of which they form a part. To count the number of circular images of these six hundred (plus) is rendered irrelevant when it is explained by Gold (1994) that sand paintings “can take either linear (single-line) form or radial (mandala) form,” (Gold, 1994:133-134) and that

The latter is preferred, although it is not necessary for invoking the powers and blessings of the Holy People. (Gold, 1994:133-134)

Given the ability of a seemingly square (or cubic) image to represent the circle of the medicine wheel, combined with the above statement that a circular form is preferable in sand paintings, this art form and its healing associations are too significant to bypass given the aims of this study.

In response to the inaccuracy of Fincher’s (1991) generalisation, it is noted that there are several reasons which could make such a misunderstanding likely. Among the most relevant of these is the observation from the Navajo perspective of Bahti and Joe (1978) that

It is impossible for a non-Navajo to truly be able to view things through Navajo eyes, but by being aware of some of the

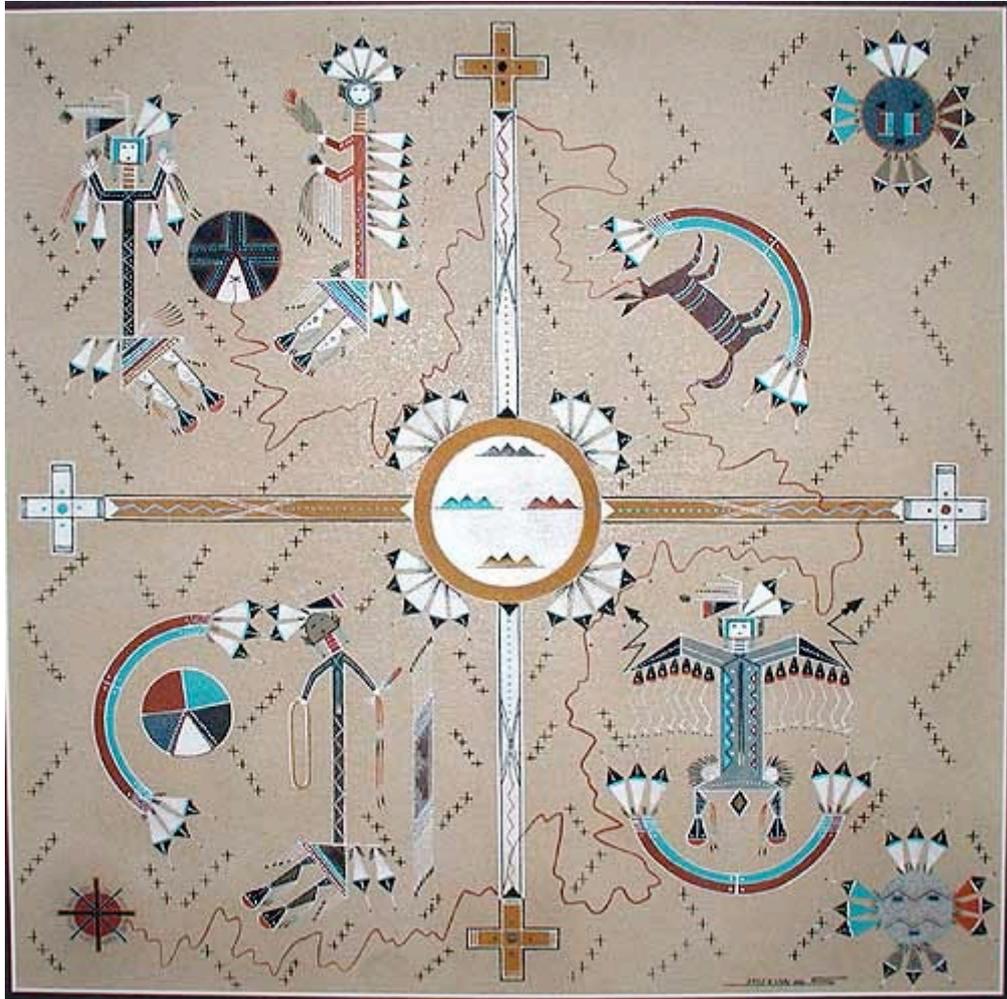


Plate 4.4.1: *Coyote Stealing Fire* (date not provided)

Myerson, S.

Sand painting

(Twin Rocks Trading Post, 2004)

differences in the manner of viewing things, it can be compensated for to some degree. By making an earnest attempt to do so, one cannot only better understand and respect Navajo sandpaintings, but also Navajo culture itself. (Bahti and Joe, 1978:7)

Whilst it is not suggested that Fincher (1991) does not make an earnest attempt to understand the sand paintings of which she writes, the comment from Bahti and Joe highlights that researching from any perspective other than Navajo will never render a truly accurate picture of the whole situation. This, teamed with an oral history (which, it has already been noted, makes for (obviously) incomplete documentation) and a high volume of possible images, has been borne in mind by the writer, and applied to this research in the interest of limiting the principle's consequences on it as far as is possible.

What, then, are sand paintings? They are images which form a part of the Navajo way of life, created within ceremonies with the purpose of healing, blessing or protecting; the former being the most common. This is, of course, a generalisation. The Navajo name for a sand painting is "... *íikááh* 'place where the gods come and go,'" (Canyon Country Originals, 2000, original italics) though the placement of accents varies slightly from publication to publication. The strong Navajo bias of this online document is estimated by the writer to be the more reliable on the subject than those written by those from other cultural perspectives, further noting the limitations in documentation of aspects of an oral tradition.

An image whose description means *place where the gods come and go* is clearly attributed more than decorative properties. There are two more definitions which will enable a clearer understanding of their purpose, and these are the names of the person

who creates the image, and the person(s) for whom it is created. The person who creates the sand painting and conducts the healing ceremony is called a *hatathli* (alternative spellings: *hataalii* and *hataali*) which translates as *singer*. Interestingly, this name is different from that of one whose job is specified as curing illness, as noted by Gill (1981) when he states that

The approached person is know as a ‘singer’ (*hataalii*) and is distinct from a curer (‘*azá’oonilígí*) who has a much narrower range of ceremonial activity. (Gill, 1981:58)

Similarly, the person for whom the healing ceremony is carried out is not named as one who is unwell. The name *bik’i nahaghá* translates as the *one-sung-over* (the plural of which is *ones-sung-over* in cases when the ceremony is for more than one person), and is deliberately distinguished from the Western equivalent of *patient* by Gill (1979), as he asserts that

The person (sometimes persons) for whom the ceremonial is performed is known as the ‘one-sung-over’ (*bik’i nahaghá*)....

The common rendering of this term as ‘patient’ is too confining and in many cases actually misleading. (Gill, 1979:12)

A sand painting, or rather, a *place where the gods come and go* is thus an image created as a significant part of a healing ceremony, which is conducted and created by the singer for the *one-sung-over*. It is the singer who consecrates the space, and ensures that all rituals are completed satisfactorily, leading to the creation of the sand painting. The resulting image is believed to provide a temporary passageway for the movement of *yeis* (which translate as gods or holy people) in and out of the life of the *one-sung-over* as required for healing, blessing or protection.

A considerable degree of effort and importance is exerted in and placed upon this process. The duration of the ceremonies is a simple and clear indicator of this, as they last from one to nine nights (including the intervening days). The full nine night ceremony will typically involve a “purification and exorcism of evil,” which is “achieved through the use of emetics, herbal treatments and sweat baths” (Canyon Country Originals, 2000). After this has been achieved, the focus of the ceremony will turn to sand painting.

The sand painting is constructed out of finely ground rock, as well as other coloured pigments such as “sandstones, mudstones, charcoal ... cornmeal, powdered [*sic*] flower petals, and plant pollens ...” (Macary, 2003). The materials bear their own significance, and the resulting coloured sand does not compare in terms of associations with a tube of acrylic paint purchased over a shop counter. Whilst it is noted elsewhere that corn pollen represents the primary food source and therefore life’s basic sustenance, Bahti and Joe (1978) explain that the ground rock symbolises more than its colour, and its source is important where that of acrylic paint might not be:

First the rock must be collected; rock, which according to the *Yo-he* or Bead Chant, are the fragments left from the defeat of the Rock People. Most of the rock used is gathered within the traditional (as opposed to the modern legal) boundaries of the Navajo Reservation. Most sandpainters keep the locations where they obtain their rock a closely guarded secret. (Bahti and Joe, 1978:6 original italics and capitals.)

The *hatathli* then creates whichever image is specific to the reason for the ceremony to restore or maintain balance. The sand painting quite literally tells a story about the holy people it portrays, and it is chosen for the qualities they carry in the myth

told by the image's structure. The sand painting is produced by pouring the grains onto the surface by hand; a painstaking process requiring skill and precision. The surface itself, to elaborate on Fincher's (1991) earlier statement, is an area of fresh sand on the floor of the ceremonial hogan (*hogan* being the name of a traditional Navajo dwelling), though this can be substituted with a buckskin or cloth.

As soon as the *hatathli* has completed the sand painting's creation, culminating in its sanctification with a sprinkling of corn pollen, it is believed that the *yeis* (holy people or gods) are compelled to come and inhabit their depictions in the image. The *one-sung-over* sits at the sand painting's centre whilst the *hatathli* sings about the *yeis*, their qualities, and the story illustrated in the sand painting. When the song reaches a point of pertinence to the restoration of balance to the *one-sung-over*, the *hatathli* touches the part of the *yeyi* in the sand painting and daubs the sand onto the relevant part of the *one-sung-over*. The qualities required of the *yeyi* are thereby added or removed to or from the *one-sung-over*, thus restoring balance.

The term *place where the gods come and go* is therefore an entirely literal one. When translated into a clinical observation from a Western perspective, Gold (1994) states that

By deeply identifying with the sand mandala's Holy People and with the spiritual hero(in)es, the one(s)-sung-over ... begins to take on the ideal thoughts and energies that are, in turn, aspects of the mind and energy of the cosmos-at-large. (Gold, 1994:161)

Whilst its simplicity is of use in the concept's understanding, it is suggested here that the qualities of the holy people entering or exiting the *one-sung-over* through the passageway created in the form of the sand painting and accompanying ritual bears closer resemblance to the Navajo perception of the situation.

In order for the holy people to be summoned to inhabit the sand painting, it must be absolutely perfect. If it is not created to the holy people's satisfaction, it is believed that they will become angry and cause greater imbalance rather than restore it. For the same reason of placating the gods, each sand painting is destroyed at the completion of the ritual. At this point the sand ceases to be the temporary resting point of the *yeis*, and it is no longer a *place where the gods come and go*. This protects all involved from the unwitting invocation of the holy people's wrath.

This belief underlies the lack of the images' documentation prior to the early twentieth century. The problem of recording the images was controversially overcome by deliberately keeping them incomplete, or intentionally altered. Permanent reproductions such as Ben's *Whirling Logs* (Plate 4.4.2) are therefore not perfect, and thus not close enough to the real thing to invoke the presence of the holy people or their anger. This makes Plate 4.4.3 apparently unusual as it must, from observation, be a depiction of what is clearly a sand painting ritual in progress. The image's caption explains that

In a ceremony that has changed little in hundreds of years, Navajo medicine man Hosteen Tso-Begay treats a four-year-old boy; the boy's body has been annointed [*sic*] with an herb potion. (Markowitz, 1995b:473)

This author notes that there is no mention of the obviously circular image at the centre of which the said four year old sits on the ground. One wonders, at this point, just which culture has hindered the recording of the images to the greater extent.

The ultimate purpose of the sand painting is to bring about balance or harmony into the life of the *one-sung-over*. The Navajo word for this state is *hózhó* (alternative spelling *hóžó*), which is defined as "an amalgamation of such concepts as *balanced*,

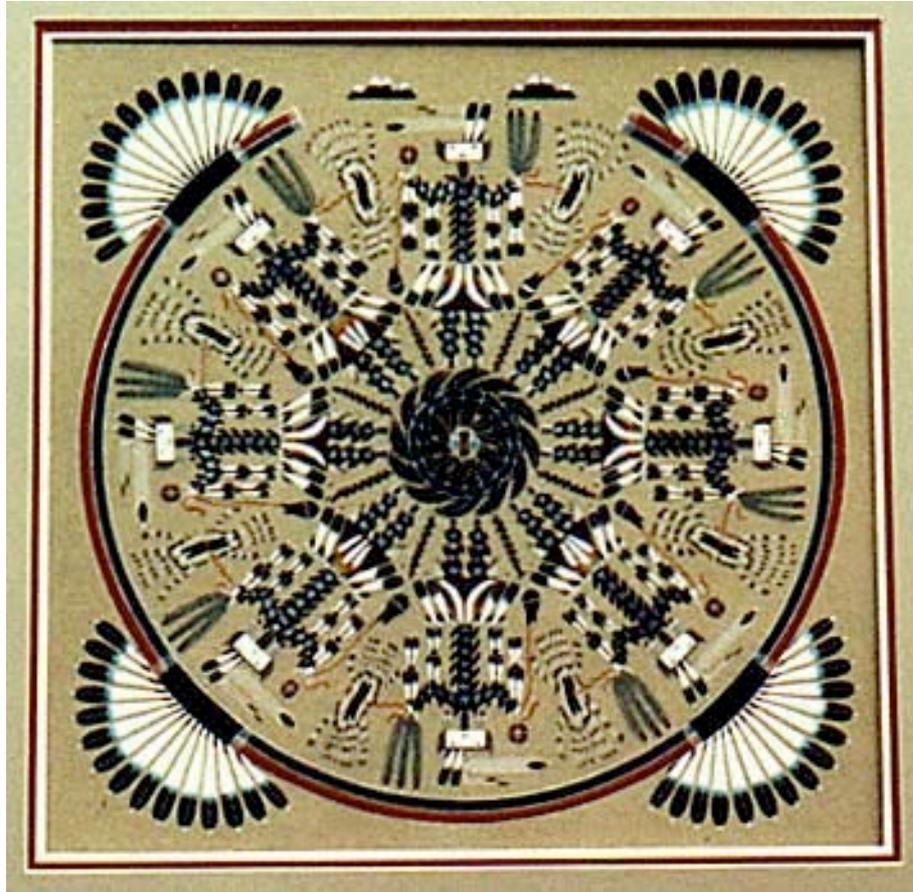


Plate 4.4.2: *Whirling Logs* (date not provided)

Ben, W.

