As if a Stage: Towards an Ecological Concept of Thought in Indian Buddhist Philosophy

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The interest of this essay is meta-philosophical: I seek to reconstruct neglected concepts of thought available to us given the diverse use South Asian Buddhist philosophers have made of the term-of-art vikalpa. *In contemporary Anglophone engagements with Buddhist philosophy, it has come to mean either the categorization and reidentification of particulars in terms of the construction of equivalence classes and/or the representation of extra-mental causes of content. While this does track much that is important in the history of Buddhist philosophy, it is overly restrictive. Based on three examples, this essay reconstructs other concepts of* vikalpa *available before, during, and after Dignāga's epochal reformulation of Buddhist epistemology. The first example takes us away from the familiar context of content introduction in perceptual experience to consider Ratnakīrti's way of treating cases where one exits from concept-involving modes of engaging content. The second takes up with Vasubandhu and Sthiramati the case of the contents of background (and non-episodic) awareness. The third and final case builds on the last concern, taking up a discussion of possible worlds in the Laṅkāvatārasūtra. This last was intended to address the relationship of thought to language. Moving beyond narrowly epistemological concerns allows a more expansive sense of* vikalpa *to come into view. Doing so, in turn, allows one to see that* vikalpa *need not indicate only occurrent representations, but also the structured systems of possible discriminations which some Buddhists took to serve as the background for all possible perception, thought, and action. The existence of such a background changes the salience and the value of distinctions drawn between conceptual and non-conceptual contents and experiences.*

Key words: concept; *vikalpa*; non-conceptuality; thought; Yogācāra; Buddhism; intentionality; imagination; ecological; perception; mind; possible worlds

Like the lead actor, thought
acts and dances its role;
The reflexive mind
is like the comic relief.
Mental awareness, along with
the five varieties of sensory awareness,
constructs the visible world,
as if a stage.[1]
Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra 6.4

1 Introduction

The interest of this essay is meta-philosophical: I seek to reconstruct neglected concepts of thought available to us given the diverse use South Asian Buddhist philosophers have made of the term-of-art *vikalpa*. In the last decade or so, this term has typically been engaged with by Anglophone

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philosophers interested in conceptuality in one of two senses: either as the categorization and reidentification of particulars in terms of the construction of equivalence classes and/or the representation of extra-mental causes of content.[2] While so construing *vikalpa* does track much that is important in the history of Buddhist philosophy, it restricts the notion too much. Louis de La Vallée Poussin was characteristically insightful when he noted in a footnote that "this word [*vikalpa*] is difficult to translate. It would be dangerous to understand any discriminative operation" (la Valée Poussin 1903: 373, n2).[3] But it is also dangerous to narrow the scope of *vikalpa* as much as contemporary engagements with Buddhist philosophy have done.

It is not alone the translation of the term that is at issue. Rather, it is a matter of recovering different philosophical paradigms governing the possible uses of the term. So I try and indicate in this essay. The overly constrained understanding of *vikalpa* has to do with a narrowly focused epistemological question that has dominated Anglophone engagement with Buddhist philosophy, and arguably, a lot of Buddhist philosophy after the sixth century CE. I identify the contours of such a context—which I call "the narrow epistemic context" immediately below—after which I lay out the three senses of *vikalpa* which the narrow epistemic context serves to occlude and which this essay will reconstruct.

2 The Narrow Epistemic Context

I'll begin with some terminological housekeeping in English. After Gareth Evans introduced the distinction between conceptual and non-conceptual contents to Anglophone philosophers,[4] talk of conceptual and non-conceptual contents on the part of philosophers was for many years primarily brought to bear on attempts to gain clarity on:

(a) The movement from ostensibly non-conceptual contents in perception to conceptual contents in judgments ostensibly tracking what is made available in perception,

and

(b) The epistemic status of the contribution which ostensibly non-conceptual contents are thought by some to make to empirical judgments.

Call (a) and (b)—the *availability* of which as a going concern, of course, long predates Evans' nomenclature—the NARROW EPISTEMIC CONTEXT for the analysis of non-conceptuality and the nature of concepts.

This context favors an emphasis on perceptual experience, and typically, though not always, involves us with an empirical description of the movement from non-conceptual to conceptual contents, and an assignment of epistemic weight to such movement.

Such an emphasis suggests (though it does not mandate) treating the difference between these types of contents as an empirical matter, one which frequently supports the framing of one's theoretical interest in distinct types of content as a straightforward matter of determining which type of elements are actually present in any stretch of mental life.[5] This encourages the expectation that a question of the form "Is such-and-so present and operative content conceptual or not?" will always receive a definite, interest-independent answer.

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For many, engaging Buddhist philosophical uses of *vikalpa* has meant engaging the distinctive Buddhist claims made with respect to perception and thought within such a NARROW EPISTEMIC CONTEXT. And it has meant foregrounding the sense of *vikalpa* on which it means something like "conceptualization," meaning here empirically describable instances of the sorting or categorization of perceptual inputs.

Such an emphasis has long historical precedent. Much contemporary work engaging Buddhist philosophy has followed the premodern South Asian philosophers working after Dignāga (fl. late fifth-early sixth centuries CE) for whom Buddhist philosophical commitments to non-conceptual and conceptual contents must take their bearings from the following claims associated with the tradition of Dignāga and his successors.[6] These are claims taken by many (premodern and modern) to be criterial of what is properly called Buddhist philosophy in South Asia:

(i) Perceptual experience is criterially non-conceptual.
(ii) There is no overlap of contents between non-conceptual and conceptual modes of awareness.
(iii) Perceptual experience provides the ultimate grounds for the justification of empirical judgments.

Buddhist philosophers, that is, have been associated with their own NARROW EPISTEMIC CONTEXT.[7] Such a context, then, may be found in history, and there is much to be learnt from the historical elaboration of the same in the works of Buddhist epistemologists and their interlocutors. Just so, there is much that may be learnt from the antecedents for such a NARROW EPISTEMIC CONTEXT in the work of Buddhist scholastic accounts of categorization consequent to sensation.[8] At the same time, the NARROW EPISTEMIC CONTEXT is also a creature of the historiography of philosophy. It highlights a way in which some scholars of Buddhist philosophy (modern and premodern) have framed what is salient and valuable about the history of Buddhist philosophy. And the commitments of contemporary philosophers to some version of a NARROW EPISTEMIC CONTEXT can, in certain conditions, be misleading.

The reason is this: There are available concepts of *vikalpa* that do not involve endorsing (a) the salience of the distinction between non-conceptual and conceptual modalities of awareness or (b) that *vikalpa* must have the alethically relevant sense of conceptualization, or the sense of empirically describable instances of the sorting or categorization of perceptual inputs. To see this, we must track the use of *vikalpa* outside of Buddhist and non-Buddhist varieties of a NARROW EPISTEMIC CONTEXT.

As there are many things that *vikalpa*, in turn, might mean, I should immediately say that I shall not pay attention to well-known Buddhist scholastic contexts that concern the description of idealized actors, their cognitive or practical perfections, or their achievements of ultimate metaphysical states, though these are indeed important, if not paradigmatic, sites for discerning the possible meanings of non-conceptuality, and so for underscoring what concept-involving awareness or activity might be said to involve (see Griffiths 1994, 154-170; Tzohar forthcoming).[9] In what follows, I shall try to recover background concerns with *vikalpa* that are different from concerns for which the distinction between conceptual and non-conceptual episodes of awareness and the discontinuity between such maximally perfect beings and finite epistemic agents are paradigmatic: Our cases will not involve descriptions tracking the alethically relevant cognitive states of (only) maximally perfect beings.[10]

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Instead, the questions we shall here pursue (and develop in section 5) will stress the continuities that obtain between what holds true of maximally perfect and epistemically infinite beings in a possible world and what we may learn from the life-worlds of animals in our actual world. More generally, I have in mind to point to ways in which the description of beings relevantly like us—and descriptions of experiences relevantly like ours—can make room, according to some Buddhist philosophers, for a way of thinking about conceptuality and non-conceptuality that does not hew to the meanings of these terms or the contrast to be drawn between them that is found in a NARROW EPISTEMIC CONTEXT, Buddhist or not.

The paper is structured as follows. In the first case, we move away from the familiar context of content introduction in perceptual experience to consider Ratnakīrti's way of treating cases where one exits from conceptual modes of engaging content. Ratnakīrti (fl. first half of the eleventh century CE)[11] shows us a concept of *vikalpa* as categorization which can serve as an environing condition for the perceptual experience of an individual (developed in section 2).

In the second case, we move back in time and take up with Vasubandhu (fl. late fourth to early fifth centuries CE) and Sthiramati (sixth century CE) the (for them) difficult case of the contents of background (and non-episodic) awareness. This will give us a concept of *vikalpa* as a *phenomenological background* and a causally describable process of *construction*: the concepts of background and construction involve the notion of *available* content for a collective and not only an individual. I offer a concept of construction in section 3, and that of the phenomenological background in section 4.

My third and final case builds on this last concern, taking up a discussion of possible worlds in the *Descent Into Laṅka* (*Laṅkāvatārasūtra*), which is intended to address the relationship of the background conditions for intelligent thought and activity to language. This example gives us a third conception of *vikalpa,* neither categorization nor construction. It offers, instead, a concept of *vikalpa* as related to a possible world, a *non-causal* conception of the background for the intelligibility of thought and action (developed in section 5).

This example introduces the issue of the relationship of modality to conceptuality, which I develop in the conclusion. Together, these examples show us how we might exit a NARROW EPISTEMIC CONTEXT, both downstream (as in Ratnakīrti's case) and (in the case of Vasubandhu) upstream from Digṅāga's epochal characterization of Buddhist epistemology. These examples also show us why, speaking from the point of view of historiography, the salience of the Buddhist NARROW EPISTEMIC CONTEXT is circumscribed.

There are also philosophical lessons to be had. The particular philosophical lesson I have in mind to underscore is three-fold. I hope my examples will recommend a reconsideration of the nature and the salience of the distinction between conceptual and non-conceptual contents we have come to associate with Buddhist philosophers: showing, firstly, that whether or not some stretch of our mental life counts as conceptual or not is not always an empirical question requiring the determination of which type of elements are actually present; and secondly, that some Buddhist philosophers would have us move from a consideration of which elements are present and operative to a consideration of the availability of anything worth calling content.

Lastly, there is an important sense on which the following cases will help us explore the continuities and discontinues in the semantic field of the word *vikalpa*, which, as *The Philosophical Lexicon* (*Nyāyakośa*) reminds us (Jhalakikar 1928: 742),[12] along with the primary sense of categorization (*prakāratā*), can enjoy a sense more indicative of the experience of a dynamic and structured world (*vaicitryam*). If successful, my examples will help move us from a representational account of thought as conceptualization to what, inspired by the work of Maria Heim and

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Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad (Ram-Prasad 2018: 20),[13] I shall call on behalf of one tradition of Buddhist philosophers an *ecological* or an *environing sense* of thought.

3 Vikalpa as an Individual's Perceptual Environment

Let us allow that *vikalpa* primarily has the by-now familiar sense of a concept-involving episode of awareness, where "concept" implies an empirically describable process involving the categorization of perceptual inputs. Such a concept-involving episode may also be called "a thought." We will have to get more precise in what follows, but this is enough to begin with.

Consider a philosophical parable with Ratnakīrti, as narrated in his essay *Vindicating Omniscience* (*Sarvajñasiddhi*).[14] Though the parable is not his own, being found as an exemplum in the work of Dharmakīrti (see Eltschinger 2010: 428),[15] we shall confine ourselves here to what Ratnakīrti does with it. To tell Ratnakīrti's variant of this story we don't need much. We want a lovesick man, and we need to catch him ruminating in a particularly affectively charged way. Then, we need to catch him ostensibly "seeing" what he has been thinking about:

> A lovesick man directly cognizes the woman he desires as a real concrete particular (*svalakṣaṇa*) due to deep contemplation produced by thought (*vikalpa*) of his beloved (§10.29 in Goodman 1989: 131; translation after Goodman 1989: 193).

That's not the whole story, more on which below.

In stories philosophers tell, particularly when elaborating on a NARROW EPISTEMIC CONTEXT, thought not untypically *begins* where perceptual experience leaves off. It is, at least, unusual to think of perceptual experience as the denouement of a story beginning with thought. There are exceptions. In 1954, Gödel, writing in a private philosophical notebook, took the time to note the salutary effects of philosophizing by stating that even when no communicable results were achieved, it had the result that "the color [is] brighter" (Wang 1996: 119).[16] By this, he had in mind "that reality appears more clearly as such" (Wang 1996: 119). The phrase "more clearly" nicely makes contact with the vocabulary used to mark out distinctively perceptual experience in the tradition to which Ratnakīrti is responsible,[17] as do phrases such as "real particular" and "directly cognizes…" in Ratnakīrti's account. What Gödel and Ratnakīrti underscore in their remarks is the *value* of thought, given that it can change us, with such changes that are induced by thought capable of "showing up" in subsequent experience.

Gödel's comment records, however, a variety of *extrinsic connection* between thought and a distinctively perceptual openness to reality. Ratnakīrti is after a more intimate connection. It is more like the connection between antecedent pro-attitudes and visual experience in wishful seeing—particularly if cases of wishful seeing are taken to show that the concept of experience is not exhausted by the idea of receptivity to the world through non-rational or non-cognitive channels.[18]

Perhaps it is more extreme than wishful seeing.

Here, rumination, under certain conditions, is said to yield up what, in other cases, we would have claimed served as the occasion for an experience: a concrete particular, something we can take in perceptually, or quasi-perceptually. The background here is how one is *to make real* for oneself insights into the nature of reality gleaned by analysis. Reality might be susceptible of propositional capture, as it is for Ratnakīrti (see Patil 2009: 331), but what is required for knowledge of reality to change us is this: we must change in such a way as to have what is true of what there is be true of us

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as well. Making new descriptions true of us, however, presupposes for Buddhists an experienced process of change, which meditation provides.[19]

At least, that's the context for the story that Ratnakīrti believes to hold various lessons. It is a chapter in what one might call the history of imagination (*bhāvanā*) in South Asia.[20] And one of the lessons of this chapter confirms his belief—inherited from his teacher, Jñānaśrīmitra—that the distinction between what is conceptual and what is not is not an absolute but rather a contextual distinction:

> Let it be the case that [being non-conceptual] the concrete particular may not be the object of those two [epistemic modalities, testimony and inference]. Yet, it will be for a mental act that manifests distinct cognition arising at the end of deep meditation produced by that object (§10.29 in Goodman 1989: 131-32; translation after Goodman 1989: 193).

Some of these terms need clarification. Typically, Buddhist philosophers working in the tradition of Diṅnāga and Dharmakīrti are taken to believe the following:

> (x) The Conceptual is bound up with Language;
> (y) The distinction between what is Conceptual and what is Non-Conceptual is absolute.

This parallels what I characterized as a Buddhist variety of NARROW EPISTEMIC CONTEXT. Taking these into account, and inheriting the association of experience with what is non-conceptual, Ratnakīrti's interlocutor puts it that:

> (z) There can be no manifest experiential content (*pratibhāsa*) associated with linguistic expression (§10.24 in Goodman 1989: 193).

Ratnakīrti, like Jñānaśrīmitra before him (Patil 2009: 341), does believe that we speak of the conceptual when we are speaking of contents bound up with language; as Jñānaśrīmitra says, "The use of the word 'conceptualization' is occasioned by connection with words and the like (*vikalpaśabdaḥ śabdādiyojanānimittikaḥ*)" (cited in Patil 2009: 341, n63). But Ratnakīrti, at least, does not agree with (y) and (z) above.

After all, the first lesson of Ratnakīrti's parable is that the distinction between what is conceptual and what is not cannot be an absolute distinction. It cannot be an absolute distinction because it is not a transparent one: that is, what we are doing when we are asking whether something is conceptual is not the sort of thing that could be answered by our inspecting a sequence of mental events for the presence or absence of a certain variety of content. To see this, we need more of the story, to prepare for which, in turn, we need a fulsome sense of what conceptual content means for Ratnakīrti.

Working within the orbit of Jñānaśrīmitra, as Ratnakīrti does, we may speak of structured content as "conceptual" when we have in mind to stress the linguistic characterizability of the content, when, as Parimal Patil helpfully defines the point at issue, "the object of our awareness is inextricably bound up with the form of the word that is used to refer to it" (Patil 2009: 341). But we may pick out the same content in a different way, by speaking of it as "determinable." We speak of determination (*adhyavasāya*) when we wish to emphasize not only the linguistic character of content, but also its serving as the scope of possible action, its "suitability for activity (*pravartana-yogyatā-nimittaḥ*)" (quoted in Patil 2009: 341, n63).

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These, we are told, are co-extensive characterizations: "'conceptualization' and 'determination' refer to the same thing (*satyaṃ ekārthau vikalpādhyavasāyau*)" (quoted in Patil 2009: 341, n63).[21] Keeping these two dimensions of what we may loosely call conceptual awareness in mind, we can say that Ratnakīrti's story about "seeing" what one has been thinking about suggests the possibility of thought grounding perceptual experience by constituting a virtual environment where one might alternatively stress either the conceptual or the non-conceptual dimensions of that environment (text in §10.29 in Goodman 1989: 131; cf. my translation with that of Goodman 1989: 193):

> A lovesick man witnesses the woman he desires right before his eyes, as a concrete particular, due to long and deep imaginative contemplation (*bhāvanā*) occasioned by a conception (*vikalpa*) of his lover. Apprehending gestures of her speech and body, he speaks:
>
> You, with your captivating breasts,
> Round and firm as the dome
> of an elephant's head, your unstill eyes,
> like a fawn's, your slender body,
> as golden as Campaka petals—O lake
> of charm and beauty,
> dearest of all women,
> extend yourself,
> like the graceful limbs
> of the Kandalī tree that
> never stop entwining—
> Embrace me! Enliven
> me, Goddess of life, I fall
> at your lotus feet!

I have translated "*bhāvanā*" above as "imaginative contemplation" for reasons to be made clearer below, but which may be anticipated as follows. Talk of *bhāvanā* provides the context of salience for Ratnakīrti's parable, emphasizing the idea that the course of change involved in making truths or conceptions more generally real for a subject is a *constructive* experiential activity. (Peter-Daniel Szanto has chosen the phrase "eidetic meditation" for *bhāvanā* to capture the dimension of both the cognitivity of psychological capacities brought to bear in the course of the exercises as well as the experienced vividness of the results.)[22] For Dharmakīrti, the thing to stress about such exercises of the imaginative dimension of thought—equally operative in the cases of daydreaming and fantasizing, as well as in Buddhist exercises of self-cultivation (see Eltschinger 2010: 428)—is the capacity for such constructive dimensions to produce (what Dharmakīrti terms) quasi-perceptual experiences, experiences that present a vivid phenomenological profile. Yet it is also important for Dharmakīrti to stress that vividness (or any manifest criterion for having a perceptual experience) can come apart from its being non-conceptual (Eltschinger 2010: 428).

Such borderline cases can prompt different responses. While Ratnakīrti is not uninterested in the distinction between true and only quasi-perceptual experiences (see §6.1-6.3; 20.2-20.8 in Goodman 1989: 232), the emphasis of his story of imaginatively constructed contents is not to preserve "non-conceptuality" as the mark of perception *in contrast* to that of thought. Rather, as Ratnakīrti puts it when summarizing the lessons of his story: "Clearly, in some way, both conception

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and perceptual experience have a similar object" (§10.29 in Goodman 1989: 193-94). The stress on the similarities between strictly perceptual and only apparently perceptual episodes with respect to their scope in this case is intended to show us that one can have a context suffused with cognitivity and articulate structure, and yet have room to emphasize its experiential character. But this is an emphasis typically reserved within a Buddhist NARROW EPISTEMIC CONTEXT for non-conceptual or perceptual episodes.

Ratnakīrti's way of making the point goes beyond claiming that one can make room to speak of the perceptual character of an experience by focusing on the vehicles rather than the contents of awareness. That would not be news for Buddhist epistemologists.[23] Ratnakīrti's example also militates against any attempt to save the usefulness of the contrast of non-conceptual and conceptual contents. Imagine, for one thing, treating vividness and conceptuality as admitting of context-independent degrees; imagine, then, assigning these to discrete phases of a sequence of mental events located at discrete temporal stages of a causal process from sensory input to conception, as might Dharmakīrti.[24] Such a tactic still treats the contrast as if it could possess a context-invariant sense—given that it appears to be based solely, as it were, on the presence or absence of certain kinds of items that might be ascertained on the bases of some context-independent empirical inquiry**.** For Ratnakīrti, however, the distinction between what is conceptual and what is not, and what we are doing when drawing such distinctions, is not best described this way.

We can see this by unpacking the ways in which the lover's phenomenological context for his vivid experience of his beloved is suffused with cognitivity before tackling its apparent perceptual character. This man's responsiveness to what is present to him as a living particular could be described as being bound up with language in two directions: what he is thinking about is captured by language, firstly, just because it is created by linguistically dependent cognitive capacities. But it is also the case that what he has been thinking about can be made evident to himself in such a way so as to have more linguistic descriptions, and of more than one type of force (as we shall see below), come to be associated with it—more than he need have been in a position to consciously acknowledge *before* his experience of the result of his rumination. Moreover, what is subsequently made real for him is something to which he dispositionally responds with actions of his own, mental actions and the (perhaps involuntary) stylized literary evocation that he goes on to produce. Nevertheless, however conceptual and determinable as the content appears to us to be, Ratnakīrti says that we can speak of this as involving a non-conceptual dimension. If that is so, whether something is conceptual is not the sort of thing that could be answered by a simple empirical test for the presence or absence of content.