Sand painting

(Penfield Gallery of Indian Arts, 2003)



Plate 4.4.3: *In a Ceremony that has Changed Little in Hundreds of Years, Navajo
Medicine Man Hosteen Tso-Begay Treats a Four Year Old Boy; The Boy's Body
has been Anointed [sic] with an Herb Potion. (date not provided)*

AP/Wide World Photos

Photograph

(Markowitz 1995b:473)

pleasant, blessed, holy and beautiful” (Canyon Country Originals, 2000, original italics). Considering *healing*’s shared roots with *whole* and *holy*, the contrast between the definitions of the two qualities of *healing* and *hózhó* is at its most marked when the latter is compared with the use of modern medications. Its definition does, however, make it less surprising that sand painting ceremonies are also conducted for a couple upon their marriage, and for a girl when she first commences menstruation. Whilst the majority of cases are for situations described in Western terms as healing situations, these two examples illustrate the blessing and protective associations of the sand painting rituals which are more comparable with the holy side of healing.

Healing is not an ideal part of every day life, for this would mean that one would have to be unwell enough to require it every day. *Hózhó*, on the other hand, and maintaining it, *is* a part of every day life for Navajo people. The comparison is distilled to that between the questions *what is wrong and how does one fix the problem?* and *what is out of balance and what will bring it back into balance?* This goes some way to explaining why a *hatathli* is different from a curer and why there is no stigma attached to being in need of a sand painting ceremony, as Gill explains,

The performance of the song ceremonials must be seen as a positive and essential part of living a full and meaningful life as a Navajo, and not solely as a means for ridding oneself of unwanted suffering from illness. ... [I]n Navajo culture, never to have been the one over whom a ceremonial is sung is not necessarily a lauded cultural position. Certainly it is not comparable to the pride in a ‘no cavities’ dental report. (Gill, 1979:9)

The balancing purpose rather than healing, from the Navajo perspective, is made most clear from the observation that ceremonies are commonly performed for a person “long after the physical aspect of their illness has been cured” (Gill, 1979:9). However, whether or not they are intended as such, the fact is that sand painting ceremonies are considered by those outside the Navajo way of life to exhibit healing properties, as evidenced by comments such as Van Noord’s (1995) that a sand painting ceremony is “the means to physical, emotional, and psychological restoration” (Van Noord, 1995:149). This carries greater medical weight when accompanied with the statement that

Many of today’s physicians find that the shamanic ceremonies and medicinal treatments are a useful complement to their ministrations. These procedures are deemed to be particularly important in resolving mental health problems, but they have also found wide utility in problems ranging from heart disease to dermatitis to cancer. (Singer, 1995:472)

The question of whether or not this is due to a placebo effect is irrelevant here, since the point is that the ceremonies are noticed to have a healing effect, which (culturally sensitive or otherwise) makes it true.

How do the sand paintings heal then? This power has to be attributed (in the interest of cultural accuracy) to the holy people, made possible by the *hatathli*. The sand painting serves as a house for the *yeis*, providing a *place where the gods come and go*. The fact that there exists fear over the images’ correct permanent reproduction demonstrates that this power is believed to be independent of the ceremony’s rituals. This is reinforced by the observation that

After the patient is treated, members of the audience may come up to the sandpainting and daub sand on themselves, thus partaking in the curing ceremony and bringing harmony to their own person. (Canyon Country Originals, 2000)

This may be hypothesised as the equivalent to preventative medicine or even an holistic vaccine. The practice of daubing sand on themselves in order to gain benefit from the curing ceremony demonstrates the audience's belief that the healing power lies with the sand painting at this point, following its accurate ritual construction.

The participation of the audience in such a manner underlines another critical point of a sand painting's healing associations, which is this; its efficacy is believed to depend upon correct ritual procedure followed by direct physical contact with the image in the form of daubing sand onto one's body. If one describes this as having to touch the *place where the gods come and go* in order to benefit from their influence, it can make greater sense of its reason from an outsider's perspective. Touching the *place* becomes comparable with providing a physical conduit, or a focus for intent, through which *the gods* (whoever or whatever they are believed to be) may *come and go* and thus restore balance by adding or removing the appropriate qualities, energies or attributes.

The songs of the *hatathli* must also be considered to be a component of the sand painting's composition. It is possible that the songs play an integral role in the image's perfection and the calling in of the holy people. This would remain consistent with the beneficial effect upon audience members who touch it, since the sand painting has been constructed whilst the *hatathli* sings.

This leads on to the answer to how sand paintings heal. The belief in the spiritual beings or entities within the Navajo way of life is not in question here, since they are so clearly attributed the responsibility for holding the power to bring about

balance. It is this ability to bring about balance, or *hózhó*, that holds what in Western terms is deemed to be a healing effect. The fact that the sand painting has to be perfect is also pertinent to how contact with the image heals, since permanent (imperfect) reproductions are not considered to have any balancing or healing effect because they do not summon the holy people.

What, then, can be said of the circle's role, other than the preference for its shape and resulting predominance in sand painting forms? Bahti and Joe (1978) suggest that the shape has beneficial properties independent of any ritual process, explaining that

When a sandpainting is created, the opening or entrance faces East, from where evil may not easily enter. The other three sides, however, must be protected.

To do this a continuous (usually) design is made to encircle the vulnerable southern, western and northern sides. (Bahti and Joe, 1978:9)

The circle is thus attributed protective properties in its own right.

What does this mean for the format of sand paintings then, given that it has already been stated that linear formats are effective despite the preference for a radial format? Even some of the permanent (imperfect) reproductions of sand paintings which are distinctly mandalas in structure appear to be quite square, as in that illustrated in Plate 4.4.1. At the position of such a question it is worth remembering Bahti and Joe's (1978) comment about the difficulty in understanding Navajo sand paintings and culture from any other perspective. They assert that

... what appears to be a variation in a sandpainting to a non-Navajo, may not be to a Navajo. As an example, a *yei* may have

a blue or green face. To the Navajo both colors are correct because, in the ceremonial manner of classifying color, they are not two, but one color. (Bahti and Joe, 1978:7 original italics)

This illustrates that what is seen and what is there may not correspond for one who is not familiar with the finer details of the Navajo tradition. Given the context, a square's representation of a circle must be recognised as possible, especially in a situation in which blue can be green and vice versa¹¹.

The documentation of the circle's ascribed spiritual healing properties in Shamanism are thus almost complete. Still to be accessed for the research is the corroborative consultation which will confirm or refute the correspondence of the literature documented thus far with current practical experience.

4.5 Unique Insight into Current Shamanistic Practice

The identification of a member of the public who is appropriately qualified by their shamanistic experience to comment on current practice is not merely a case of looking in the Yellow Pages™ under *Shaman* or *Hatathli*. Due to the limit of the practical knowledge of sand paintings to the Navajo region, the search for an individual with working knowledge of both sand paintings and the medicine wheel poses certain limitations. Since a trip to North America was not practical, a person with eight years' practical experience of working with a medicine wheel, identified from personal contacts in the alternative healing scene, presented as an ideal source of corroboration regarding the currency of as much of the consulted literature as could reasonably be

¹¹ The "squaring of the circle" (Jung, 1971:388) mentioned briefly in 2.6 will be discussed in more detail in Chapters Five and Six.

expected. This ideal person with whom to consult is Andy (Cyril) Andrews, with whom this author conversed on 9th July, 2002¹².

Like many of the authors cited above who have written about shamanistic culture and the healing powers of medicine wheels, Andrews lives in the United Kingdom. His authority to comment on the medicine wheel stems from the time and effort he has invested into learning about it, coupled with his relevant experientially based knowledge. What follows is a synthesis of his comments on the medicine wheel, confirming that much of what has been quoted above is true in his opinion, and adding fresh insight to the spiritual healing associations of the circle.

4.5.1 Andrews on the Medicine Wheel's Healing Associations

The first confirmation provided by Andrews is that of the visual description of the medicine wheel cited earlier in 4.2. The medicine wheel he created in a field adjacent to his house conforms to these descriptions. Shown in Plates 4.5.1.1 and 4.5.1.2, his medicine wheel gains its circular form from the placement of stones on the ground in the grass. This circular form is emphasised by the grass, which is mown short on the area of the medicine wheel and extends beyond the stones, leaving a smooth patch in what is otherwise meadow. It also possesses poles adorned with coloured ribbons next to the outer stones marking the cardinal directions, and there is a lamp just at the edge of the wheel on the floor. The stones have white markings on them and are arranged to form concentric circles placed in a radial pattern, which provide it with the two features necessary for it to match the anthropological description defined by the Provincial Museum of Alberta cited earlier.

¹² Andrews granted this author permission to record and refer to his communications of the conversation, in addition to photographing his medicine wheel as a visual reference. Unless stated otherwise, citations in 4.5.1 are taken from this source, which is henceforth abbreviated to (*p.c. 9th July, 2002*).



Plate 4.5.1.1: *Medicine Wheel at Coleford Water 1* (2002)

Markwick, L.

Photograph

Private collection of the author



Plate 4.5.1.2: *Medicine at Coleford Water 2* (2002)

Markwick. L.

Photograph

Private collection of the author

The description of a medicine wheel provided by Andrews during the conversation likewise conforms to many of the descriptions mentioned above. There is, as in many of the passages consulted and referred to previously, little mention of its visual appearance. Instead, he talks of the properties he believes the medicine wheel to possess in order to explain what it is. It is possible that the visual appearance may not receive much attention due to the photography of the wheel which preceded the conversation on its subject. Prior knowledge of the symbols on the stones was also indicated in conversation, which, together with visual contact, may have caused Andrews to assume the physical description to be superfluous. However, since this metaphysical priority matches the structure of many of the descriptions given earlier, it seems more likely that his reason for describing the medicine wheel in terms of its properties should be deliberate.

In addition to the emphasis he places on the properties he believes the medicine wheel to possess is the repetition in content of many of the accounts cited previously. He thus describes the wheel as representing all that is when he says that “it incorporates the stars, it incorporates the universe” (p.c. 9th July, 2002). The sanctity of space he believes it to possess is made clear when he comments that “It’s used as a temple,” (p.c. 9th July, 2002) and the bonding function with the earth described by others is mirrored by his statement that “It’s a way of making a connection with the Earth. ...” To these he adds that “in each direction there is held an element, a plant, a mineral” (p.c. 9th July, 2002).

He also speaks of other properties of the wheel, and rather than talk of its power, he attributes it “magical qualities” (p.c. 9th July, 2002). The subtle comparison between the two highlights the inadequacy of explaining one culture in the words, terms and understandings of another. Power needs no explanation or justification. It is nothing

unusual, but is simply believed to be present, available for use in well trained hands, and the source of the facilitated results such as healing. To describe the medicine wheel as possessing magical properties demonstrates that this power is a mystery in the terms of everyday Western life. A dictionary definition of magic describes it as

the supposed art or practice of using the power of supernatural forces, spells etc to affect people, objects and events (Robinson, 1999:823).

This, in turn, is stated as being the cause of “wonderful, startling or mysterious results” (Robinson, 1999:823).

The undermining use of the word *supposed* is illustration enough that the belief is not considered reasonable or rational. The words *wonderful*, *startling* and *mysterious* are equally indicative of the unfamiliarity with events that could be described as magical, as each denotes an unusual event. This compares with an understanding of the wheel’s power which is woven into the fabric of everyday existence in shamanistic culture, in which its results are believed to be far from startling or mysterious, but expected and depended upon. Andrews evinces a clear belief in these, as evidenced by his choice of the word *magical*, which demonstrates his understanding of the perceptions of both shamanistic and Western cultures and selects the vocabulary appropriate to his audience.

When invited to explain what he would identify as the magical properties of the medicine wheel, Andrews replies that they are “the properties that we’ve forgotten about through our technology or through our needing to grasp and have more – the magicalness [*sic*] of simplicity” (p.c. 9th July, 2002).