What does it mean to speak of non-conceptuality here? I will sketch the non-conceptual character of this experience in two steps. First, I'll consider the delicate matter of the contentfulness of his experience; next, I'll offer some remarks on the continuity of imagination and thought emphasized in this story. On one way of parsing things, "the content" of experiencing and what he has been thinking about are describable as being the same. Because of this, we should pick on something else to get at the apparently perceptual character of the experience of what the lovesick man has been thinking about. Call this the force. Here's the point: to get at the force of his experience, we *do not need to get out of the realm of language.*

Instead, we need to recognize that the character of content is here not only captured by the declarative content of the verse. Instead, it is indicated by the texture of the language associated with his literary description, and by the description having recourse to vocatives and imperatives. The presence of the vocative and the imperative, occasioned by what is being experienced—whether or

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not one wishes to call *that* alone the content—serve to signal a point also made by Colin Klein in the context of the contentfulness of pain experience.[25] There is a tendency amongst some contemporary Anglophone philosophers to take the contentfulness of intentional experiences to be exhausted by what can be captured in linguistic form, and then, by what can be captured in declarative sentences. But linguistic form is richer than declarative sentences; even richer are the uses to which the various kinds of linguistic form can be put. I believe that is also the point to be gleaned by Ratnakīrti's use of Sanskrit *belles-lettres* to indicate the mode of experience here.

Ratnakīrti's way of telling the story is suggestive of the fact that the texture of the experience and the linguistic modality required to evoke, enact, and assess it are not best served by absolute distinctions but rather by distinctions of emphasis. If a non-poetic third-personal paraphrase of the verse uttered by the lover, if you will, might capture something of *what* is being entertained experientially, but not the force of it, we can suggest the following analogy:

> *Non-conceptual content is to conceptual content* **as** a lyrical, first-personal poetic use of language is to a generalizable prosaic use of language.

I think such an "intra-linguistic" analogy is helpful because it suggests a more flexible orientation to what is at stake in the following question: Is a mode of bringing a state under a description indicative of that state's being non-conceptual or not?

Relatedly, the capture of the contentfulness by language used in a self-consciously literary mode points to another feature of the example. The sense of "thought" may have to take into account the overlap of thought with imagination available to Sanskrit-language philosophers (see Matilal 1986: 312). The point can be made on the basis of words formed from the verbal root *klp*, as in a point made by Griffiths:

> *Vikalpa* is derived from a verbal root, *klp*-, whose semantic range runs from the functions of ordering, arranging, and adapting, to those of ornamenting and embellishing. A derived nominal form (*kalpana* or *kalpanā*) is often associated with literary creation: *kavikalpanā* denotes a poet's literary creation.[26]

There are two points to be made here, the first of which might be made as follows. To point to the imagination in a South Asian context can have the function of pointing to a case where experiences are not gauged by their representational but their pragmatic function, what they bring about or make; relatedly, to stress the contribution imagination makes to the availability of a class of content is to point to a class of experiences occasioned by, and penetrated by what, in some contexts, we would call conceptual content, but which, in the case of the use of imagination, is *not necessarily* their most salient feature. This claim might be connected with the evidence of some versions of contemplative exercise, where we find the use of propositional-structured scripts and contents which the cultivator is exhorted to enact, but whose execution is described as being non-conceptual, non-deliberate, uncalculated. The mystery evaporates when we realize that the distinction between what is conceptual and what is not is not part of a concern to absolutely determine what sorts of contents are present; what is being emphasized, instead, is the making real of something that was previously only entertained.[27] That is to say, we are being asked to transition from a propositional variety of imagination to an objectual one.

Stepping back from the argument, we might do well to consider that philosophers like Ratnakīrti may be using cases emphasizing the presence of imagination in experience to call into

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question a possible Buddhist empiricist's hope of a strict and ostensibly empirical demarcation of our mental life into dichotomies such as perceptual as distinct from quasi-perceptual, or non-conceptual as distinct from conceptual—the kinds of contrasts we are encouraged to draw due to certain ways a Buddhist variety of a NARROW EPISTEMIC CONTEXT has been motivated. Whether or not, at the end of the day, any Buddhist variety of such a context *ought* to be read as broadly empiricist in spirit remains a question;[28] my argument here is that at least Ratnakīrti shows us one way beyond such an interpretive temptation.

We ought to follow him when he reinforces the above arguments by more generally reconsidering the continuity and distinctions which obtain between cases such as dreaming, the entertaining of fictions, rumination, and contemplative exercises (see §5.30-6.3 in Goodman 1989: 177-78). Such cases, which involve a central place for the interplay of imagination and perceptual experience,[29] and what Ratnakīrti has done with them, encourage us to forego thinking that the philosopher's task is the transparent one of inspecting experience for the presence and absence of a certain variety of essential content that could give us description-independent pegs on which to hang the distinctions we would like to draw. Rather, given that, as Ratnakīrti puts it (speaking of vivid, quasi-perceptual experiences in dreaming), "sameness of phenomenological form does not entail similarity of logical kind" (§6.1 in Goodman 1989: 178), our task must be to accustom ourselves to finer grains of detail and the potential blurring of boundaries between varieties of experience that different ways of contextualizing these experiences will enable us to apprehend.

4 Vikalpa as Construction

We have now seen that even some Buddhist philosophers working within a Buddhist NARROW EPISTEMIC CONTEXT do not necessarily treat the difference between non-conceptual and conceptual contents as an empirical matter. Moreover, some such philosophers might discourage the expectation that a question of the form "Is such-and-so present and operative content conceptual or not?" will always receive a definite, interest-independent answer. We are encouraged, in fact, to overlook the idea of context-independent and determinable "contents" of mental events in favor of contextual assignments of the possible force and salience of experiences, and contextual assignments of their possible effects on us when taken up in different sorts of ways.

Outside of a Buddhist NARROW EPISTEMIC CONTEXT there are other ways in which talk of conceptuality (if indexed to talk of "*vikalpa*") and talk of determinate content can come apart. To see one such way, we must turn to a generation working within an analytic paradigm of Buddhist philosophical thought distinct from that inaugurated by Digṅāga. Call this distinct paradigm "scripturally informed Yogācāra Buddhist scholasticism," or "Yogācāra Buddhist scholasticism" for short (for more on which, see Griffiths 1994: 27-41). This was a paradigm available to philosophers to work within before, during, and after Digṅāga's epochal formulations of Buddhist epistemology.[30]

Earlier, I claimed that philosophers' engagement with Buddhist ideas of *vikalpa* have typically taken their departure from the Buddhist variety of NARROW EPISTEMIC CONTEXT. I claimed that this forced the notion of "*vikalpa*" to take on the meaning of "conceptualization in the sense of empirically describable instances of the sorting or categorization of perceptual inputs." For a few intellectual generations, philosophers working within such a paradigm took as their going concern the task of sifting mental life into non-conceptual and conceptual varieties of events, understanding this to be an exclusive distinction, and focusing narrowly on episodic events. Furthermore, since Digṅāga, there was a tendency of relating thought and categorization to language narrowly,

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associating conceptual content only with the kind of structure susceptible of capture in definite linguistic forms.[31]

For some philosophers working in the distinct paradigm of Yogācāra Buddhist scholasticism, however, this was not the case. For two reasons: The first reason has to do with what I will call Yogācāra constructivism about content. And the second has to do with a richer phenomenological approach to the background of content that Yogācāra developed. I'll deal with the first here and the second in the next section.

To begin to understand Yogācāra constructivism about content, consider that for someone like Vasubandhu, when describing what we are currently like,

> *All content* available to beings relevantly like us involves *vikalpa*.

Call this the constructivist slogan. It really involves two claims. All mental processes—including sensory experiences—may be described as being *processes* of *vikalpa*; *therefore*, all content counts as unreal when taken as a candidate for reality independently of the process.[32] But what does *vikalpa* here mean? My suggestion is "construction." If there are just too many senses of "construction" in philosophy now available,[33] we can get a more fine-grained notion of construction by following the criteria used by Yogācāra philosophers to speak of *vikalpa*.

Following Vasubandhu (and Sthiramati, for which see Friedmann 1937: 13-4), a mental episode involving some *x* as content counts as involving a case of *vikalpa*,

> When the episode is not a function of the causal influence of *x* or something *x*-like upon an individual, but rather,
>
> (i) The availability of *x* is not independently given, but dependent on a long-durée mental process of which the episode is a part, and, for the most part, *due to* such a process,
> (ii) The intelligibility of *x*—the full description of what *x is*—requires reference to such a process, and
> (iii) One may bring the process, but not *x*—the content made available by it—directly under a causal description.[34]

That is, the status of "x" cannot be taken at face value, and it may not be treated as a concrete particular. This is a variety of ontological debunking.

Differences can obtain depending on whether or not one treats the "due to" clause in (ii) as a semantic affair or not. (For more on the intelligibility requirement, see below.) Typically, the process by which content *x* is constituted is taken to be passively achieved; it is shared, and not idiosyncratic to individual subjects; and unlike the way in which an object or proximate stimuli might be appealed to in representational accounts, the mental process is a distal source for the content made available by it, and in that sense, external to any one subject.

With (i)-(iv), *vikalpa* is best thought of here as construction; it does not appear to name anything like an early modern European notion of an epistemic representation, as it can for other Buddhist philosophers working in other historical traditions.[35] It is not quite categorization either. The constructivist slogan is only available once one has dropped talk of extra-mental causes of content from one's description of mental events and allowed the requisite cognitive contribution enshrined in *klp-* to be closer to that of imagination[36]—though this must be a passive and even

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unconscious variety of imaginative activity, like habituation to shared patterns of seeing and believing, now thought to be in play even in the most otherwise cognitively silent processes such as sensation.

Yogācāra constructivism changes the "sense" of any distinction one might draw between perception and thought. Perception is not only possibly related to thought, as in Ratnakīrti's case above; it is, in some sense, also constituted by cognitive structure: experience takes place given a context which ties mind and world very closely together. Construction involves not only the making available of possibly intelligible contents to experience, but also the intelligibility of subjective modes of experience. After all, not least among the phenomena taken to be "constructions" are the *structuring* features of our experience.

Yogācāra Buddhist scholastics tell us that we are disposed to interpret our experience in terms of discrete items that are grasped in experience and some further distinct item that serves as the agent of grasping. (Typical types of things that fulfill such a schema are the idea of free-standing objects which are grasped, and the idea of an agent, either a self, or perhaps the senses, or even the awareness itself, as an agent which grasps.)[37] In fact, Sthiramati points out that the principal sense of "construction of what is unreal (*abhūta-parikalpa*)" involves the constitution of content in terms of subjects and objects (Friedmann 1937: 14)—the phrase "unreal" in this technical term, Sthiramati says, has to do with the articulation of phenomenological content in terms of some putative real relation obtaining between free-standing objects and subjects.