He goes on to explain that his interaction with the medicine wheel allows him to see his life from a different perspective and think differently, with the qualification that

“if I can think differently I can access things which I even find strange” (p.c. 9th July, 2002)¹³. The example he uses to demonstrate his point is of his belief that the dead buzzard which was given to him by a friend (who had found it after its fatal collision with an electricity pylon) bore spiritual significance rather than being a coincidence, following his admission a few days previously that he would like some buzzard wings to place in his medicine wheel. It was for him “a gift from the animal kingdom” (p.c. 9th July, 2002) as well as from his friend, brought about by the medicine wheel’s magical properties rather than chance.

The same shift in his perception leads him to believe that the medicine wheel has the ability to hide or reveal itself as it chooses, depending on the viewer. The fact on which this belief is based is the high number of people who have asked about the other physical features of the house and surroundings, compared with only three or four in the space of six years who have asked him about the medicine wheel. Given its size and visibility, he believes that the medicine wheel must have a certain degree of control over its revelation. Any possible fear regarding a response to the question *what is that?* is clearly not sufficient, in his opinion, to dull the curiosity of so many of his visitors.

The ability of the medicine wheel to alter one’s perception of the world is related to one of the other properties attributed to it by Andrews. As he argues that the medicine wheel surpasses what can be seen in the physical world, he posits that there is a part of it that is “talking about beyond what we see,” enabling the user to enter into what he calls “higher consciousness” (p.c. 9th July, 2002). He likens it several times to a tool, to which he attributes the ability to hold information and be used for teaching as well as a focussing device for the mind. As a tool he also says that it can also be used as a meditation and for invocations.

¹³ Jungian theories which relate to Andrews’ experiences will be discussed in Chapters Five and Six.

When describing how he uses the medicine wheel, he emphasises that he does not use it for one thing, specifically saying “I don’t think it has a prime use ...” (p.c. 9th July, 2002). Instead, he describes his deliberate incorporation of the medicine wheel into his way of life. Many of the properties he details speak for themselves, such as its function as a meditation tool or as a sacred space in which to pray, and the attributions already listed in 4.2.1 which all feature in his use of the medicine wheel.

He provides greater detail regarding the physical process of using the wheel than any literature resources accessed to date by the researcher. He describes honouring the wheel to be an important part of the process, with gifts for the element, plant and animal kingdoms being desirable protocol. He also explains that using the medicine wheel is not simply a case of strolling in and expecting results. In order to open the circle, or activate it, there is an opening stone which must be tapped, and the greatest emphasis was placed on the importance of the intent of the person using the wheel. Careful to keep his account accurate, he also makes clear that “There are different ways” (p.c. 9th July, 2002) of using the medicine wheel, highlighting that all may not use it in precisely the same manner. This also confirms many of the accounts cited previously in this chapter which stress that whilst the basic principles of the wheel remain the same, the details may vary according to the origin of the user’s knowledge.

With specific reference to using the medicine wheel for his own healing, Andrews confirms the method advanced above. It is the alteration of one’s perspective brought about through the *use* of the wheel which facilitates the healing process. Andrews comments that this property allows him to achieve clarity on an issue for which he seeks guidance. The importance of asking is stressed as an integral part of this healing process, further, he claims that and the results tend to enable him to take life

less seriously. He describes himself as using the medicine wheel for his own healing every day, and asserts that

I've learnt to heal myself on both an emotional level, a physical level and a spiritual level. ... Healing is bringing that dis-ease back into balance, and we can bring that back into balance in many ways. We can bring it back into balance through ritual, we can use prayer, we can use focus and intent. Its healing qualities act on all of those levels. (p.c. 9th July, 2002)

When originally asked by the researcher if he uses the medicine wheel for healing, the first response of Andrews was an assumption that the question referred to the healing of others. This led him to explain that to heal someone else would involve a healing circle. This would consist of nine people; eight sitting at the directions and one in the centre. His respect for the healing power of such a circle is marked by the unqualified statement that

... when demonstrated by the people who have the knowledge and the gift to use the circle, transformations are nothing short of miraculous. (p.c. 9th July, 2002)

He reaffirms the significance of experience for participants in such a healing circle when he explains that he would not take on the task of healing another person because he does not consider himself to have "learnt enough to know how to be in charge and responsible for a healing circle," explaining that a requirement of this would be "to hold the energy" (p.c. 9th July, 2002), for which he feels he would be ill equipped currently. Whilst he is happy to be in charge of his own healing, he prefers to leave the healing of others "in the hands of those who know how" (p.c. 9th July, 2002). This could be

likened to understanding a language, but not choosing to translate for another person, particularly in such an important matter as someone's health.

Andrews was also happy to elaborate on one question which was present in the researcher's mind, about the importance of the circle to its attributed spiritual healing properties. The clear message given by Andrews is that it is the circular shape of the medicine wheel which allows it to possess so many such properties. When describing a medicine wheel, he speaks of both the wheel and life, commenting that

It holds a lot of history for the native teachings, so it's not just what it was used for, what it's used for now, but how it's always been ... it's a circle and we always find that we come back to where we start in the circle. ... (p.c. 9th July, 2002)

In addition to this, in relation to the centrality of the shape to its function, he confirms that it could be no other shape, specifying a square as an example:

... a medicine square wouldn't be representative of the cycles because cycles don't go in squares. It wouldn't be representative of the directions and the non-cardinals, because they're represented [*sic*] of the earth, so what we're doing is we're trying to bring a picture (a three dimensional picture) and trying to bring it in a one dimensional place. ... Its function as a circle tells us about how life goes in cycles. ... So its shape is crucial, because we're trying to bring in everything as above and below, and make it a representation that we can work with and come to understand. (p.c. 9th July, 2002)

Further to this, if the four cardinal points are used as the only physical signifiers of a medicine wheel, although their positions mark the four corners of a square, the intention

is for them to represent the medicine wheel as a circle. In this situation it is implied that the circle exists whether seen or not, and that its shape as perceived in the mind is more significant than the shape's physical appearance.

Should his belief in the healing power of the medicine wheel not be clear enough, the researcher asked Andrews to rate his belief in the healing power of the circle on a scale of one to ten, where one is the lowest and ten is the highest. His response was that his belief goes off the scale. His belief in the healing power of the circle is not just equal to his belief in the medicine wheel, but precisely the same belief for him. Should he doubt the healing power of the circle, he says he would take that issue to the medicine wheel to find out why, thereby using the healing power of the medicine wheel to answer his own doubt in it, rendering the question literally pointless.

4.6 Synthesis of the Circle's Spiritual Healing Associations in Shamanism

As shown in the preceding passages, the circle is clearly an important feature in the shamanistic cultures of Native America. This applies to life itself, and is not limited to healing. Of the circles which are used for healing, there are a number of associations which are consistent, whether the art form be a medicine wheel or a Navajo sand painting. These can be summarised as follows:

- The healing process involves interaction with the circle, and not merely looking at it or hanging it on the wall of one's home.
- The ground (the Earth) is the surface on which the circle is most commonly created.
- The interaction with the circle involves contact with spiritual entities or energies.

- The circle's use for the healing of others requires facilitation by one (or more) with the specialist knowledge and experience to carry it out.
- A cross in the direction of the four cardinal points is a common characteristic.
- A visible circular form is not necessary for its efficacy. In the case of the medicine wheel it is present regardless of structural appearance and can be represented by the four cardinal points. In the case of Navajo sand paintings it is the preferred shape, which may (or may not) be represented by linear forms when not apparent to a Western eye.
- The strength of belief about their power has limited their documentation beyond that of oral history alone.
- The goal of, or intention behind, interaction with the circle is to bring about or maintain a state of balance.

Whilst both medicine wheels and sand paintings are employed to bring about this state of balance, the latter is not considered to be a healing tool within its culture of origin. This is due to a difference in cultural perceptions. Markowitz (1995c) addresses this issue when he asserts that

An oral culture recognizes the need of interdependence and harmony among the generations for its continuance; the need to live in the circle of life for the continuance of life itself.
(Markowitz, 1995c:661)

A brief look at the crumbling welfare state is sufficient to make the point that this view is not central to Western society in general. Likewise, what is understood to be healing from a Western perspective can to a Navajo be part of the way of life. The issue of this

difference of opinion is therefore a problem of concept, and the semantic limitation of translating concepts between cultures.

The medicine wheel, conversely, is very firmly linked with healing in its culture of origin. The belief in the medicine wheel is a way of life in itself. Why should this be? An answer is suggested again by Markowitz, who asserts:

A ubiquitous element is the circle. Oglala mystic Black Elk explained the importance of circularity as imitating an important principle of the universe. ... Circularity also represents the sun, the central divinity and astronomical anchor of the nomadic Plains people ... (Markowitz, 1995c:765)

Should such an important principle of the universe not be sufficient to answer this question, a further hint can be derived from Gold's (1994) statement that

Navajo peoples and mystics universally reckon their place at the center of a sacred circle. The circle is the most elegant rendering of all-encompassing closure, stability, and unity. It is humankind's most widespread symbol, found in the spiritual art of every culture and epoch, as well as in all natural systems. (Gold, 1994:133-134)

The first sentence of this, when placed alongside the previous citation, provides a securely balanced vantage point. The self at the centre of a sacred circle, which is an important principle of the universe, has little opportunity of falling out of place. It might just be possible to waver off centre, requiring consideration of the circle to bring the self back into balance.

Perhaps this is the vision expressed in Gold's (1994) subsequent comment about the shape's stability. The culminating observation of this citation is true as detailed in

Chapter Two, and serves as a signpost to move on in the direction of the spiritual healing associations of circles in other cultural contexts, the next to be addressed being that of Western Spirituality.

Chapter Five Circles in Western Spirituality

5.1 Introduction to Western Spirituality

Western Spirituality is a term which encircles several belief systems. Strictly speaking, the West consists of the countries of Europe and North America (Robinson, 1999). Since the Shamanism of North America was dealt with as a totality in Chapter Four, this chapter will be dedicated to the other belief systems of the West¹⁴ which together form a rich cultural tapestry of mutual influence and evolution. Within this cultural tapestry there is a wide variety of spiritual associations of the circle. Some of these also have healing connections, and are mentioned in Chapter Two's trace of such associations around the globe. In this chapter, the focus will be on the documentation of the circles within Western Spirituality which have spiritual healing associations as visual art forms.

A number of examples have been identified in Chapter Two as warranting further exploration under the heading of Western Spirituality. Given the range of these in time-span and belief system, in combination with the mutual influence and evolution mentioned above, there is no obvious chronological or religious order. Their presentation in this chapter will therefore follow a thematic trail to create a fluid text linking examples by association. This will commence with the example of labyrinths, of which the association with the Shamanism of the previous chapter will be revealed in due course.

5.2 Labyrinths

The labyrinth under discussion here is a single path which leads in a visually confusing route to the centre of the symbol created by its total shape or outwards from

¹⁴ To avoid confusion, Western Spirituality will not be taken to include Native American Shamanism when discussed by the author from this point forth.

the centre depending on one's perspective. This is distinct from a maze, which has more than one path, some of which lead to dead-ends and are designed to puzzle. There is a challenge to find the goal of a maze, which is present in a labyrinth only in the effort of placing one foot in front of the other.

There are many kinds of labyrinth, which take both visual and metaphoric forms. Whilst it is predominantly the physical labyrinth which is referred to here particularly in relation to walking its paths, the metaphor and symbolism are also of relevance to foreground the labyrinth's association with spiritual healing.

Perhaps the best known myth surrounding the labyrinth is the Grecian myth of Theseus losing the minotaur in the labyrinth at Crete. The story seems to rely on the labyrinth being a maze as Theseus finds his way out by following a line of string, whereas a single path in a visually confusing route is the feature which distinguishes a labyrinth from a maze. The story nonetheless introduces the labyrinth's metaphoric association with overcoming one's demons and thereby connects the symbol with spiritual healing. With this story quite literally in mind, it is almost unsurprising to note that "The unconscious is often symbolized by corridors, labyrinths, or mazes" (Franz, 1964:171).

The styles of labyrinth which are currently most popular, and thus well known, start with a simple spiral and include the *classical* or *classical Cretan labyrinth* (with varying numbers of paths going up in fours) such as the classical seven circuit labyrinth pictured in Plate 5.2.1, and variations of what is now known as the *Chartres labyrinth*, pictured on the top right of Plate 5.2.2.

The earliest known example of a labyrinth is a classical style labyrinth which dates back to Neolithic times, and is estimated to have been created between 2500 B.C. and 2000 B.C. (Sands, 2001). Illustrated in Plate 5.2.3, it is as accurately circular in



Plate 5.2.1: *Classical Seven Circuit Labyrinth* (date not provided)

Lonegren, S.

Online image.

(Lonegren, 2003a)

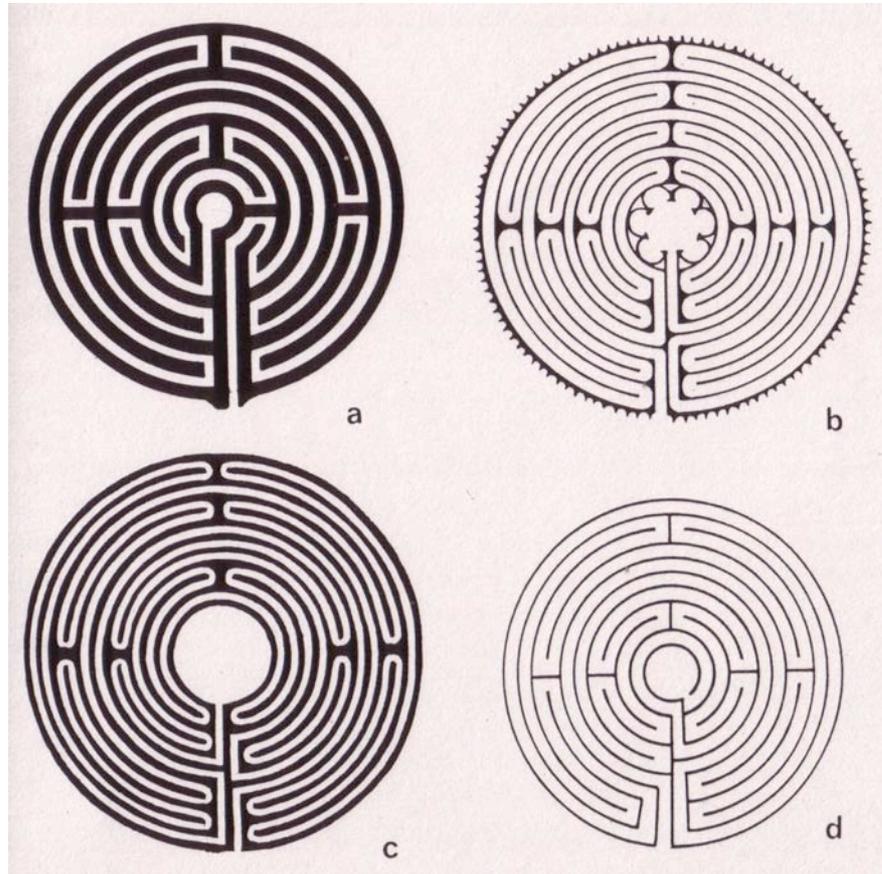


Plate 5.2.2: 3.6. *Continental Church Labyrinths: a: San Vitale, Ravenna, Italy, sixth century (extant); b: Chartres, France, c. 1220 (extant); c: Sens, France, (destroyed 1769); Bayeux (extant). (1990)*

Pennick, N.

Line drawing

(Pennick, 1990:117)



Plate 5.2.3: *The Labyrinth Carved into a Megalithic Tomb at Luzzannas in Sardinia*

(date not provided)

Saward, J.

Photograph

(Sands, 2001:27)

shape as one could reasonably expect given the imprecision of the available implements of the time. This ancient stone engraving is located in Sardinia and, since its creation, the symbol has scattered itself across much of Europe with a variety of uses and functions.

There are also labyrinths carved into rock faces in the Hopi reservations of Arizona, which are believed to date back as far as the twelfth century (Sands, 2001). Herein lies the connection with Shamanism. The description of this Hopi symbol's meaning is one of "Emergence, or birth and creation" (Sands, 2001:27). Whilst the emergence within this description is consistent with recovery and healing, it is written not from a Native American perspective, but from one of Western Spirituality. This is the predominant standpoint from which the considerable volume of recently published literature associating the labyrinth with spiritual healing is written and, as such, the above description represents the tangibility of the labyrinth's association with the traditional healing methods of North America.

In the symbol's spread across Europe, the labyrinth has been attributed powers beyond that of an intriguing drawing. There is a thirteenth century turf labyrinth in Sweden, for example, which was employed by fishermen to trap and hold bad weather prior to their fishing trips (Sands, 2001). Ireland also possesses labyrinths of considerable age. The spiral, being the simplest form of single path to the centre, is featured on the walls of rocks at Newgrange. The prehistoric monument is described by Bord (1976) as a burial chamber, the sun hitting a spiral carved rock face only on the morning of the winter solstice.

It is the point in time when the Church started adopting this clearly pagan symbol into its iconography and architecture that a link between the labyrinth and spiritual healing becomes less speculative. Medieval France in particular saw a

multiplication of tiled or carved labyrinths on the floors of cathedrals and churches. With so little in the way of physical protection from the plague which travelled so extensively and mercilessly at the time, it was superstitions and the hope of spiritual salvation on which medieval Christians tended to focus their efforts. If God could not save them from the plague, then nothing could.

Of the surviving medieval cathedral labyrinths, one of the largest, most complex and consistently impressive is that at Chartres Cathedral in France. Measuring nearly thirteen metres across, it dominates the floor of the Gothic building. Since everything has meaning in Gothic architecture, its purpose is guaranteed to surpass mere decoration. Its placement at the cathedral's western entrance (typical of the placement of all church labyrinths) provides the essential premise for Westbury's (2001) argument regarding its medieval purpose. She explains the significance of Chartres as a stopping point on the medieval routes of pilgrimage and connects this with the cardinal placement of the labyrinth on the floor, commenting that the west corresponds with the setting sun and death. From this follows her statement that

For this reason, it is thought that all the church labyrinths served a time-honored role as protective devices, ritual gateways to sanctuaries. (Westbury, 2001:51)

The reasoning for this supposition is based on knowledge of medieval society. It is known that labyrinths were sometimes referred to as roads to Jerusalem (Westbury, 2001), and that pilgrims would stop at the cathedral on their journey. As mentioned in 2.3, it is said that to walk or crawl the labyrinth at Chartres a certain number of times was considered to be equal to a pilgrimage, thus obviating the need to travel. The assumption follows that, since the labyrinth is placed at the west entrance to the cathedral, pilgrims would have to encounter it before reaching high altar. Westbury

(2001) also suggests that, like the Swedish fishermen trapping inclement weather prior to going to sea, perhaps pilgrims would leave their sins at the centre of the labyrinth before entering into communion with God.

This implication of a cleansing property is supported by the concept of pilgrimage itself. Undertaking a long, potentially costly or even dangerous journey, whether it is for the “greater sense of closeness to the religion,” (Robinson, 1999:1950) or the “means of affirming one’s faith,” (Robinson, 1999:1950) has ultimately to be the source of spiritual gain. The naming of the labyrinth as a road to Jerusalem thus associates it with the same power to generate spiritual gain.

By far the strongest documented healing association of the labyrinth comes from modern sources. This link is becoming increasingly accepted, better researched and progressively less equivocal from a rational perspective. Whilst once it might have been dismissed as new age nonsense, the greater the public contact with labyrinths, the higher the volume of reports affirming the association. Such is the level of current belief surrounding the labyrinth’s healing associations that, among the most recent titles on the subject, is the unapologetic *Exploring the Labyrinth: A Guide for Healing and Spiritual Growth* (West, 2000), a title signalling the strength of the association.

Almost any of the most recent publications regarding the labyrinth will inform the reader of its installation and use in a host of conventional medical facilities. Westbury (2001), for example, cites Sparrow Hospital in Lansing, The California Pacific Medical Center and The John Hopkins Bayview Medical Center in Baltimore as locations which feature permanent labyrinths to be used by patients, medical staff and visitors. Hospital authorities note that cancer patients who walk a labyrinth deal more effectively with their health crises. The same cancer patients offer less cautious comments themselves, with the result that

A few patients report rapid rates of recovery, which they attribute to the labyrinth's healing effects. (Westbury, 2001:82)

Whilst this strong belief is supported by a large number of similar experiential statements from a variety of sources, support for the labyrinth's healing properties is not limited to the anecdotal. Research into the labyrinth's effects on brainwave patterns shows it to cause a temporary improvement in mental clarity for people with conditions such as Alzheimer's, schizophrenia and dyslexia, as well as in mobility for people with Parkinson's disease (Westbury, 2001). It is this research which gives credence to the opinions of those people who believe that walking a labyrinth

produces subtle neurological effects, which facilitate healing and deep states of consciousness. (Westbury, 2001:84-85)

The potential of measuring the functionality of the labyrinth's healing association does not strip it of its spiritual nature. Proof of its measurable beneficial effects has not yet, to the author's knowledge, led to a discovery of how or why it works. Answers to these questions remain firmly in the realm of supposition supported by belief. Labyrinth maker Ferré (2000) believes that they function by leading the walker to his or her true self and that this is the source of healing. This, of course, begs the question of whether the healing power comes from the labyrinth itself or the person using it. Whilst in some cases throughout the healing associations documented throughout this section the documented beliefs express an attribution of healing power to the circle, the question of whether the circle heals or whether it is a device for facilitating healing can be similarly applied to the majority of cases here.

With reference to the labyrinth in particular, insight into this question may be gained from examining how the labyrinth is used for healing. In his comprehensive website addressing all facets of what perhaps ought to be called labyrinthology,

Lonegren (2003c) puts forward his own views on how the labyrinth functions and how best to employ it for one's own benefit. He proposes a correlation between the chakra system and the progressive nature of the labyrinth's path. He also postulates a metaphysical subdivision of the labyrinth into areas corresponding to thoughts, emotions, the physical world and body, and the spirit.

In the directions he offers for using the labyrinth, he essentially describes it as a meditation technique, defining it as a "right brain intuitional tool" (Lonegren, 2003b). He offers the suggestion that one asks a question as one enters the labyrinth, and considers how the issue affects one's physical, emotional, mental and spiritual life whilst walking the corresponding paths. Upon reaching the centre, he instructs the reader to listen to his or her intuition, suggesting that at this point it will provide the answer to the posed question. Following this, he directs the reader to reverse the process on the way out of the labyrinth.

There are two issues raised by this technique. One is that there is no apparent reason to believe that the circular movement around a labyrinth performs any function other than that of visual stimulus. As a means of resolving a problem, all the work could be done by the person and the labyrinth might therefore have no spiritual properties. The other is that the resolution of a problem, according to Lonegren's (2003b) theory, depends on accessing one's intuition, which may not be a sufficiently familiar experience for all who try it to achieve success.

Addressing the first of these issues, if solving one's problems could be achieved by following Lonegren's (2003c) directions without a labyrinth, then this would mean that the labyrinth nonetheless reflects a map of the personal problem solving process. The second of these issues is addressed by the fact that walking a labyrinth is shown to

result in a change to brainwave patterns, which supports Lonegren's (2003c) implicit theory that one's intuition is easier to access within its paths.

Another way of describing a change in brainwave patterns is as an altered state of consciousness. It is from this premise that the author suggests support for the possibility that the labyrinth facilitates access to one's intuition. The alteration of brainwave activity also supports the concept that the labyrinth's mapping of the problem solving process extends beyond one of visual reminder, and performs a facilitative function through its structure. This idea is lent credence by the observation of professionals who work with children who walk a labyrinth regularly (Westbury, 2001). Their comments relate to how much calmer and better able to resolve problems such children are, by comparison with children who are not similarly exposed to a labyrinth. This rests on the notion that, if a child can gain benefit from a labyrinth, then it must be simple to use (hence the phrase *child's play*), neither requiring complex problem solving techniques nor extended concentration.

It is worth remembering at this point that Lonegren's (2003c) suggestion is precisely that. There is no right or wrong way to approach a labyrinth walk. As Ferré (2000) points out,

Walking a labyrinth is an intensely personal endeavor. There is nothing that is supposed to happen. Indeed, no one can predict what experience the labyrinth will generate. (Ferré, 2000:6)

With its compelling experiential evidence of metaphysically beneficial properties such as healing, it is easy to understand the rationale behind the recent resurgence in interest in the labyrinth. Although it would be easy to describe this as a new age renaissance, some adjustment to the term *new age* might then be required. The modern literature's illustrations showing people drawing and walking labyrinths on the

sands of beaches might seem to fit the description well, yet this activity is not exactly new. In Matthews' (1922) account of the history and development of labyrinths and mazes, he includes photographs of this very activity, taken in 1920, as seen in Plates 5.2.4 and 5.2.5.

Such is the level of current public interest in the labyrinth that it has enjoyed a return to the Church. The labyrinth which was installed on the floor of Grace Cathedral in San Francisco in 1991 (Pavlinac, 2004) shown in Plate 5.2.6 is a permanent carpeted replica of that tiled on the floor at Chartres, which is illustrated in Plate 2.3.2. This return sees the path of the labyrinth complete a circuit as Ferré (2000) and others now lead pilgrimages to the labyrinths themselves; the road to Jerusalem thus becomes its own destination.

The cathedral at Chartres possesses another feature which has the appeal to draw large crowds. In fact, when the author visited the cathedral in 1983, the labyrinth was covered with chairs to such an extent that it could easily have gone unnoticed. Instead it was the enormous and beautiful rose windows which captured and held the young visitor's attention for the duration of the visit. Whilst the labyrinth was observed, and some frustration was expressed at its impassable obstacle course, it ranked third in order of attention after the music from the organ, which came second to the stained glass.

5.3 Rose Windows

Given the meaningful nature of Gothic design, the placement of the rose windows in the same building as the labyrinth is no coincidence. Likewise, the spiritual healing associations of rose windows extend beyond this local connection. The deliberateness of their joint inclusion is made obvious in Plate 5.3.1, which illustrates that the labyrinth is exactly the same size as the west rose window above it. Such



Plate 5.2.4: 141. *Sea-Side Sand Maze* (1920)

Matthews, W. H.