At the same time, such structuring features provide the minimal conditions for the availability of experience on the part of beings relevantly like us.[38] To describe such structural features as constructions is to say that construction goes all the way down, and all the way out, as it were: there is no intelligible notion of experience or of content without it. But it is not clear that this, in turn, is then best illuminated by speaking of construction being "conceptual," especially if by "conceptual" we have in mind to indicate the resources actively brought to bear on perceptual inputs by a conscious subject as an activity of thought, keeping in view the association of structure with what can be captured in definite linguistic forms.

5 Construction and Background Awareness

This brings us to the second reason why philosophers working within a Yogācāra Buddhist scholastic paradigm might not acquiesce to the going concern of philosophers working within a Buddhist variety of a NARROW EPISTEMIC CONTEXT. The latter context obscures the distinction that matters and promotes one that does not. For example, the distinction between types of mental events that matters for Vasubandhu is not the distinction between conceptual and non-conceptual mental events. Instead, the distinction that matters is that between episodic and non-episodic mental processes.[39]

The easiest way to make the latter distinction is to follow Vasubandhu's claim in the *Monograph on the Five Bundles* (*Pañcaskandhaprakaraṇa*) to the effect that, when using vocabularies of mind, one should keep distinct one's concepts for occurrent mental events and a conception of mind as the "storehouse" (*ālaya*). I shall treat this latter as a concept of "background awareness," given that it is characterized as being something singular, something intrinsically like a process rather than an event, and lastly, as that which involves the continuity of dispositions that condition and constrain the availability and character of possible experience.[40]

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The idea of vocabularies for episodic mental events involves two potential elements: as a type, they are multiply realized (according to Sthiramati), and their content is bound up with many discrete types of separable and occurrent causal factors (according to Vasubandhu).[41] The latter involves a recognition of what is involved in individuating mental events understood to be occurrent: the individuating conditions for a single occurrent mental event *are various*, based on the possible types of sensory media, sensory objects, and aspects under which an object can be disclosed[42]—that is, the conditions for such events are themselves multiple and separable in type.

Background awareness, by contrast, is a single process, one involving the continuity not of occurrent factors entirely specifiable by categorical properties, but dispositions. Some of these are dispositions to have certain occurrent, phenomenally rich, intentional episodic events. But there are also dispositions related to stance, orientation, and even the intelligibility of one's experiences (like the disposition to take in experience as structured in certain ways (see Waldron 2003: 158-171)). There are, then, what one might call deep dispositions, and more local dispositional sets.

I mean "background awareness"[43] to capture two features: firstly, that we are speaking of a mental process considered to be occurring when episodic events are happening, as a kind of causal context for them. And secondly, that this awareness is not fully conscious, but present as a *phenomenological* background to what we consciously attend to in experience. With this in mind, to pull apart the idea of definite content and conceptuality all we have to do is to ask with Vasubandhu: How does the phenomenological background relate to the causal background? That is also to ask: Can the notion of dispositions be treated phenomenologically? In our answer, we just have to recall that such content must, by the lights of Yogācāra constructivism, also count as *vikalpa*.

Vasubandhu explicitly holds that the *ālaya-vijñāna* is characterized as possessing content, albeit of a distinct kind: content which is indistinct, in the sense of not admitting of distinct apprehension or definition.[44] Vasubandhu does not develop on this point anywhere in detail, except for a brief remark in his *Thirty Verses* (*Triṃśikā* 3a-b). He states there that the most basic mental process is that in which there is an indistinct kind of awareness, a not fully conscious awareness (*asamviditaka-vijnapti*), which he further specifies as involving an indistinct awareness of appropriation (*upādi*) and place (*sthāna*).[45] Sthiramati helpfully glosses what is involved in claiming this by framing it as a response to an implicit question:

> —If background awareness (*ālaya-vijñāna*) exists, as something distinct from occurrent forms of awareness, then one ought to specify its intentional content and its phenomenological aspect [necessary for it to count as a type of mental phenomenon].
> —It is not the case that we wish to say that this [basic form of mental process] is without an intentional object and without a phenomenological aspect, but rather, that it is characterized by intentional content and a phenomenological aspect which are indistinct. Why? Since the form of awareness that is the background (*ālaya*) functions in a two-fold manner: Internally, in terms of making known appropriation; externally, in terms of making known the world whose aspect is indistinct.[46]

Sthiramati's response shows us why something counts as intentional content without being thereby something of which we are in some *occurrent sense* fully conscious. There is, furthermore, a direct way in which dispositional processes are characterized as falling within the rubric of intentional content.[47] The contentfulness of dispositional mental processes is two-fold, involving not entirely separable aspects. The content described as being presented internally involves appropriation, which we can gloss here to say that there is something it is like to be an embodied individual, capable of being

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taken up in first-personal identifications and characterized by dispositions associated with a particular form of life.[48]

The content presented externally is said by Vasubandhu to be *sthāna*, place, or perhaps dwelling, which Sthiramati glosses as the arrangement of the world about us. This I recommend treating as a phenomenological interpretation of the way in which the physical world is described in cosmology: the fundamental physical loci, meaning the environment and physical arrangements of matter and processes that serve as the physical contexts for the life-worlds of beings, and which provide, in part, for the constraints on the available range of their experiential possibilities.

In a sense, the content associated with mind as bearer of dispositions is "being in the world," as Noritoshi Aramaki (with Heidegger in mind) once eloquently glossed it, emphasizing this two-fold sense of the content of the *ālaya-vijñāna* (Aramaki 2000: 49).[49] One experience things *as* an individual form of life, and from *within* a world. But this "as" is distinct from the "as" with which items in focus are brought under a description. The structuring elements—which constrain the possible contents for a range of experience, and one's perceptual affordances—need not "show up" *as* a definite object. One way of cashing out the notion of indefinite content has to do with content not being the subject of a definite form of judgment, given that it does not fall in as the subject of judgments of identity "X is Y" and the like; more particularly, we cannot bring such content under a description—*as being* something, as in "this [is] X," or "this X is related in such and so way to Y."[50]

The content of an occurrent episodic awareness occupies a definite place in the space of concepts, and phenomenologically, occurs as something situated in the world indexed to oneself. But the always already available, non-episodic[51] background with respect to which they occur as localized and occurrent events does not ever entirely come into focus, even as it constrains the nature of what is had in focus.

How does such a background relate to the notion of construction broached above? The concept of background awareness is sometimes included within the process of *vikalpa*, as the Yogācāra Buddhist scholastics suggest by allowing the background to fall within the scope of the category of *abhūta-parikalpa*, or the construction of what is unreal insofar as it is taken to consist in a real relation between subject and object.[52]

To identify such a background with a process of construction helps us re-contextualize both concepts: on the one hand, it shows us the radicalization of the notion of *vikalpa*, wherein it no longer paradigmatically means "[deliberate] thought," or "conceptualization" or "categorization" in any obvious sense. Rather, it must mean something more like the mental characterization of the conditions for the intelligibility of shared mental life, as we saw above. At the same time, the notion of the phenomenological background shows us that the conditions for intelligibility of life are not abstract or experientially idle: they are drawn out into experience, even if not directly so. The phenomenologically manifest is not exhausted by the objects that are in view.

Here is the payoff: the concepts of construction and the phenomenological notion of a background complicate appeal to some single Buddhist notion of the conceptual. After all, might we not here have reason to speak of the background, which is construction, being non-conceptually experienced?[53] So long as our experience has structure that is difficult to articulate,[54] no matter how susceptible bits of it may be to propositional capture, there may be reason to resist describing construction as overlapping entirely with conceptuality.

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6 Possible Worlds and the Extent of Language

If it will not do to collapse the notion of background as construction with the notion of categorization employed by Digṅāga (and subsequent thinkers), it will also not do to pull language and *vikalpa* too far apart. There seems to be a commitment in the Yogācāra scholastic tradition to seeing these as related (Griffiths 1994: 159-61; Schmithausen 1969: 138-9, n101), even to the point of some texts claiming that the basis of the structuring elements of subject and object in experience are based on dispositions associated with discourse (*Madhyāntavibhāgabhāṣya* ad 5.16; D'Amato 2012: 179). In the *Viniścayasaṃgrahaṇī*, to say that *vikalpa* is the basis for linguistic expressions is to say that "[*vikalpa*] includes the latent tendencies for conventional language (*vyavahārānuśaya*)."[55] Thought, furthermore, is held to be a kind of awareness constituted by conventional language (*vyavahārānubodha*; see Kramer 2005: 107, n29).

Even if "discourse" and "language" are not as finely specified above as they are in Digṅāga's requirement that *vikalpa* involve items with definite sentence-shaped structure (Tucci 1976: 50; Kachru 2019: 173-4), there seems to be an unresolved tension between the relationship of construction and conceptuality, on the one hand, and the relationship between *vikalpa* and language on the other. To see how such a tension might be addressed, we turn now to a passage from that labyrinthine scriptural work of Yogācāra scholasticism, *The Descent Into Lanka* (*Laṅkāvatārasūtra*). The value of this example is two-fold: it shows us a new concept of *vikalpa*, one distinct from conceptualization as well as construction, and it offers us a new way to think about *vikalpa*, a rather different prospect than what is available only from within a Buddhist NARROW EPISTEMIC CONTEXT. The chief element responsible for both of these has to do with a distinctive emphasis on modality.

In what follows, we shall need the notion of a "Buddha-field." With philosophers working within the paradigm of Yogācāra scholasticism, take a "Buddha field" to mean "a coherent set of possible experiences made available for an experiencing subject of sufficient mental agility by an advanced being" (cf. Griffiths 1994: 96-7; 129-30). Thus equipped, consider the following point made in the course of *The Descent Into Lanka*:

> Discourse, Mahāmati, is a contingent phenomenon (*kṛtakaḥ*). In some Buddha-fields the doctrine is taught by looking steadily, in others by gestures, in still others by a frown, by the movement of the eyes, by laughing, by yawning, or by the clearing of the throat, by recollection, or by trembling. For instance, Mahāmati, in the worlds of the Steady-Looking and in those of Exquisite Odors (*Gandhasugandha*) […] the awakening beings, without a wink, attain the recognition of all things as unborn by steady looking, and also various most excellent states of mind (*samādhi*) […] [M]ahāmati, even in this world, it is seen that in the kingdom of such special beings as ants, bees, and the like, they carry on their work without words.[56]

There are several things to note about a passage like this. We ought first to touch on what such a passage is doing before more narrowly noting the claims being made here.