Photograph

(Matthews, 1922:203)



Plate 5.2.5: 142. *Sea-Side Sand Maze* (1920)

Matthews, W. H.

Photograph

(Matthews, 1922:203)



Plate 5.2.4: *MZ-G285pc* (1991-2004)

Pavlinac, C.

Photograph

(Pavlinac, 2004)



Plate 5.3.1: *The Chartres Labyrinth as if Superimposed Over the Rose Window Above
the West Door* (date not provided)

Saward, J.

Mixed media

(Sands, 2001:39)

correlation cannot, in the Gothic era, be an accident. This leads to the conclusion that the two symbols are likely to share common meanings.

At the time of the cathedral's construction, roses had many associations, and a good number of these are of a healing or protective nature. Of these, that which relates most directly to the rose windows at Chartres is the Virgin Mary, who was popularly considered to be "the chief intercessor for sinners and as the help of human souls" (Westbury, 2001:57). For a medieval Christian seeking spiritual salvation through earnest prayer, the rose would therefore embody her approachability and the compassionate nature through which she would champion their cause in heaven.

It would seem that this meaning is sufficient to explain the cultivation of roses in the monasteries of the time, which grew so many roses that they were the primary medieval source of the flower (Frear, 1997). Yet this fact associates the rose with healing even more strongly. Monasteries are noted by Frear (1997) in an online document as being "the hospitals of the Middle Ages" (Frear, 1997). As the main producer of roses, monasteries would be in the optimum position for making the many remedies upon which they were based. These would be employed to treat a host of complaints from agitation to rabies (Frear, 1997).

In addition to this direct healing association are the rose's perceived properties of purification and protection, which were so strong that the pocket full of posies in the nursery rhyme *Ring-O-Roses* refers to a posy of roses carried to purify the air and protect the bearer from the plague. This form of protection would also take the shape of a circle due to the nature of binding flowers together at the stem.

To this list of the medieval beliefs about the rose which associate it most tangibly with spiritual healing is added confirmation that a strong conceptual framework underpinned the design of the rose windows at Chartres, and that these associations

would therefore have been conscious factors in their creation. Cowen (1979) notes that elements of sacred geometry and the then recently discovered Fibonacci series find their way into the windows' structure, highlighting the cleverness of their design.

The structure and shape of the rose is, of course, not the only design feature of the windows' composition. There are the pictorial subjects, which at Chartres range from Christ to the signs of the zodiac, and the light which passes through these images. Again, in medieval times, light was attributed powers now no longer part of the belief system of the majority of the general public. Whilst today it is common knowledge that one's skin benefits from protection against the sun's ultraviolet rays, the medieval belief was that light was "a magical substance which contained the power to transform the soul" (Cowen, 1979:18). This significant property would therefore have been believed to contribute its considerable power to the other properties associated with the rose window, thus enhancing its spiritual healing function.

Whilst no longer a feature of mainstream Christianity, the belief in the spiritual healing power of rose windows is currently found in a slightly different context of Western Spirituality. In an online document introducing the principles of colour therapy, Rowe (2004) provides an explanation of how coloured light is believed to heal from the perspective of modern colour therapy. It is rather more complex than the medieval belief in its power to transform the soul, though it remains related to this property. The opinion of colour therapists is, according to Rowe (2004), that

Colored light works with the aura, the electromagnetic field that surrounds every living organism. Apparently the aura contains the intelligence that determines where a color needs to go. If the emotional body needs color vitamins (and it most assuredly does if you are sick, injured or [sic] run down) the aura will delegate

the color almost entirely to the emotional body. Only when the emotional body is built up will the effects trickle down into the physical. Then results happen quickly. (Rowe, 2004)

This assertion makes it evident that the healing with which colour therapy is associated extends to physical healing as well as the healing of the metaphysical body. These healing properties continue to be associated with the rose window by colour therapists. Goodwin (2004) describes them as “a symbol of enlightenment of the human spirit,” (Goodwin, 2004) whilst Rowe (2004) refers directly to Chartres when she asserts that Gothic rose windows were “the first grand demonstration of color therapy in the western world” (Rowe, 2004).

The rose finds itself associated with additional spiritual properties in another alternative context of contemporary Western Spirituality. Cooper (2004) cites the source of her material as being channelled by her from the angelic realm and, on the basis of this, states that the rose is “the highest frequency flower on the planet ... which expands the mind and heart” (Cooper, 2004). The implicit premise on which this statement is based is that the higher the frequency the better, as the rose’s position in this context is an admirable one. When seeking the best or most spiritually pure flower, it would therefore be the rose to which one would look. Its heart and mind expanding associations are redolent of spiritual growth rather than a specific healing quality although, given the holy association of the root of the verb *to heal*, one could argue that spiritual growth would automatically lead to some level of healing.

It is this manner of healing to which Cowen (1979) refers in the argument that

The radiating form and pattern of most rose windows indicate many paths to one centre; and this corresponds to the paths

which lead to the real self at the centre of the soul. (Cowen, 1979:11).

Finding one's true self at the centre of one's soul describes becoming whole, which is a holy definition of the healing process. In a book devoted solely to a discussion of the meaning of rose windows, paying particular attention to the outstanding examples at Chartres, Cowen (1979) examines their form and meaning from the perspective of a well established yet modern context of Western Spirituality. Whilst rose windows do not attract pilgrims to the same degree as do labyrinths, they attract comparable popularity from the dominance of the circular image in Psychology.

5.4 Jungian Analysis of Circles Envisaged, Dreamt and Drawn

The study of the circular image in the domain of Psychology was initiated by Jung (1973), and it is a Jungian perspective from which Cowen (1979) writes, her opinion being that "Every rose window ... is a symbol of love" (Cowen, 1979:28). Such is Jung's (1973) influence on the discussion of the mandala in current Western Spirituality that, despite Cowen's (1979) thorough coverage of the rose window from within the realms of its historical background, mathematics, sacred geometry and personal response, it is the research, theories and publications of Jung (1973) which exert the strongest influence in the creation of Cowen's book.

The same has to be said of any author writing about the mandala in the modern day from within Western Spirituality, the current author included. The common acceptance of this may be demonstrated by reference to statements such as: "Jung introduced the idea of the mandala to modern psychology," (Fincher, 1991:19) which make it clear that it is his pioneering work which not only raised Western awareness of the healing potential of their shape, but also paved the way for all subsequent research into mandalas from within a Western Spiritual context.

Jungian Psychology is a subject of highly specialist scholarly research; indeed, there are many Jungian experts who have devoted years of study to his work. Just as there is no pretence here of knowing Tibetan Buddhism as a learned monk, or understanding Native American cultures as a Native American, so the intention is to respect the expertise of those who have earned it, and present a digest which touches upon the points which appear, to one without formal training in Jungian Psychology, to be of significance to this thesis. It is thus recognised that the research within this thesis may provide material which would be best left to an expert in Jungian Psychology for further study.

The focus of attention here is, as everywhere else throughout this thesis, on circles in art and the documented beliefs of people about those circles and their relationship with spiritual healing. The spiritual healing interpreted within Jungian Psychology is the journey towards a state of emotional wholeness, which describes in basic terms the intention of Jungian analysis (called the process of individuation by Jung (1971)) and satisfies the definition of spiritual healing in 1.6.1.

It is also art which marks the commencement of Jung's research into mandalas. In *Mandala Symbolism* (Jung 1973) he recounts drawing a series of images from day to day, which coincided with a period of personal crisis in his early adulthood. Without deliberate planning, he produced images which were circular in form, of which that illustrated in Plate 5.4.1 is an example. He noticed that their creation had a comforting quality for him, and as time progressed he observed that he could trace the improvement in his own mental state in the series of images.

His research stemmed from this observation, and he made his conclusions public only when he considered his research to be adequate, stating that at this point:

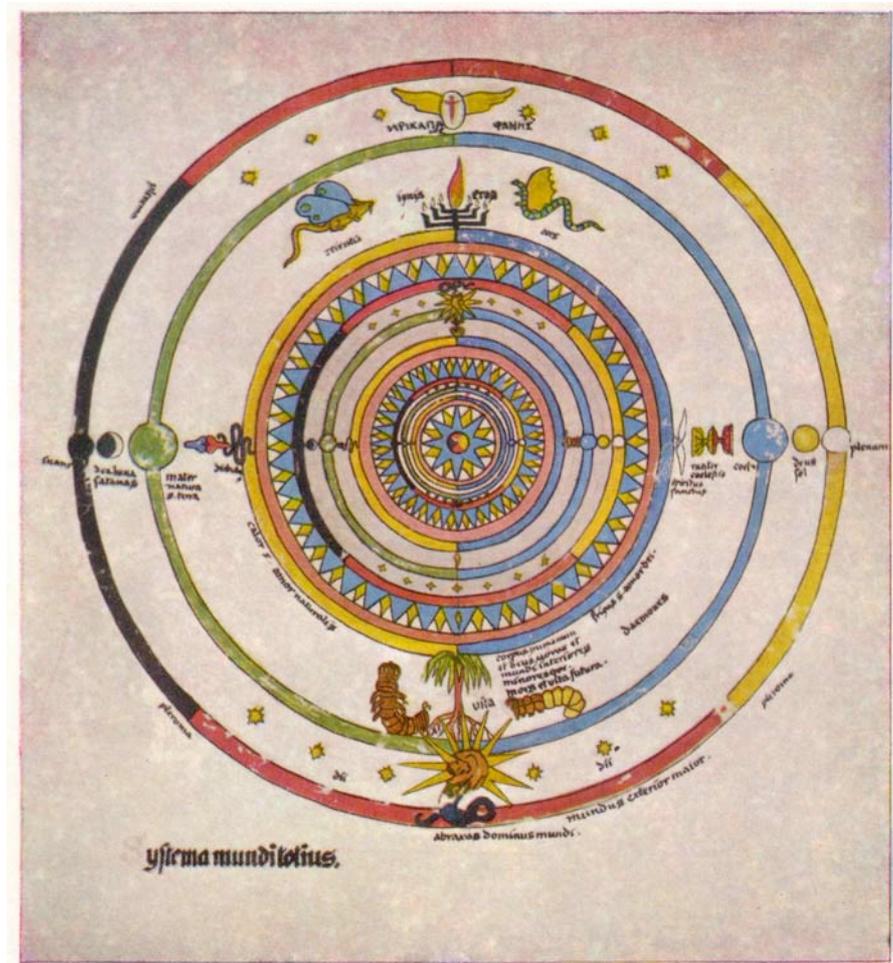


Plate 5.4.1: *Mandala of a Modern Man*, (1916)

Jung, C.

Painting on unidentified material

(Jung, 1973:0)

I was then able to convince myself, through my own studies, that mandalas were drawn, painted, carved in stone, and built, at all times and in all parts of the world, long before my patients discovered them. I have also seen to my satisfaction that mandalas are dreamt and drawn by patients who were being treated by psychotherapists whom I had not trained (Jung, 1971:353).

His extensive and well documented research into the workings of the human psyche led him to develop a number of psychological theories. Those of particular relevance here are the existence of the *collective unconscious* and the *archetypes*, and the identification of symbols of the Self. The *collective unconscious* is the term Jung (1971) created to explain the independent and universal psychic occurrence of the same symbols in different people all over the world and throughout the history of humankind, and the symbols which are included within the *collective unconscious* he called the *archetypes*. Among these *archetypal* symbols is the mandala, or the squared circle, on which Jung (1973) elaborates with specific relation to spiritual healing as it is conceptualised within this thesis:

The ‘squaring of the circle’ is one of the many archetypal motifs which form the basic patterns of our dreams and fantasies. But it is distinguished by the fact that it is one of the most important of them from the functional point of view. Indeed, it could even be called the *archetype of wholeness*. Because of this significance, the ‘quaternity of the One’ is the schema for all images of God ... (Jung, 1973:4 original italics).

Jung (1973) thereby associates the *archetypal* symbol of the mandala, or squared circle with healing (wholeness) and the divine, though an exploration of precisely what Jung (1973) means by *God* and the *quaternity of the One* is best left to those who are experts in that field.¹⁵ Of further interest, however, is the significance this carries given Jung's (1971) (1973) identification of the *archetypal* symbols of the Self, which include the squared circle among others. It thus seems reasonable to conclude that, for Jung (1973) the circle symbolises wholeness, the Self, and the divine, with ever increasing relevance to spiritual healing, especially given the common root of the words holy and healing. The additional inference that each person is also holy is one of the principles which, this author suggests, places Psychology firmly in the domain of Western Spirituality at the same time as it is allowed to stand in the domain of Science.

The image of the circle's association with the Self extends a little further within Jungian Psychology, as the Self is illustrated in a metaphoric diagram shown in Plate 5.4.2, from Franz's (1964) chapter entitled The Process of Individuation within *Man and His Symbols* (Jung, 1964), which is accompanied by a short description explaining its composition. Here the shape is deliberately employed to depict and explain Jung's (1964) definition of the Self, in contrast to a spontaneously produced circular symbol of the Self as in dreams, visions and art.

This phenomenon of the circle's appearance in the dreams of people experiencing emotional conflict is explained by Jung (1973) as

... an *attempt at self-healing* on the part of Nature, which does not spring from conscious reflection but from an instinctive impulse (Jung, 1973:4, original italics).

¹⁵ A comparison between the squaring of the circle and circular art forms discussed in previous chapters can be found in 6.1.3.

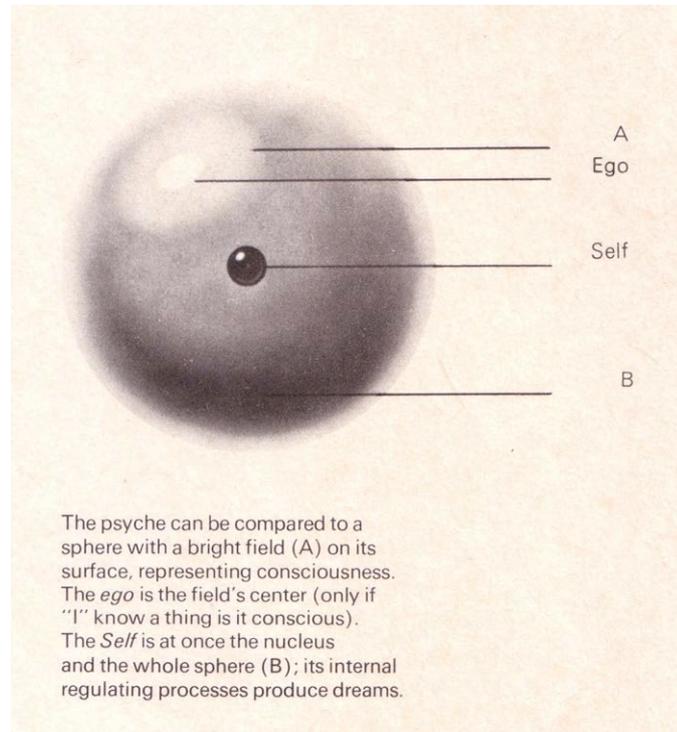


Plate 5.4.2: *The psyche can be compared to a sphere with a bright field (A) on its surface, representing consciousness. The ego is the field's center (only if 'I' know a thing is it conscious). The Self is at once the nucleus and the whole sphere (B); its internal regulating processes produce dreams. (date not provided)*

Anon.

Printed diagram

(Jung, 1964:161)

By this he means that the psyche often responds to situations of emotional conflict by producing (or accessing from the *collective unconscious*) a symbol of the whole Self as a single, integrated object or body. The resulting circular symbol, according to Jung (1973),

... compensates the disorder and confusion of the psychic state – namely, through the construction of a central point to which everything is related, or by a concentric arrangement of the disordered multiplicity and of contradictory and irreconcilable elements (Jung, 1973:4).

Such an image of the whole Self goes a considerable way to delineating Jung's (1973) conviction cited earlier, that the squared circle could be called the "*archetype of wholeness*" (Jung, 1973:4). The circular form representing the whole Self thus serves as a compensation for a chaotic state in an attempt to reconcile contradictory elements. In this instance, the Self is symbolised in a circular form and is an integrating force for the individual.

The mandala's assistance in the process of integration is not limited to those dreamt or envisaged. In *Mandala Symbolism* (Jung, 1973), Jung states the therapeutic effects of drawing mandalas under certain circumstances as fact, as indeed, he concludes:

The fact that images of this kind have under certain circumstances a considerable therapeutic effect on their authors is empirically proved and also readily understandable, in that they often represent very bold attempts to see and put together apparently irreconcilable opposites and bridge over apparently hopeless splits. Even the mere attempt in this direction usually

has a healing effect, but only when it is done spontaneously.

Nothing can be expected from an artificial repetition or a deliberate imitation of such images (Jung, 1973:6).

In reiteration of Jung's theories of the mandala's role in the individuation process, he believed that mandalas dreamt, envisaged or drawn spontaneously represent the totality of the Self. When interpreted intelligently he believed that these mandalas function as a tool for understanding the Self. This interpretation relies on knowledge of the symbols contained within the mandalas, as he believed that such symbols offered a means of access to the unconscious, and hence the psyche could be better understood.

Since Jung's (1973) work on the mandala in Psychology, research into the field is continued by current psychologists. References to Jung (1973) in all studies on the subject both illustrate the profundity of his influence and aid the understanding of his work as it is discussed in present day language. In reference to the Self, Fincher (1999d) explains that "Jung considered the Self to be like the image of God within each of us" (Fincher, 1999d). She also confirms and elaborates upon the standard Jungian thinking in simple terms when she explains that

The mandalas you create symbolize you: your body, your psychological state, and your place in the world. (Fincher, 1999e)

The research and practice which has taken place since that of Jung (1973) has confirmed the healing power of the mandala noted by Jung (1973). In the Master of Science research project which is entitled *The Mandala in Art Therapy: A Tool for Healing the Self*, Jacques (1996) concludes that "the use of the mandala as a tool in art therapy is effective ..." (Jacques, 1996).

Studies have also provided profound insight into the human relationship with circular images, as it has been shown that babies are “born with a desire to look at circles” (Fincher, 1999c). Infants younger than seven days old display measurable preferences for looking at curves over straight lines. This seems a useful design feature, especially given a newborn baby’s necessary focus on the circular sources of food discussed in Chapter One, which would provide Jung’s (1973) pioneering counterpart Freud with considerable material for analysis.

The principles of Jungian Psychology are marketed to a wider audience in the present day as Fincher (1991) places the power into the hands of the general public. Marketed for the lay-person as much as for the academic, *Creating Mandalas for Insight, Healing and Self-Expression* (Fincher, 1991) is, in effect, a self help book in which the reader is informed of the history of mandalas, including its employment in Psychology, together with instructions for their creation and amateur interpretation.

Clearly intent on spreading the word about the mandala’s healing association, much of the same information is made available online. Here Fincher (1999a) provides some guidelines for the creation of one’s mandala, including advocating the use of the highest quality materials in the interest of making the experience as enjoyable as possible, and the results more pleasing. The idea of using the best materials to promote one’s sense of self worth is not made explicitly, yet the point is made indirectly when she explains that her own mandalas are turned into rich compost in her “special memory garden” (Fincher, 1999b).

For the reader’s interpretation of his or her mandala, Fincher (1999b) instructs the artist to consider the colours, shapes and markings within the image after its completion. It is the contemplation of the personal associations of these factors which will provide the artist with insight into his or her current state of being. The degree of

benefit gained from the exercise thus depends on the reader / artist. Fincher (1999b) explains that by contemplation of these personal associations, healing is encouraged as it raises awareness of the process to a conscious level. This conforms to Jung's (1973) view that the unconscious may be accessed through the symbols which appear in, in this case, in mandalas.

Long before the dawn of the world wide web and its information superhighway, healing benefits which followed the recording of circular images from visions were observed by Hildegard of Bingen. Cited briefly by Jung (1973) in *Mandala Symbolism*, she had a series of visions which were dominated by the circular form. As made evident by the common occurrence of such events among the global population which caused Jung (1971) to develop his theory of the *collective unconscious*, she is obviously not alone within Western Spirituality in having had such visions. Yet, as a twelfth century German Abbess whose life had such a focus on healing that she wrote the first medical dictionary, and who was compelled to record and comment on her visions in detail, her visionary work offers a compelling exemplar.

5.5 Psychic Visions; Hildegard of Bingen

Hildegard describes herself as having had visions throughout her life beginning at least by the age of five years old. While it would clearly be of interest to know of the content of her early visions, it is the series of visions which commenced at the age of forty-one in 1142 which Hildegard recorded as important and worth sharing.

The reason for the elevated status accorded to this series of visions is due to their content, combined with Hildegard's perceived source of the visions and her Christian beliefs and vocation as a monastic. She takes great care to explain that her visions are neither hallucinations nor dreams, but experienced in full waking consciousness, and that she "truly saw those visions," (Hozeski, 1995:2) asserting that

I received those visions according to the will of God while I was awake and alert with a clear mind, with the innermost eyes and ears of a person. ... (Hozeski, 1995:2)

The will of God described here may not be explicit enough to make clear the source to which Hildegard attributes her visions. She explains her visions in terms of what she saw and heard, and prefaces her first quotation of that voice with the statement that “I saw a very great light from which a heavenly voice spoke ...” (Hozeski, 1995:1). Without saying that she heard the voice of God, she describes the voice as coming from heaven, which was audible to her as a result of God’s will.

The heavenly voice which accompanied her visions instructed her to write them down and share them, yet she initially refused to do so, a decision which she justifies in terms of her humility. Her observation is that, as a result of this failure to share her visions, her health became impaired and was restored only when she began to record them. In her own words she explains:

I became sick, pressed down by the scourge of God. I was sick for a long time with many different illnesses. Eventually ... I started to write what I had searched out and come upon secretly. As soon as I did that, I became healthy with a received strength ... (Hozeski, 1995:3).

From the passage cited above, it was clearly some time after their occurrence that their recording commenced, and it is this act to which Hildegard attributes a healing effect.

It has also to be noted that Hildegard was not the person who held the pen or brush in the creation of her illuminations. The recording of her visions took the form of a detailed account of each vision written in Latin by a secretary, and an image of the same vision constructed according to her instructions (Fox, 1985). Nevertheless it must

be acknowledged that, from masters of the Italian Renaissance to the Op Art of Bridget Riley, artists have been employing assistants to aid in the construction of their works while still maintaining total authorship of them. Riley admits to having used assistants since her first black and white painting (Riley, 1995) and, indeed, she was the force behind the creation of copyright laws protecting artists in the 1960s after the concept for her images was stolen for use in the fashion industry. Hildegard thus remains accurately described as the artist of her illuminations.

This method of realising her visions and sharing them with humanity has played an important role in their survival. The original script and illuminations have been lost, hence modern translations and illustrations come from a copy made from a photocopy taken in 1927 (Fox, 1985). Since Hildegard's originals were dictated and directed for recording by the hands of others, the copies of the originals can still be as accurate as human nature will allow.

From the appearance of the illuminations of her visions, it is evident that the circle is a recurring, if not dominant theme. Her visions are grouped into sections within books, with a titled theme to each of the three books. The first of these books was called *Scivias* by Hildegard, which translates as *Know the Ways* (Fox, 1985), and it was the act of creating this book to which Hildegard attributes her own healing above. Taking it as an example within which to quantify the circular content of her visions, twelve out of twenty-six illuminations illustrate a circle. Whilst this number represents nearly a half of the visions and proves the point adequately, the proportion in reality is even greater. This is because many of the visions either contain circles within their description in text which have not been incorporated into the illustration, or are details contained within a circle which is illustrated in an earlier illumination. Adding this number to those visible

in the illuminations brings the proportion of visions containing a circle to around eighty per cent.

Having gained the impression from the illuminations that the circle is of importance on account of its common visible occurrence, their descriptive text and Hildegard's commentary renders this impression even more strongly. The Fourth Vision of the First Part of *Scivias*, for example, is one of the visions in which a circle features in the text but not the picture. In this vision, a burning sphere descends from within "the mystery of the heavenly creator" (Hozeski, 1995:39) and enters into a foetus, which is promptly born. The sphere is subsequently described as protecting this person from storms, which

... tried to bend the burning sphere that was in the body of the person, but that sphere worked vigorously to renew the person.

It resisted these storms strongly. (Hozeski, 1995:39)

The sphere in this circumstance comes from God, gives life to a person, and protects that person from harmful influences. The significance of this sphere is unquestionably profound, and leads this author to suspect that an exploration of the representative qualities of the circles in the remaining visions might provide insight into the question of why it is circles which are so commonly attributed a healing effect. It is also comparable with Jung's (1973) theory that the mandala is one of the symbols which represent the Self, which is the divine within, since this vision depicts the sphere as an element of the divine within the body.

Similarly, the Jungian diagram of the Self (see Plate 5.4.2) shares characteristics with Hildegard's vision here, as it describes the Self as being "at once the nucleus and the whole sphere..." (Franz, 1964:161). Hildegard's sphere which works vigorously to renew the person and resists the storms presents a strong metaphor which is analogous

to Franz's (1964) Jungian explanation of the Self as "The organizing center from which the regulatory effect stems", which "seems to be a sort of 'nuclear atom' in our psychic system" (Franz, 1964:161). If the storms of Hildegard's vision are interpreted as the turmoil of the outer world, then Hildegard's burning sphere may be considered to form a parallel with the Jungian psychic nucleus or centre into which one may retreat symbolically in an attempt to deal with such turmoil, often represented by a circle as discussed in 5.4.

Hildegard's visions were fully endorsed by the church in her lifetime, attracting encouragement from Pope Eugenius III, who "authorized her to write whatever the Holy Spirit inspired her to write" (Hozeski, 1995:xxv). After her death in 1179 there followed a diminution in public interest in Hildegard's work, which lasted for approximately eight hundred years until it returned to vogue in Western Spirituality towards the end of the twentieth century.