I recommend taking it that the passage exemplifies for us the philosophical use made of experiments with the imagination.[57] For example, take the case of the world of Exquisite Odors mentioned above, a possible world not uncommonly appealed to in Mahāyāna Buddhist works.[58] We can expand on the appeal to this possible world with the help of another text, *The Teaching of Vimalakīrti*:

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> In that world [of Exquisite Odors, called *Sarvagandhasugandhā*], the trees emit a fragrance that far surpasses all fragrances…even the names "disciple" and "solitary sage" do not exist, and the Tathāgata Sugandhakūṭa teaches the Doctrine to a gathering of bodhisattvas only. In that world, all the houses, the avenues, the parks and palaces are made of various perfumes.[59]

We are invited to entertain a different realization of communication in this world constituted of smell:

> The Tathāgata does not teach the Doctrine by means of sound and language. He disciplines the bodhisattvas only by means of perfumes. At the foot of each perfume-tree sits a bodhisattva, and the trees emit perfumes like this one. From the moment they smell that perfume, the bodhisattvas attain the contemplative state called "the source of all bodhisattva-virtues." From the moment they attain that contemplative state, all the bodhisattva-virtues are produced in them (after Thurman 1976: 81).

We might take the description of such possible worlds narrowly as a "text"—an ordered system of signs to be interpreted and understood (as in Griffiths 1999: 41)—and assign it several functions, ranging from the thought experiment (the way it functions, I believe, in *The Descent Into Lanka*) to a rhetorical ornament designed to induce wonder (the way it functions, I believe, in *The Teaching of Vimalakīrti*). More radically, we might acknowledge that such ostensible "descriptions" of utopic worlds might very well work like exercises:[60] according to such a view, descriptions are really concealed injunctions or scripts for a variety of contemplative exercises pursued to various ends.

Taken only as an experiment of thought and not an embodied regimen of cultivation, we might begin to take the following points. Recall, there is a close relationship between thought and language for Yogācāra Buddhist scholastics. Nevertheless, *The Descent Into Lanka* would have us see that there is something wider than language related to thought that we ought to acknowledge. Call this the cognitive background for thought and action, to distinguish this from what *vikalpa* names in our own case.

Elsewhere, *The Descent Into Lanka* conceives of language as being neither the same as nor different from *vikalpa*, being instead, as I should put it, founded on *vikalpa*.[61] The argument goes as follows: speech has *vikalpa* as its cause, so speech and *vikalpa* cannot be entirely different in the sense of separable phenomena. But importantly, without speech, the argument continues, semantic content (*artha*) would not be manifest (Unebe 2000: 331).[62] This is said to indicate that speech and *vikalpa* cannot be identical, for there is a contribution speech makes to thought.

The contribution that language makes to thought is that of *extruding* content, thus making it manifest and so available to more than one mind. Is this inconsistent with our thought experiment? Not necessarily. But it does suggest a tension. Let's illustrate the tension by distinguishing between "thought" (*vikalpa*) used for our own human case and *thought for the wider notion of a cognitive background at issue in the thought experiment. Then we can see a tension between the linguistic constraint for thought, on which

(i) X counts as an instance of thought if and only if it is constituted by, and bounded by, language, and so public,

and what, in the thought experiment in *The Descent Into Lanka,* is worth calling a communicability constraint:

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(ii) X counts as a case of *thought if and only if it can be communicated, and so public, even if it is neither constituted nor bounded by language.

And this, I take it, would involve having some way for contents to be extruded (and available to others) in the absence of language. Again, by *thought I mean a system of intelligible and communicable contents and orientations to co-operative behavior.

I stress the communicability constraint for two reasons. I wish, first of all, to invite comparison with Herder's views that thought is essentially dependent on and bounded by language and that one can only think what one can linguistically express.[63] Without the communicability constraint, the view from the *Descent Into Lanka* might seem to be a simple contrary to Herder's view. Things are not so simple, however. The second reason to stress the communicability constraint is this: the point being made in the *Descent Into Lanka* also goes against any view where one might feel like one can attribute thought (or "internal processing" or "understanding") to a creature that eludes the constraint of what can be communicated. One might, perhaps incautiously, be tempted to claim for the research on baboons and some species of birds summarized by Peter Godfrey-Smith: "[T]hey have some means for putting ideas together which goes far beyond what they can express using their communication system."[64]

Against the thrust of the above summarized research on animal cognition, the argument in the *Descent Into Lanka* evinces a concern with getting "meaning" and "thought" out of the head of any one individual and into an extruded social medium. Importantly, the argument is offered *after* an argument that seeks to weaken the identification of linguistic meaning with reference, or the existence of real relations linking words to things.[65] If meaning does not consist in real relations, we might suppose that we must think of meaning in some other way. It is this other way of thinking about meaning that is suggested by the thought experiment we have considered. There are three parts to the proposal: (a) as with the referential account of meaning, meaning is not something which is private, but (b) unlike the referential account of meaning, the public availability of meaning is not secured by an account of relations between words and things, but behaviors using signs, (c) the use of which is not paradigmatically exemplified by the tasks of representation, but communication.[66]

The *Descent Into Lanka*, that is, would have us take the enactment of social connections through communicative behavior to be the general notion of which linguistic usage is a special case. And on this view, anything that makes use of a sign, and that can function as a sign, counts as an instance of a wider notion of communication, the possibility of which is taken to involve behaviors that are not linguistic, being based instead on a matrix of non-linguistic "sign-systems."[67]

Neither the reconstruction of the details of the argument to which this thought experiment gestures nor its ultimate intelligibility (much less its defense) need detain us. However, it is important to note the historical fact that the premodern social world *was indeed* experienced by many elite actors as a set of contexts suffused with meaning constituted by disciplines of the body—as in South Asia, for example, where the social and the aesthetic are rendered continuous through disciplines of making and interpreting communicative gestures, disciplines interpreted by their theoreticians and practitioners as being non-linguistic.[68] The experience of such a constructed cognitive background and the fact of it being basic to getting around in such a world, I think, would incline one to acquiesce to considering sign-systems and disciplinary contexts more general than language as the true context of meaningfulness.[69]

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Let us reconsider the tension I highlighted above. Is thought essentially constituted of and bounded by language? How should we address such a question? The examples of possible worlds adduced by *The Descent Into Lanka* help illustrate the thesis that, while *vikalpa* is typically exemplified by language, and while we typically conceptualize it in this way, there is a dimension of cognitivity that would appear to be wider than even what we use "thought" to mean, a use that comes close to concept-blending elements of Searle's deep and local Backgrounds,[70] or perhaps it suggests an idea that might be taken up as a variety of "deep" precedent for contemporary ideas of a *habitus*,[71] notions that *might be* more amenable to being extended beyond only human life-worlds.

The upshot of the *Descent into Lanka* is that some such extension is necessary: If in our case—the human world as distinct from the case of awakening beings in other worlds or animals in our own—thought appears to be *necessarily* founded on language, against the background of an extended notion of thought (*vikalpa*) the overlap of thought and language might yet turn out to be a contingent feature. We have to place such modal relationships between larger contexts of possibility, through which we might allow "thought" to mean more than the (rational) thought and (generalized) scope which we take to be typical of our own case. If communicability and orientation is the general criterion, then we don't have available reason such as Herder's not to recognize in the cognitive life of animals something continuous (if distinct) from our own (cf. Forster 2003: 71): Their life-worlds might become non-ignorable contexts for what is important to us about ourselves.

7 Conclusion

Eventually, philosophical engagements with the history of Buddhist philosophy in South Asia will be capacious enough to make room for more than finding in competing Buddhist philosophers recognizable answers to contemporary questions. They will allow for the possibility that, along with questions we find pressing, they found other topics to sustain their theoretical curiosity.

I have only tried to suggest a few sites beyond a NARROW EPISTEMIC CONTEXT worthy of our engagement. I have tried to point to some productive tensions that arise from the use made of the *vikalpa* outside of a NARROW EPISTEMIC CONTEXT, tensions which I believe it will be useful not to try to explain away. I believe they should be explored further.

Some very tentative conclusions are possible. There is an interest among Buddhist philosophers in contexts suffused by categorization—in contexts that are, indeed, a function of thought—but within which, nonetheless, a certain mode of engaging content somewhere between perception and thought, and worth calling experience, is enabled. I have offered two scales at which this is pursued. In the case of Ratnakīrti, we might look to the phenomenology of imagination, dreaming, and rumination for contexts in which the distinction between non-conceptual and conceptual experience loses the salience it enjoys in epistemic contexts. But in the "scaled up" version of cognitive contexts for experiential awareness—as in the materials we have seen from the Yogācāra Buddhist scholastic literature—the very distinction between conceptuality and non-conceptuality cannot any longer possess the value it does within a NARROW EPISTEMIC CONTEXT.

These examples of possible worlds—when taken in addition to the case of the peculiar contentfulness of background awareness—serve to make explicit a wider theme that is often concealed when we use contemporary concerns with non-conceptuality too narrowly in order to track questions posed by some Buddhist philosophers with the help of *vikalpa*. Such a wider theme is perhaps best got at with the help of the Śaiva philosopher Abhinavagupta and his way of making his own the views of Buddhist epistemologists since Dignāga. This is particularly on display when he set

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about trying to offer a definition of what concept-involving awareness (*vikalpa*) involves. What's interesting for our purposes is that he offers us a way of connecting the sense of thought available within a NARROW EPISTEMIC CONTEXT and the wider environing sense of thought available beyond such a context as seen in the examples we have pursued thus far.

Here is a paraphrase of Abhinavagupta's criterion of concept-involving awareness, underscoring the two constitutive elements Abhinavagupta takes conceptual states of awareness to involve:

> (i) Construction involving a manifold of features, and (ii) Thought concerning what is undecided insofar as there is a manifold of possibly relevant features—that is, conceptual awareness is the exclusion of unlike features.[72]

By (i) Abhinavagupta is suggesting that, when speaking of the distinctive modality of concept-involving awareness, one can never speak of, think of, or attend to things in isolation. To be in a position to see that "there is a pot in front of me," for example, and to describe such content as an instance of *vikalpa*, is to say that a term like "pot" is available to us to function in a description only when there is a framework of relevantly like categories, a space of implicature inferentially structured (minimally represented by the semantic value of a term partly consisting in its exclusion of relevantly like categories, "not jar," "not table," and so on…).

But this framework on its own is insufficient to get at conceptuality. Abhinavagupta goes on (in (ii) and in his comments thereon) to explain the functioning of this richly structured manifold space as constituted by modality (see Iyer and Pandey 1986: 304; Pandey 1986: 87). Abhinavagupta's recognition of modality relies on a NARROW EPISTEMIC CONTEXT to make his point. Using the scenario of indecision and doubt as a constitutive element when bringing something under a description in perceptual experience, Abhinavagupta helps himself to the epistemic vocabulary of superimposition of content onto perceptual inputs, taking the following to be criterial for our sense of something's counting as conceptual: it is constitutive of conceptual awareness that it involve contingency, because for any X which we use to bring a perceptual input under a description, *the sense* of the category used in the description is given by the possibility that some inferentially related category (such as ~X) *might possibly have been* relevant (see Iyer and Pandey 1986: 306; Pandey 1986: 87-88).[73]

It is only when we join (i) and (ii) that we get the full weight of what Abhinavagupta took the Buddhist epistemologists to mean by conceptuality involving exclusion, and notwithstanding the value of thinking of concept-involving awareness, Abhinavagupta helps us see a wider context for talk of *vikalpa*, which is that

> The conceptual as representation entails the conceptual as an inferentially structured space of possible discriminations.