The inconsistency of belief and popularity regarding Hildegard's visions reflects that of the circle's association with spiritual healing within Western Spirituality in general. Labyrinths, once adopted by Christianity from pagan culture, lost popularity within the Church only to regain it in the domain of new age spirituality and thus make a physical return to the Church. The rose window was clearly a strong and significant symbol in medieval Christianity which, like the labyrinth, lost its original level of attention but subsequently found favour in different areas of Western Spirituality, this time in the forms of colour therapy and Jungian Psychology. Psychology itself is a relatively new addition to the beliefs and practices of Western Spirituality, highlighting the culture's readiness to embrace new ideas and evolve.

5.6

Unique Insight into Western Spirituality's Healing Circles

The changeability which is the result of the culture's evolutionary nature provides clear direction for the remainder of this chapter. A means of corroborating the correspondence between the consulted literature and contemporary practice is particularly pertinent here. Hence this researcher sought consultation with a contemporary source. Since the present day associations of the circular form of rose windows with spiritual healing now lie in the domain of Psychology rather than the churches in which they were built, the knowledge and experience sought in such an individual should, ideally, include labyrinths, circles in Psychology, and also the psychic occurrence of circles.

Finding a person with these fields of expertise posed a considerable challenge. This person's identification is, as in the instance of finding a shaman in Chapter Four, not a case of opening a directory, but involves making contacts in holistic lifestyle circles. Through such methods, this researcher was able to locate a labyrinth workshop in the Sydney area, but whose personnel lacked other relevant expertise. However, one person who possesses a degree in Psychology, runs labyrinth workshops for healing, has had psychic visions involving circles since childhood, and works in a location which is convenient for the researcher to access was identified during the course of the study. This person is Mary Hykel Hunt, with whom this researcher conversed on 19th June, 2002¹⁶.

5.6.1

Hykel Hunt on Western Spirituality's Healing Circles

As a qualified psychologist who earns a living as a psychic medium and runs workshops about labyrinths for healing (among other topics), Hykel Hunt embodies the

¹⁶ Hykel Hunt granted this author permission to record and refer to her communications during the conversation. All further references to Hykel Hunt refer to this personal communication, which is henceforth abbreviated as (*p.c. 19th June, 2002*). (Hykel Hunt chooses not to hyphenate her surnames, which is reflected in her reference here.)

unorthodox combination of the academic and the intuitive, invariably bringing elements of both to any aspect of her work. Her insight into the spiritual healing associations of the circle in Western Spirituality therefore represents qualities from each of these contrasting perspectives. She does not compartmentalise her work, and demonstrates this fact in the involvement of her professional counselling skills in psychic readings when necessary. This also means that she brings her education in psychology to her work with labyrinths, and hence she suggests that the form of the labyrinth might be “a product of *collective unconscious*” (p.c. 19th June, 2002) in answer to the self posed question of the symbol’s origin.

The first confirmation offered by Hykel Hunt of the consistency of her experience with the literature consulted above on the subject of labyrinths takes the form of experiential evidence of its spiritual healing properties. Naturally, this is new material, and the healing experiences which the participants at her workshops have shared with her include relief from insomnia and improvement in Irritable Bowel Syndrome symptoms.

To this she adds her personal experience of the labyrinth’s healing power, which she reports as her own introduction to the symbol. Accentuating the spiritual side of its healing powers, she recounts a story attributing the healing of her relationship with an estranged family member to a “spiral of tranquillity” (p.c. 19th June, 2002), which she describes as a spiral of copper wire with small crystals and gemstones set around it, contained within a clear plastic block approximately the size of a paperweight. Hykel Hunt thus provides an experiential healing association of the spiral as a simple labyrinth, as well as for the more complex paths. Based on the combination of her experiences, observation, education and intuition, Hykel Hunt believes that the labyrinth

has the power to heal illnesses more serious than insomnia or Irritable Bowel Syndrome, mentioning cancer as a particularly complex example.

For her, its powers extend beyond those of healing as she notices that each person will normally display at least a preference for which direction the path takes; to the left or right. In her own experience, she finds that if she attempts to walk a three ringed classical Cretan labyrinth which leads to the right, it will cause her to feel sick. If she tries to walk a seven ringed classical Cretan labyrinth which leads in the same direction, she reports that: “I’ll actually get a headache. I can’t do it” (p.c. 19th June, 2002). Her preference is for labyrinths which begin by leading the walker around to the left, and, despite her wealth of experience, concedes that she has

... no explanation for it whatsoever at the moment ... I wish it was something as straightforward as *handedness*, but it isn’t, unfortunately. (p.c. 19th June, 2002)

Whilst she does not make explicit the connection between the two, this phenomenon observed by Hykel Hunt suggests that walking a labyrinth in one’s opposite direction of preference may have the potential to subvert a healing effect. The duration of the physical effects in such circumstances is unclear from her report, though she does comment on the short term effect of the labyrinth on brainwave patterns and improvements in the symptoms of serious physical illnesses.

One of the methods she chooses to employ for working with a labyrinth is the chakra walk described by Lonegren (2003c). Hykel Hunt’s experiences have led her to conclude that this method has diagnostic value, should a need or starting point for a healing process not be immediately obvious. She asserts that, at some point whilst walking a labyrinth,

... you can start to develop feelings of panic, and that's what I call the *wobble moment*. It's very interesting to notice on what path you wobble, because that will point to the chakra area that needs a bit of attention. (p.c. 19th June, 2002)

From this point, armed with the knowledge of the associations of the chakras, the walker can examine his or her life and or health, and use the guidance obtained from walking the labyrinth to identify one of its aspects which may be in need of healing.

During the conversation, Hykel Hunt shares four more of her own ideas concerning the labyrinth's powers. She describes the cross at the approximate centre of a classical Cretan labyrinth, around which the first, middle and final paths meet, and explains that her belief is that this cross holds the power of the labyrinth, calling it the "power centre" or the "power point" (p.c. 19th June, 2002). Although she admits to having no way of demonstrating so at the time, and underlines the anecdotal nature of her assertion, she believes that it is because this cross is "where all things meet" (p.c. 19th June, 2002) that the labyrinth is so powerful.

Whilst explaining her perception of the significance of this source of power, Hykel Hunt introduces another of her beliefs to illustrate her point. As she describes the power point, she shares what she believes the labyrinth to be, asserting that

... what we're looking at here is a physical map of human consciousness, and a kind of trigger. You know when we actually meditate and we do shift consciousness? I believe that this is a map of that journey to the altered state of consciousness ... (p.c. 19th June, 2002)

Scientific experiments demonstrating brainwave patterns are certain to be an influential factor in this belief. However, this is not the only source of inspiration for Hykel Hunt,

who adds the insight she gains through her work as a psychic medium to this firm basis of knowledge.

The belief that the labyrinth is a map of consciousness which can be walked is related to one of her intuitive experiences, which has led her to assert that “everybody has an inner labyrinth, and it’s their very own” (p.c. 19th June, 2002). She describes a journey into one’s inner landscape using the power of the imagination as the vehicle, explaining the process as a form of guided visualisation meditation. She perceives this concept as having been given to her rather than as being designed by herself, due to the nature of the source of her information. As she explains the function of the inner labyrinth, she argues that

It’s a way of accessing guidance ... I believe we all carry our own answers, it’s just a question of how we access them. This, I’ve discovered, is an extremely efficient way of getting at those answers. (p.c. 19th June, 2002)

Although the structure of one’s inner labyrinth does not, in her experience, have to correspond with that of a physical labyrinth or anyone else’s inner labyrinth, she reports her own as representing a physical labyrinth in the form of a squared spiral. Rather than consider the inner labyrinth to be a derivative of physical labyrinths, she believes that physical labyrinths represent a means of accessing the same guidance as would be gained from one’s inner labyrinth, and therefore that walking a physical labyrinth constitutes a physical shortcut to one’s inner labyrinth¹⁷.

Hykel Hunt’s psychic experiences provide a unique addition to the circle’s association with spiritual powers. As a clairvoyant, she sees colours and shapes associated with a person’s name, and finds that, as each person’s shapes and colours are

¹⁷ Hykel Hunt’s description of gaining access to the inner through the outer ritual will be compared with Shamanistic practices in Chapter Six.

different, they represent a form of language. When a person gives permission, this language informs Hykel Hunt of details about that person's life and character. She delineates the appearance of these visions by explaining:

... when I'm actually looking at somebody's name I generally see some formulation of six images; squares, circles, rectangles, triangles, crescent moon shapes and different patterns, and ovals, and they tend to come through in mainly sixteen colours.

(p.c. 19th June, 2002)

Due to the nature of this language, a certain shape in a certain colour does not have to be uniform in meaning, but has to be read in context. What is standard throughout though, is the presence of a three dimensional sphere which represents a person's drive or motivation. She refers to this as a *battery pack*, which this author considers to suggest the qualities of a life force. When questioned, Hykel Hunt realises that she can remember no occasion in which a person did not have such a sphere present in his or her name. To this she adds that, without exception, there is no other shape (or colour) which appears in every person's name.

Whilst there can be no single translation of, for example, a blue square, Hykel Hunt does admit that there are always elements of the qualities of shapes which are standard. Of the circle specifically, she declares:

... whenever I see a circle it's a dynamic. It's a motivator. It moves. It's not a static quality. A circle can't be, because it's free to move in any direction, so energetically, for me, circles are about moving people on ... (p.c. 19th June, 2002)

For this reason, she believes that a circle can carry "a quality of shifting and changing a person out of a stuck place," which she thinks is because "Circles keep

energy moving.” This she attributes to their complete lack of corners, in which, according to her beliefs, “energy can get stuck” (p.c. 19th June, 2002).

Finally, in answer to the direct question of whether she believes that circles have healing powers, she responds that she does, and ranks that belief at the position of nine out of a maximum ten in terms of its certainty. The reason she gives for the high strength of this belief is because her experience shows it “demonstrated virtually every day that I work” (p.c. 19th June, 2002).

The result of the personal communication has to be the conclusion that the contemporary practice and experience of the circle’s spiritual healing powers and associations for Hykel Hunt represent a microcosm of practice and experience within Western Spirituality throughout time. Compared with the content of the literature consulted within this chapter, there remain consistencies, such as the use of the labyrinth for healing, and there are also evolutionary changes, such as the intuitive discovery of the inner labyrinth and its healing potential.

5.7 Synthesis of the Circle’s Spiritual Healing Associations within Western Spirituality

This chapter’s environmental scan of extant literature tempered by contemporary experience conclude the documentation of the spiritual healing associations of the circle within Western Spirituality and meet the study’s second aim. These associations can be summarised as follows:

- The labyrinth, including the spiral, is associated with emotional, spiritual and physical healing, which is effective regardless of whether conscious consideration is given to its use. It is also shown to exert a measurable effect on brainwave patterns.

- Rose windows are linked in history to spiritual healing qualities through Medieval Christian beliefs, and are currently associated with physical, emotional and spiritual healing in the realms of colour therapy and Jungian Psychology.
- Circles envisioned, dreamt and drawn are associated with emotional healing within Jungian Psychology. This healing effect is documented through their interpretation. Such mandalas are believed to represent the Self and the divine.
- The psychic occurrence of circles is further associated with spiritual healing given the example of Hildegard of Bingen, who attributes her own healing to the act of recording her visions. The predominance of the circle's shape within Hildegard's visions thereby associates the shape with her healing.
- The circle's psychic occurrence is also associated with healing by Hykel Hunt, who links them with the ability to move one's energy and thus improve health.

In the chapter which follows, these associations and attributed properties will be compared with those documented in the preceding two chapters. From the results of this comparison, an example will be selected for deeper exploration in relation to why circles rather than other shapes are associated with spiritual healing.

Chapter Six **Common Spiritual Healing Attributions of the Circle in the Primary Cultural Contexts**

6.1 **A Comparison of the Circle's Ascribed Properties Thus Far**

The combination of recorded and contemporary sources in the documentation of the circle's ascribed spiritual healing properties in each of the cultural contexts which feature in the preceding three chapters together with the originality of their coalescence render their comparison unique. The logical starting point for this comparison is as evident as the starting point of any circle's circumference. On this occasion, the intended course of action is therefore to start the central droplet, following the ripples of common associations outward until they become too faint to be discernable.

6.1.1 **The Importance of the Centre**

The droplet has to be located at the centre, which is important in all three of the cultural contexts studied in Chapters Three, Four and Five. The centre, in accompaniment with its surrounding environment, forms an integral part of the definition of the mandala in Tibetan Buddhism. As a defining characteristic, any of a mandala's attributed properties, healing included, have to be linked to this centre. The mandalas created by Tibetan Buddhists are also accurately described as a central component of their way of life.

This centrality of importance is more appropriate still in relation to the medicine wheel and the shamanistic way of life. The symbol is considered to be a critical factor in every aspect of living. To this is added many examples of the importance placed on the centre, cited in Chapter Four, such as the medicine wheel's power point being at its centre (Spiritual Network, 2003a), its provision of a centred or grounding area (Spiritual Network, 2003b), and its use as a device for bringing one's consciousness to its centre

(Moorey, 1997), which enables the “return to the home of the True Self in the center of our own internal wheel of being” (Great Round, 2003).