This insight, which captures what we have seen with the help of the above examples in this essay, helps us join two senses of the word *vikalpa*, that of categorization, and the wider cosmological sense of a world. "World" and "*vikalpa*," that is, as used by philosophers working within a Yogācāra scholastic context, have roughly the same logical shape as categories: a richly structured (if not inferentially structured) space of possible discriminations, manifested in possible perceptions and actions. At very least, the attention of the Yogācāra scriptural tradition appears to have gone beyond what one could focus on from within a NARROW EPISTEMIC CONTEXT. Yogācāra philosophers have

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been invested in what happens when all experience, in some sense, is so described as requiring a constructed context of a set of possible discriminations.

Vikalpa on such a view is not, then, an example of what Émile Durkheim called a "merely general idea"—the content of which might be generalized and the source for which might be thought to lie in a combination of the sensory inputs from the world and the free activity of an individual. Rather, we are dealing now with what Durkheim called concepts as "collective representations."[74] Durkheim thought that concepts so understood are the work of a collective that is logically and (often) temporally prior to any individual; what concepts so understood express "is the manner in which society as a whole conceives the objects of experience" (Durkheim 1995: 436). If we liberate this notion from only human varieties of sociality and drop the last vestiges of representionalism, we will have what Yogācāra Buddhist scholastics meant by *vikalpa*, and what is worth calling (on their behalf) an ecological view of conceptuality.

In conclusion, let's briefly unpack the contours of the sense and possible salience of this idea. Recall that we are speaking of something that can first of all play the conceptual role of a world, a background and inter-subjectively available condition for perceptual affordance, and secondly, be something that is yet cognitively structured, parts of which, though not every structuring element, are available to specification in thought. This environmental, extruded conception of thought is taken to be continuous with the structures of possible discriminations, as here in *The Descent Into Lanka*:

> I teach that the variegate world (*vicitra*), born of thought (*citta*), and bound up with the dispositions of conceptual construction (*vikalpa*), though declared by people to be external, is nothing but thought. There is no external sensible; for it is thought (*cittam*) that is apprehended as the world (*citram*). [75]

It is difficult to capture the semantic play of this verse. The word for "world" (*vicitra*) in the opening line nests between two cognitive contexts, thought as awareness (*citta*) and thought (here) as construction (*vikalpa*).[76] But the conceptual points on offer here are clear enough, and hopefully underscore what I have called the ecological view of conceptuality: on this view, "mind" and "thought" are not to be treated in a paradigmatically distributive sense. They do not pick out individuals; instead, these concepts have the function of emphasizing a shared, inter-subjectively available surrounding context of possibilities, a sense underscored by the verse's going on to speak of the dispositional basis for conceptual construction. Thought, then, taken to mean the extruded context of possible discriminations, is not really best described as, strictly speaking, transparently either internal or external. We might choose to emphasize either possibility in our use of the concept of thought depending on context, and this "perspectivism," I take it, along with its resolute methodological non-individualism, is criterial for speaking of an ecological dimension to the concepts involved (Ram-Prasad 2018: 24).

But note, however, that we must pluralize the notion of "world" either by embedding it in a causal or a modal context: what makes a richly articulated system of possible contents and possible forms of experience available to us, and intelligible, is itself variable, dependent on wider sets of possible structures. These might be continuous, as in the case of construction and background awareness, or not, as in the case of possible worlds. The view from Yogācāra Buddhist scholasticism, if you will, is at a level of ascent from Abhinavagupta's point that the conceptual as representation entails the conceptual as an inferentially structured space of possible discriminations. It is this possibility of variation—at a time, given possible worlds, and over time, given history—the

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availability over time of causally connected and distinct structured spaces of possible discriminations—that the Yogācāra scholastic tradition would ask us to explore in phenomenological and imaginative ways.

These, to join now with the metaphor used by *The Descent Into Lanka* that I have quoted in my epigraph, are the stages on which our lives, and the possible senses of our life, play out. The theater of our lives involves the curious reversal on which we experience the sensible world not as what has been made, but what there is: we don't experience thought as the enactment of a script, but as the spontaneous response to something given. In our verse, "construction" has the resonance of unconscious projection that has become a second nature to us: our sensory engagement involves us in a kind of stage for the playing out of the possibilities our dispositions realize for us as if they were given to us moment by moment by chance.

The image is apt. In Indian classical theater, the art of the actor lies in creating the appearance of spontaneity out of deliberate art: "The actor no more yields to the impulse in gesture than in the spoken word" (Coomaraswamy and Duggirala 1917: 3). Yet, for the Sāṃkhya, the metaphor of the stage provided a way in which to dissociate consciousness, metaphorically realized as the spectator to the drama, from thought; along with other psycho-physical factors, thought is metaphorically imagined as the actor and the performance being enacted on stage.[77] In the image used by the *Descent into Lanka*, however, we are allowed no such room to insulate some variety of consciousness from a causal description, or construction. All distinctions we draw within the life of our minds are made within a *constructed* background, whatever other variety of achievements of unconstructed (*avikalpaka*) forms of mindedness and action are held out as being possibilities for us.

We must engage the salience of insisting with Yogācāra Buddhist scholastics that whatever such backgrounds might be, they are continuous with what we grasp as conceptual and as thought in our own case. Such an insistence exemplifies an appreciation of what John McDowell, for one, takes to be the stakes of such questions.[78] We are asking after what makes us human, however we draw the line between our own case and the forms of mindedness exemplified by other forms of life. If we are to keep *this* question in view when engaging Buddhist philosophers, it will be helpful to keep in mind *how they thought*, and why.

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1 "*naṭavan nṛtyate cittaṃ mano vidūṣasādṛśam | vijñānaṃ pañcabhiḥ sārdhaṃ dṛśyaṃ kalpeti raṅgavat ||*" ed. P. L. Vaidya, *Saddharmalaṅkāvatārasūtram* (Darbhanga: The Mithila Institute, 1963), 91.

2 For a brief yet incisive overview of what conceptuality might mean in a Buddhist context, see section 4 in Evan Thompson, "Sellarsian Buddhism: Comments on Jay Garfield, *Engaging Buddhism: Why It Matters to Philosophy*," *Sophia* 57, (2018): 565–79.

3 Louis de la Vallée Poussin, "On the Authority (Prāmāṇya) of the Buddhist Āgamas," *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, (April 1902): 363–76.

4 Gareth Evans, *The Varieties of Reference* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 119, 144.

5 Compare with Joseph Rouse, "What is The Phenomenon of Conceptual Articulation?" in *Mind, Reason, And Being-In-The-World: The McDowell-Dreyfus Debate*, ed. Joseph K. Schear (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 285–303.

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6 See B. K. Matilal, *Perception: An Essay on Classical Indian Theories of Knowledge* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), 255–92; Daniel A. Arnold, *Buddhists, Brahmins and Belief: Epistemology in South Asian Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 13–56; Eli Franco, *Perception, Knowledge, and Disbelief: A Study of Jayārāśi's Skepticism* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1994), 182–274; Arindam Chakrabarti, "Experience, Concept-Possession and Knowledge of a Language," in *The Philosophy of P. F. Strawson*, ed. L. E. Hahn (Chicago: Open Court, 1998), 315–24; Arindam Chakrabarti, "Against Immaculate Perception: Seven Reasons for Eliminating *Nirvikalpaka* Perception from Nyāya," *Philosophy East and West* 50, no. 1, (January 2000): 1–8; Lawrence J. McCrea, "The Transformations of Mīmāṃsā in the Larger Context of Indian Philosophical Discourse," in *Periodization and Historiography of Indian Philosophy*, ed. Eli Franco (Vienna: Publications of the De Nobili Research Library, 2013), 127–45.

7 To be sure, Buddhist epistemologists (even within the same tradition) did not all agree, not even on the claims taken to count as basic tenets of the tradition; see Parimal Patil, *Against a Hindu God: Buddhist Philosophy of Religion in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 338–40; Lawrence J. McCrea and Parimal Patil, *Buddhist Philosophy of Language in India: Jñānaśrīmitra On Exclusion* (New York: Columbia University Press 2010), 33–4; Daniel A. Arnold, "Dharmakīrti and Dharmottara on the Intentionality of Perception: Selections from *Nyāyabindu* (*An Epitome of Philosophy*)," in *Buddhist Philosophy: Essential Readings*, ed. William Edelglass and Jay L. Garfield (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 186–96, 188. Furthermore, philosophers for several generations worked on developing new interpretations and variations on these basic claims with increasing sophistication, developing and sustaining a conversation amongst themselves and philosophers from other traditions (unsympathetic to the letter of these basic claims).

8 Robert H. Sharf, "Knowing Blue: Early Buddhist Accounts of Non-Conceptual Sense," *Philosophy East and West* 68, no. 3, (2018): 826–70.

9 Paul J. Griffiths, *On Being Buddha: The Classical Doctrine of Buddhahood* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 154–70; Roy Tzohar, "Contemporary Non-Conceptualism, Conceptual Inclusivism, and the Yogācāra View of Language Use as Skillful Action," *Philosophy East and West* (forthcoming).

10 Nor will we consider the evidence of esoteric Buddhism, wherein the definition of "being without *vikalpa*"—criterial for the awareness of awakened beings as well as the true nature of our own minds (as far as some tantric Buddhists are concerned)—shows *vikalpa* to have come to mean not so much the categorization of perceptual inputs as the structuring of awareness by advertence (*ābhoga*). Thus, the *Jñānasiddhi* of Indrabhūti defines the awareness of Buddhas as *nirvikalpa* insofar as it is *an-ābhoga*. See verse 5.6 in B. Bhattacharyya, *Two Vajrayāna Works* (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1929), 54. My thanks to Brianna Morseth for alerting me to this verse. Note that "advertence (*ābhoga*) of mind" is how attention (*manas(i)kāra*) is typically defined by Vasubandhu. See the commentary to *Abhidharmakośa* 2.24 in Leo M. Pruden, *Abhidharmakosabhasyam of Vasubandhu*, trans. Louis de la Vallée Poussin, Volumes I-IV (Berkeley, California: Asian Humanities Press, 1988-1990), Vol. I., 190.

11 For a brief historical introduction, see Patrick McAllister, *Ratnakīrti's Proof of Exclusion* (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2019), 1–2; for a masterful presentation of Ratnakīrti's overarching context and commitments, see Patil (2009).

12 Bhimacarya Jhalkikar, *Nyāyakośa, Or Dictionary of Technical Terms of Indian Philosophy* (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1928).

13 Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad, *Human Being, Bodily Being: Phenomenology From Classical India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

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14 For thinking of *siddhi* here as "vindication" rather than "validation," see Goodman 1989, Steven B. Goodman, "A Buddhist Proof For Omniscience: The "Sarvajñasiddhi" of Ratnakīrti," (PhD Dissertation, Temple University, 1989), 115.

15 Vincent Eltschinger, "Dharmakīrti," *Revue Internationale De Philosophie* 3, no. 253, (2010): 397–440.

16 Hao Wang, *A Logical Journey: From Gödel To Philosophy* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996).

17 Usually marked, from the time of Dharmakīrti, by such words as *spaṣṭa* ("clear" or "distinct") or *sphuṭa*, which also means "vivid" and "clear" but whose root sense is that of something "open." See Eltschinger (2010: 409).

18 Susanna Siegel, "How Is Wishful Seeing Like Wishful Thinking?" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 95, no. 2, (2017): 408–35, 409.

19 Birgit Kellner, "Buddhist Philosophy and the Neuroscientific Study of Meditation: Critical Reflections," *American Philosophical Association Newsletter* 19, no. 1, (2019): 35–40; Florin Deleanu, "Agnostic Meditations on Buddhist Meditation," *Zygon* 45, (2010): 605–26.

20 David Shulman, *More Than Real: A History Of The Imagination In South India* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2012).

21 Citing Anantalal Thakur, *Jñānaśrīmitranibandhāvali* (Patna: Kashiprasad Jayaswal Research Institute, 1987), 226.01–226.03. For more on the background of these characterizations—some inspiration for which is already to be found in the work of Dharmakīrti—and for these counting as characterizations of the same process, see Patil (2009: 341-42, n65). For Dharmottara's use of it, see Arnold (2009: 188).

22 Peter-Daniel Szanto, "Selected Chapters From The Catuṣpīṭhatantra: Introductory Study with the Annotated Translation of Selected Chapters" (PhD Dissertation, Balliol College, 2012), 7, n2.

23 See *Pramāṇasamuccaya* 1.7ab in Masaaki Hattori, *Dignāga, On Perception: Being the Pratyakṣapariccheda of Dignāga's Pramāṇasamuccaya* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1968), 27.

24 cf. John D. Dunne, "Key Features of Dharmakīrti's Apoha Theory," in *Apoha: Buddhist Nominalism and Human* Cognition, ed. Mark Siderits, Tom Tillemans, and Arindam Chakrabarti (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 84–109.

25 Colin Klein, "An Imperative Theory of Pain," *The Journal of Philosophy* 104, no. 10, (2007): 517–32.

26 Griffiths (1994: 154); see also 158; cf. Shulman (2012: 18); see also Sonam Kachru, "Who's Afraid of Non-Conceptuality? Rehabilitating Digṅāga's Distinction Between Thought and Perception," in *Sellars and Buddhism: Freedom From Foundations*, ed. Jay Garfield (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), 172–99, 179.

27 As in 8.140 in Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra*; see Kate Crosby and Andrew Skilton, *Śāntideva: The Bodhicaryāvatāra* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 100.

28 Daniel A. Arnold, *Brains, Buddhas, and Believing: The Problem of Intentionality in Classical Buddhist and Cognitive-Scientific Philosophy of Mind* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 21.

29 cf. Jennifer M. Windt, *Dreaming: A Conceptual Framework for Philosophy of Mind* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2015), especially 251–52; Evan Thompson, *Waking, Dreaming, Being: Self and Consciousness in Neuroscience, Meditation, and Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press 2015), 182–5.

30 Allow that a paradigm may be characterized using Kuhn's sense of a disciplinary matrix along with what he calls exemplary problem-solutions. See Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Second Edition. London: University of Chicago, 1970), 181–91. It is important to note (a) incommensurable senses given to the same technical terms across paradigms and (b) the fact that paradigms are not insulated. For (a), consider how different the vocabulary Digṅāga uses to convey his views on conceptuality in his *Collected Thoughts on Epistemology* (*Pramāṇasamuccaya*) is when compared

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with the generic vocabulary to which he restricts himself when reconstructing the epitome of the *Perfection of Wisdom In 8,000 Verses* (*Prajñāpāramitā-piṇḍārtha*). For the latter, see Giuseppe Tucci "Minor Sanskrit Texts on the Prajñāpāramitā: The Prajñāpāramitā-piṇḍārtha of Diṅnāga," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, No. 1, (April 1947): 53–75; particularly verses 48–53; for a different term which acquired incommensurable senses, see Birgit Kellner, "Changing Frames in Buddhist Thought: The Concept of *ākāra* in Abhidharma and in Buddhist Epistemological Analysis," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 42, (2014): 327–37. For (b), see the attempt on the part of philosophers like Sthiramati to explicate Yogācāra Buddhist scholastic ideas—such as the attainment of non-conceptual awareness—with the help of vocabulary developed by Digṅāga in an epistemic context. See Susumu Yamaguchi, *Madhyāntavibhāgaṭīkā* (Nagoya: Librairie Hajinkaku, 1934), 104, quoted in Mario D'Amato, *Maitreya's Distinguishing The Middle From Extremes: Madhyāntavibhāga, Along with Vasubandhu's Commentary Madhyāntavibhāga-bhāṣya: A Study and Annotated Translation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 175, n3. For an evaluation of the relationship of Dharmakīrti's epistemological project with that of Yogācāra Buddhist scholasticism (among other paradigms), see Eltschinger (2010: 399–401); Vincent Eltschinger, *Buddhist Epistemology as Apologetics: Studies on the History, Self-Understanding and Dogmatic Foundations of Late Indian Buddhist Philosophy* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2014), 154–218. For a pre-Dharmakīrti example of working across paradigms, see Dan Lusthaus, "Yogācāra Theories Of The Components of Perception: The *Buddhabhūmy-upadeśa*," in *Buddhist Philosophy: Essential Readings*, ed. William Edelglass and Jay L. Garfield (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 205–17. For an attempt at a social history of epistemology as a paradigm, see Vincent Eltschinger, "Buddhist Esoterism and Epistemology: Two Sixth-Century Innovations as Buddhist Responses to Social and Religio-Political Transformations," in *Periodization and Historiography of Indian Philosophy*, ed. Eli Franco (Vienna: Institute für Südasien-, Tibet- und Buddhismuskunde der Universität Wien, 2013), 171–275. My thanks to James McNee for this reference.

31 See Giuseppi Tucci, *The Nyāyamukha of Diṇnāga: The Oldest Buddhist Text on Logic. After Chinese and Tibetan Materials* (San Francisco: Chinese Materials Center, 1976), 50; Kachru (2019: 173–4); Eltschinger (2010: 409).

32 This seems entirely consistent with a wider background in Yogācāra literature on which *vikalpa* comes to mean not episodic judgments, but a process. See Sthiramati's comment to verse 17 in the *Triṃśikā* of Vasubandhu: "'Construction' refers to those mental events and associated mental factors of the three-fold world whose phenomenological presentation involves superimposed content (*adhyāropitārthākārās traidhātukāś cittacaittā vikalpa ucyate*)"; see Hartmut Buescher, *Sthiramati's Triṃśikāvijñaptibhāṣya: Critical Editions of the Sanskrit Text and Its Tibetan Translation* (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences, 2007), 108. See also O' Brien (1954, 241–42, n195), Paul Wilfred O'Brien, "A Chapter on Reality from the Madhyāntavibhāgaśāstra," *Monumenta Nipponica* 10, no. 1–2 (1954): 227–69. See also Sthiramati's gloss on the term-of-art *abhūta-parikalpa* in the *Madhyāntavibhāgaṭīkā*, in David Lasar Friedmann, *Madhyāntavibhāgaṭīkā: Analysis of the Middle Path and the Extremes* (Utrecht, 1937), 13–4.

33 Cf. Sally Haslanger, "Social Construction: The 'Debunking' Project," in *Socializing Metaphysics: The Nature of Social Reality*, ed. Frederick F. Schmitt (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 301–25.

34 The claim is made clearest in *Triṃśikā* 17b–c: "Insofar as something is constructed it does not exist (*yad vikalpyate tena tan nāsti*)." On *vikalpa* as process, Vasubandhu is fairly explicit in the *Triṃśikā* 21ab: "But the nature of what is dependent is construction, which occurs in reliance on conditions (*paratantrasvabhāvas tu vikalpaḥ pratyayodbhavaḥ* [Buescher 2007: 122])." See also Friedmann 1937: 14. As Sthiramati explicitly says in his comments on *Triṃśikā* 20: "A thing, that is to say, a cognitive object that has been constructed, does not exist, on account of its not being an existing particular.

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Therefore, that thing is precisely something whose nature is constructed, *and not something whose nature involves being directly subject to causes and conditions* (*yad vastu vikalpyavisayas tad yasmāt sattābhāvān na vidyate | tasmāt tad vastu parikalpitasvabhāvam eva, na hetupratyayapratibaddhasvabhāvam*" (Buescher 2007: 122, emphasis added).

35 See Lambert Schmithausen, *Der Nirvāṇa-Abschnitt in der Viniścayasaṁgrahaṇī der Yogācārabhūmiḥ* (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1969), 138–9, n101. The notion of "representation" has become elusive. If one has in mind the notion of representations increasingly used in cognitive science—where it appears to be divorced from the function of explaining epistemic access to what there is, or "grounding" the intentionality of conscious episodes—perhaps the notion will still apply to what I am calling the background on behalf of Yogācāra Buddhist scholastics. In particular this is so if we allow for past patterns to enter into constraining what items representations enjoy co-variance with, and allow the rather extended notion of a representational system in Andy Clark, *Being There: Putting Brain, Body, and World Together Again* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1997), 144–147; on this view, anything, "if it depicts whole systems of identifiable inner states (local or distributed) or processes (temporal sequences of such states) as having the function of bearing specific types of information about external or bodily states of affairs," counts as representationalist. What we would require to make the points in my argument stick would be to see that tagging any occurent item as a representation (within a NARROW EPISTEMIC CONTEXT or not) entails the wider notion of a system, the characterization of which (its nature, boundaries, conditions, and variety of causation involved) is non-trivial, and not best accomplished within a NARROW EPISTEMIC CONTEXT, nor by too tightly coupling information to linguistic structure or processes narrowly understood.

36 For the purposes of this essay, I aim for neutrality between different interpretations of the nature of the restriction. I owe the recognition of this point to Sthiramati, who, introducing verse 22 of the *Triṃśikā,* says: "It is only given that there are only mental events that the three natures [including the description of constructed content and mind as construction] can be established (*vijñaptimātra eva sati svabhāvatrayavyavasthānāt*)" (Buescher 2007: 122).

37 On these not as present and operative items, but dispositions, see Sonam Kachru, "Minds and Worlds: A Philosophical Commentary On *The Twenty Verses* of Vasubandhu," (PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2015), 240–2. On Dharmakīrti's uptake of such notions within a Buddhist epistemological paradigm, see Catherine Prueitt, "Karmic Imprints, Exclusion, and the Creation of the Worlds of Conventional Experience in Dharmakīrti's Thought," *Sophia* 57, 2, (2018): 313–35.

38 Jonathan Gold, "No Outside, No Inside: Duality, Reality and Vasubandhu's Illusory Elephant," *Asian Philosophy* 16, no. 1, (2006): 1–38.