In Western Spirituality, this theme of the Self and the centre is a fundamental concept of Jungian Psychology, as made most visibly obvious by the visualisation of the Self in Plate 5.4.2, chosen as a representative from the field which is rich with other examples of the Self’s relationship with the centre of a circle, referred to in 5.4. Cowen (1979) finds the property of enabling one to find one’s centre to be a quality of the rose windows featured in Gothic churches. The labyrinths which are also found in Gothic architecture, as well as in older Pagan sites and in present day Western Spiritual practice, have the centre as their literal goal, at which point resolution to problems can be found (Lonegren, 2003c).

The full circle of this argument for the importance of the centre brings the subject back to Tibetan Buddhism. Given that the centre is one of the defining attributes of a mandala, a concept similar to finding one’s true self at the centre is expressed by Gold (1994) in his text comparing the culture’s sand mandalas with Navajo sand paintings. He argues that the effect of a mandala ritual¹⁸ in Tibetan Buddhism is the transformation of the participant into his or her ideal state, as the best version of him or herself.

6.1.2 The Significance of the Encircled Cross

The form of the encircled cross is closely linked to these central principles, given its common location at the central point in the symbols within each of the three cultural contexts. These two concepts combine in Shamanism as Kollar (1995) describes one’s position at the centre of a sphere when one considers the six directions

¹⁸ It is noted that a mandala ritual is a whole, and a physical mandala is created as a part of Tibetan Buddhist ritual.

equidistant from oneself. This three dimensional encircled cross places one at the centre, and thus associates the form of the encircled cross with all of the cited shamanistic qualities attributed to the centre. The encircled cross is visibly present in any medicine wheel which has physical form, and can also be seen as a dominant symbol in the directional crosses within Navajo sand paintings, commonly bound by the preferred circular form.

This form can also be identified in a high proportion of mandalas in Tibetan Buddhism, as evident from the mandalas illustrated in Chapter Three. In each case, with the only exception being the photograph of the mandala's dispersal into water, an encircled cross is either drawn directly, or can be distinguished in the symmetry and division within the image's structure.

The same characteristics of symmetry and division place the encircled cross within the form of rose windows. This is also true of labyrinths, the example of the Chartres labyrinth being the most visibly compelling. However, as Hykel Hunt (p.c. 19th June, 2002) explains her theory of the power point of the classical Cretan labyrinth, she points to the cross formed at the approximate centre of the symbol, bound by the circular form of the whole. The encircled cross, for Hykel Hunt, can therefore be described as the source of the labyrinth's power.

6.1.3 The Squaring of the Circle

The four right angles created at the centre of an encircled cross draw the attention to the squaring of the circle which is common to all three of the cultural contexts here. Just as an encircled cross is visible in the structure of many Tibetan Buddhist mandalas, so the squared circle can be seen to be present in the images. Within Shamanism, the distinction between the square and the circle is blurred in the instance of Navajo sand paintings. In a situation in which green can be blue and the preferred

shape of the circle can, on occasion, be substituted for a squared image, the possibility that what appears to resemble a squared shape may represent a circle must at least be accommodated, as discussed in 4.4. Images such as Ben's *Whirling Logs* shown in Plate 4.4.2 also present a visible squared circle. The "squaring of the circle" (Jung, 1971:388) is of such significance to Jungian Psychology that, from the perspective of its domain, Tibetan Buddhist mandalas and Navajo sand paintings represent examples of the "squaring of the circle" (Jung, 1971:388), which Jung described as being the "*archetype of wholeness*" (Jung, 1973:4).

6.1.4 Common Media and their Associations

In pursuit of the physical characteristics of the circles associated with healing, sand has to be seen as a common medium. In the Navajo sand paintings, the sand carries significance and is traditionally collected from sacred sites (Bahti and Joe, 1978). The source of the sand used to create sand mandalas in Tibetan Buddhism has similar relevance, according to Gold (1994), who asserts that the more precious the source of the sand used, the better the result in terms of karmic merit. These two examples compare with the more mundane example of rose windows in Western Spirituality, whose glass is made of sand, treated with heat.

Following the same theme of material commonality, in each of the primary cultural contexts, the circles associated with healing are created in direct contact with the ground on a regular basis. This is true of medicine wheels, Navajo sand paintings, Tibetan Buddhist sand mandalas, and labyrinths. In each case, this location may be determined by size alone, yet the possibility that the direct contact with the floor is of facilitative significance to the symbols can not be eliminated, particularly in the light of the importance of mother earth to the belief system of Shamanism as well as Paganism in which three of the above four symbols are found. Within Tibetan Buddhism, the

equal importance of everything in the universe, including the earth, is the closest the religious way of life comes to upholding the same principle.

6.1.5 The Need for Physical Form Surpassed

Bizarrely, in each of the three primary cultural contexts, the circle is described as not needing a physical form to exert its healing effect. Bryant (2003) explains that the physical form of a Tibetan Buddhist sand mandala is a representation of something which already exists. This is confirmed by Gold (1994) when he asserts that the best way to experience such a mandala is in the mind's eye. Andrews (p.c. 9th July, 2002) expresses similar beliefs regarding the medicine wheel, making it clear that the perception of its shape in one's mind is of greater significance than its visual appearance. The example which clarifies this is that of the four points of the compass representing an encircled cross which is the medicine wheel, rather than marking the four corners of a square.

In the context of Western Spirituality, there are two examples of the circle's needlessness for physical form in relation to its healing association. The first of these is the squared circle's status as the *archetype of wholeness* among the Jungian symbols of the *collective unconscious* which, as a symbol of the Self, need not have a physical form, but can be interpreted directly from dreams or visions. The second is the new example of the inner labyrinth discovered by Hykel Hunt (p.c. 19th June, 2002), which she believes to be the construction on which physical labyrinths are based, and the source of the same guidance and ascribed healing properties. The existence of the circle's form without physical materiality must thus be considered to be as (if not more than) common a medium for the circle's construction as is sand, within the three cultural contexts under consideration.

6.1.6

The Theme of Metaphysical Cartography

This common metaphysical medium for the circle's construction brings the focus of attention to the common metaphysical properties attributed to circles in each of the cultural contexts. Another of the hypotheses put forward by Hykel Hunt (p.c. 19th June, 2002) is that the labyrinth is a map of the mind's journey to an altered state of consciousness. Similar principles are found in both Shamanism and Tibetan Buddhism. Meadows (1990) and Moorey (1997) agree that the medicine wheel functions as a map of the mind and life, and Hynes (2001) describes Tibetan Buddhist sand mandalas as maps of inner consciousness and the universe.

The circle's representation of the universe is not limited to Tibetan Buddhist mandalas. The same representation is also commonly attributed to the medicine wheel. In the realm of Western Spirituality, the association is subtler and smaller in scale, with Fincher (1999e) including the illustration of one's place in the world in her description of the representative properties of mandalas.

Developing the cartographic principle a step further leads one to consider the effect of following the map's directions. Hykel Hunt's belief in the existence of the inner labyrinth, which can be accessed by walking a physical labyrinth, could be described as accessing the unconscious through ritual from a Jungian perspective. From this viewpoint, the same can be said of, for example, Andrews' use of the medicine wheel to gain spiritual insight into issues in the physical world through ritual. Considering the Tibetan Buddhist mandala ritual from the same Jungian perspective, the independent existence attributed to the mandala prior to its reproduction in physical form could be interpreted as a symbol of the *collective unconscious* accessible through ritual.

mandala is confirmed to be a healing experience by many of the Buddhist sources consulted, including the Tibetan monks who presented the workshop on the topic referred to in Chapter Three (p.c. 23rd January, 2001), which renders interaction with the circle as a common feature of its healing associations in all three cultural contexts.

6.1.11 The Use as a Tool for Meditation

The circle's use as an aid to meditation is also found in all three contexts. Andrews (p.c. 9th July, 2002) describes using his medicine wheel for meditation, and a significant proportion of the activity before, during and after the creation of a Tibetan Buddhist sand mandala consists of meditation. In Western Spirituality too, labyrinths can be used as a form of ambulatory meditation.

6.1.12 The Commonality of Purposes Additional to Healing

When a droplet lands in water and sends ripples outwards in rings of concentric circles, there is one outer ripple within which all others are contained. This is the first ripple caused by the impact of the initial droplet. The metaphoric equivalent of this outer ripple, within which all others are placed, is the fact that, in all three of the cultural contexts examined, the circles are used as tools for healing, although this is not their only function. In each case, the circles which are employed for healing also form a part of an holistic way of life which recognises emotional, mental or spiritual influences on one's physical and emotional health.

6.1.13 The Power to Alter the Body

As the ripples move outwards, however, they become fainter to the point of imperceptibility. This faintness can be employed as a metaphor to describe the associations of the circle which are found in only two of the three cultural contexts. An example of such an association is the perceived capability to alter the physical body.

The labyrinth is reported to show the ability to alter one's brainwave patterns, and there is a connection in Tibetan Buddhism between mandalas and an alteration of the body's atomic structure. Within Shamanism, however, specific claims made about the circle's influence on the physical body are limited to the strong belief in its power to heal physical illness.

6.2 Identification of a Case Study for Phase Three of the Research

Beyond this point lies the flat surface of the water outside this chapter's metaphoric ripples, which marks the completion of the second phase of the research. As delineated in the methodology, the task is now to select a specific healing context to undertake as a case study from the examples discussed in this phase of the research.

In the cases of Tibetan Buddhism and Shamanism, the literature consulted is consistent which, when compared with the corroborative examples of current practice, suggests the conclusion that either little has changed in their practice over time, or there is no documentation or other evidence of any fundamental change in their practice throughout history. The ancient Tibetan Buddhist texts and mandalas continue to be studied by the monks, and form the basis of contemporary secular literature. The modern Shamanistic texts based upon the culture's oral history display significant concordance of content within their substantial volume.

By contrast, Western Spirituality contains demonstrable inconsistencies throughout its history. The labyrinth is perhaps the most enduring circular icon, yet even this has had a variety of attributions and uses since its initial documentation. The question is therefore which example of the circle's association with healing within Western Spirituality might offer a suitable case study. The labyrinth is predominantly and consistently associated with healing in modern literature and practice, the additional

intuitive hypotheses of Hykel Hunt (p.c. 19th June, 2002) aside. In addition, though labyrinths take on a mandala form, a precisely circular form is not a requirement of their definition. The combination of these two factors mean that labyrinths do not provide an ideal subject for further probing in this regard.

Rose windows have a history of varying associations, though the healing link explored in 5.3 is not strong enough to provide adequate material for a case study of this nature. The field of Jungian psychology is comparatively new to Western Spirituality, and therefore lacks the appropriate consistency throughout time for a case study, but the consistency in the literature relating to mandalas in art therapy and Jungian Psychology is potent as is the predictability of referencing Jung (1973).

This leaves the psychic occurrence of circles, which offers great potential in this instance. Whilst the psychic occurrence of the circle is described by Jung (1971) as widespread, and there must thus be a great many people who have experienced the psychic occurrence of the circle in Western Spirituality, the one example which meets the criteria established in the methodology for the identification of the most suitable case study is that of Hildegard of Bingen.

The reception of her visionary works has been inconsistent, commencing with their papal approval and public acceptance in Hildegard's lifetime, passing through a waning in popularity to the brink of obscurity during the course of several hundred years, and culminating in a resurgence in popularity eight hundred years after her death. This has led to contemporary translations and published commentaries, including Fox's (1985) association of her illuminations with healing. Hildegard's own association of the act of recording her visions with an improvement in her health reinforces their validity as a healing context. The strong presence of the shape of the circle within the illuminations thus renders them as appropriate and complete an example as might be

achieved for this case study. This choice is made obvious in Table 6.2.1, which is constructed according to the same principles as Table 2.12.1.

Consequently, the circular content of the mystic visions of Hildegard of Bingen will be explored in the final phase of this research. The purpose of this case study is to probe Hildegard's intuitive wisdom embedded within the images and texts which, together, comprise her illuminations. It is anticipated that the posing of, apparently, hitherto undocumented questions such as:

- What are the properties and associations ascribed to the circles in her visions?
- What does Hildegard note in relation to these properties and associations?
- How do Hildegard's observations compare with those of others in Western Spirituality, as well as Tibetan Buddhism and Shamanism?
- To what extent are there continuities / discontinuities?

has the potential to yield new insights into why it is the circle which is so routinely attributed healing associations, given the source, context and dominant shape of Hildegard's illuminations.

Table 6.2.1: Healing Contexts Evaluated According to Case Study Selection

Criteria

| | | Criteria for Selection of Case Study | | | |
|--|---------------------------|--|--|---|---|
| | | Circular Art Form Associated with Spiritual Healing | History of Varied Public Acceptance | Inconsistency Expressed in Existing Literature | Volume of Literature Sufficient for Case Study |
| Healing Contexts Documented in Phase Two in Order of Presentation | Tibetan Buddhist Mandalas | Y | | | Y |
| | Medicine Wheels | Y | | | Y |
| | Navajo Sand Paintings | Y | | | Y |
| | Labyrinths | Y | Y | | Y |
| | Rose Windows | Y | Y | Y | |
| | Jungian Psychology | Y | | | Y |
| | Hildegard's Visions | Y | Y | Y | Y |