39 For more, see Lambert Schmithausen, "Spirituelle Praxis und philosophische Theorie im Buddhismus," *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 57, (1973): 161–86, 164; William S. Waldron, *The Buddhist Unconscious: The ālaya-vijñāna in the Context of Indian Buddhist Thought* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 55–62, 71–81; Kachru (2015: 128–38).

40 Thus, Vasubandhu: "What is awareness? It is directed awareness of an object […] primarily, *citta* is the *ālaya-vijñāna*, because that is where all the dispositional powers on the part of conditioning factors are collected. Moreover, it does not possess clearly discernible intentional content or phenomenological aspect […] [and is that which] occurs as a single connected sequence […] (*vijñānaṃ katamat / ālambanaṃ vijñaptiḥ* […] *mūlacittam ālayavijñānaṃ tadyathedaṃ sarvasaṃskārāṇāṃ saṃcitaṃ bījam tat punar ālambanam apyuparichinnam ekasantānavarti* […])." For a translation of the passage in its entirety, which is also concerned with arguments for the existence of this type of mental phenomenon, and with clarifying the kind of mentality which has this dispositional continuity as

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content, see Artemus B. Engle, *The Inner Science of Buddhist Practice: Vasubandhu's Summary of the Five Heaps with Commentary by Sthiramati* (Ithaca: Snow Lion, 2009), 239.

41 In the *Pañcaskandhakaprakaraṇa*, the conceptual distinction is articulated with the help of a semantic explanation of the word "*citta*." When speaking of *citta* (thought) as tracking an occurrent event, instead of a dispositional concept such as a basis of dispositions for action and experience more generally, Vasubandhu adduces the etymology based on "*citra*," with a sense of variegate or manifold ("*cittaṃ* […] *citratāṁ*") or as that which is responsible for manifoldness (*citrīkāratā*). The sense of multiplicity here, I would argue, is doing duty for a notion that could underwrite our sense of the mind *as a concept of a manifold of discrete and separable mental events*. See Engle (2009: 239).

42 Étienne Lamotte, *Karmasiddhiprakaraṇa: The Treatise on Action by Vasubandhu*, trans. Leo M. Pruden, (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1987), 64.

43 In what follows, it will perhaps be difficult not to hear echoes of Searle's resonant sense of "the background." I *do* have in mind to invite consideration of this, but not to endorse continuity of function. For two reasons: the notion of background awareness, while not one of occurrent representation, is not for that best described as non-representational entirely. Second, it is not called upon to solve a theoretical problem with representation (as in John Searle, "Literal Meaning," *Erkenntnis* 1, (1978): 207–24)—though it is taken to complete any account of intentionality and skills (as in John Searle, "Response: The Background of Intentionality and Action," in *John Searle and His Critics*, ed. E. Lepore and R. Van Gulick (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1991), 289–301). Additionally, the *ālaya* might be described as among the preconditions for representation and intentionality generally.

44 *aparicchinnālambanākāra*. This is consistently claimed by Vasubandhu not only in the *Pañcaskandhaprakaraṇa*, but also the *Karmasiddhiprakaraṇa*, and the *Pratītyasamutpādavyākhyā*. For details of the views held in these texts, see Schmithausen (1987: Vol. I., 103–4).

45 *asaṃviditakopādi-sthāna-vijñaptikaṃ ca tat* (*Triṃśikā* 3a-b [Buescher 2007: 52]).

46 *yadi pravṛttivijñānavyatiriktam ālayavijñānam asti tato 'syālambanam ākāro vā vaktavyaḥ | na hi nirālambanaṃ nirākāraṃ vā vijñānaṃ yujyate | naiva tan nirālambanaṃ nirākāraṃ veṣyate: kiṃ tarhy aparicchinnālambanākāram | kiṃ kāraṇam? yasmād ālayavijñānaṃ dvidhā pravartate | adhyātmam upādānavijñaptito bahirdhāparicchinnākārabhājanavijñaptitaś ca* (on *Triṃśikā* 2cd; and introducing 3ab, Buescher 2007: 50–2).

47 And so, unlike the way in which Digṅāga in the *Ālambanaparīkṣā*, or Searle in our own time, would characterize dispositions as being intentional. For these thinkers we credit dispositions as intentional and as possessing aspectual shape by linking dispositions to the intentional experiences that they can cause. For more on the details of this, see Kachru (2015: 595–6).

48 While following Sthiramati here in treating "*upādi*," or appropriation, as comprehending the "*vāsanas*," or dispositions associated with the *ālaya-vijñāna*, I shall ignore here a detail Schmithausen (1987: Vol. I., 104–5), points out: namely that Shiramati, unlike Vasubandhu, when further developing his comments on the two-fold content of the *ālaya*, does not emphasize that the fact of appropriation serves as a kind of phenomenological content. But I am not as confident as Schmithausen that when Sthiramati speaks of appropriation as the function of the *ālayavijñāna*, he has in mind to *rule out* its also serving as the content of the *ālaya*. See Schmithausen (1987: Vol. II., 410, n745).

49 Noritoshi Aramaki, "Toward an Understanding of the Vijñaptimātratā," in *Wisdom, Compassion and the Search for Understanding: The Buddhist Studies Legacy of Gadjin M. Nagao*, ed. Jonathan A. Silk (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), 39–61.

50 As Sthiramati says, glossing "*asamvidita*": "appropriation is described as 'not completely discerned' on account of the fact it is not completely and perspicuously specified along the lines of the following

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kinds of judgment: 'X is Y' or 'X placed in Y' (*so 'sminn idaṃ tad iti pratisaṃvedanākāreṇāsaṃvidita ity atas tad asaṃviditakopādir ity ucyate*)." This form of argument with respect to the individuation in language of items (and particularly background or environing conditions for perceptual experience) which do not have the logical shape of objects encountered in perceptual experience has a long history in Indian thought. For the argument in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* that the self cannot be individuated with the linguistic form supplied by a demonstrative in apposition to a noun, see Matthew Kapstein, *Reason's Traces: Identity and Interpretation In Indian and Tibetan Buddhist Thought* (Somerville, Massachusetts: Wisdom Press 2001), 59. On how to characterize the self, once one is convinced that it does not have the logical shape of an object of consciousness, see Jonardon Ganeri, *The Concealed Art of the Soul: Theories of Self and Practices of Truth in Indian Ethics and Epistemology* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 22–38, a discussion which will, I think, suggest important continuities and discontinuities with the function of the Yogācāra background.

51 There is a word missing in Vasubandhu's description that one might well want to supply. In the *Saṃdhinirmocana sūtra*, as discussed in Schmithausen (1987: Vol. I, 89), the quality of presented content is described in addition as "steady" (*sthira*). As Schmithausen adds, the *Yogācārabhūmi* discussion of two kinds of content allows us to speak of "a continuous perception of one's corporeal basis of existence" (Schmithausen 1987: Vol. I, 90).

52 Gadjin M. Nagao, *Mādhyamika and Yogācāra: A Study of Mahāyāna Philosophies* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 80; using Sthiramati's gloss in Friedmann (1937: 14).

53 On an early Yogācāra commitment to the effect that one's awareness of a background is linked to a form of incommunicable experience (*pratyātmavedanīya*), given that the awareness of a background (and the background itself) eludes propositional capture, and so cannot be exhibited to another in discourse, see Schmithausen (1987: Vol. I, 228–9).

54 cf. Taylor Carman, "Conceptualism and the Scholastic Fallacy," in ed. Joseph K. Schear, *Mind, Reason, And Being-In-The-World: The McDowell-Dreyfus Debate* (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), 165–78, 174.

55 See Jowita Kramer, "Conceptuality and Non-Conceptuality in Yogācāra Sources," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 46, (2017): 321–38, 325.

56 "*abhilāpo mahāmate kṛtakaḥ; kvacinmahāmate buddhakṣetre 'nimiṣaprekṣayā dharmo deśyate, kvacidiṅgitaiḥ, kvacidbhūvikṣepeṇa, kvacinnetrasaṃcāreṇa, kvacidāsyena, kvacidvijṛmbhitena, kvacidutkāsanaśabdena, kvacitkṣetrasmṛtyā, kvacitspanditena. yathā mahāmate animiṣāyāṃ gandhasugandhāyāṃ ca lokadhātau samantabhadrasya tathāgatasyārhataḥ samyaksaṃbuddhasya buddhakṣetre animiṣairnetraiḥ prekṣamāṇāste bodhisattvā mahāsattvā anutpattikadharmakṣāntiṃ pratilabhante anyāṃśca samādhiviśeṣān… dṛṣṭaṃ caitanmahāmate, iha loke kṛmimakṣikaivamādyāḥ sattvaviśeṣā anabhilāpenaiva svakṛtyaṃ kurvanti*" (Vaidya 43–44). cf. Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *The Lankavatara Sutra: A Mahayana Text* (London: George Routledge and Sons, Ltd, 1932), 91–2.

57 For more about which in Indian philosophy, see Jonardon Ganeri, *The Self: Naturalism, Consciousness, and the First-Person Stance* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 50, 57–60; see also Robert Sharf, "Is Nirvāṇa the Same as Insentience? Chinese Struggles with an Indian Buddhist Ideal," in *India in the Chinese Imagination: Myth, Religion, and Thought*, ed. John Kieschnick and Meir Shahar (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 141–71, 144–5.

58 See Étienne Lamotte, *L'Enseignement de Vimalakīrti* (Louvain, 1962), 319, n2.

59 After Robert A. F. Thurman, *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakīrti: A Mahāyāna Scripture* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976), 78.

60 cf. Paul Harrison, "Mediums and Messages: Reflections on the Production of Mahāyāna Sūtras," *The Eastern Buddhist* 35, no 1/2, (2003): 115–51, 120–2.

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61 See Toshiya Unebe, "Jñānaśrībhadra's Interpretation Of Bhartṛhari As Found In The 'Laṅkāvatāravṛtti' ('Phags pa langkar gshegs pa'i 'grel pa)," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 28, no. 4, (2000): 329–60, 330–1.

62 "*athānanyā syāt, arthābhivyaktitvaṃ vāg na kuryāt*…" Unebe cites Bunyiu Nanjio, *The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* (Kyoto: Otani University, 1923), 86–7.

63 Michael Forster, "Gods, Animals, and Artists: Some Problem Cases In Herder's Philosophy of Language," *Inquiry* 46, no. 1, (2003): 65–96, 65.

64 Peter Godfrey-Smith, *Other Minds: The Octopus, The Sea, And The Deep Origins of Consciousness* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016), 141.

65 Thus, the phenomenon of communicable meanings that are unexampled (or which cannot be exampled in principle, such as "the horns of a hair" or "the son of a barren woman") are taken to be sufficient to rule out the prospect of meaning consisting in real relations between words and things (see Suzuki 1932: 91). The point is also to thus rule out any such correlation of words and things that would license one to infer the reality of things on the basis of the intelligibility of discourse.

66 For other places where one can find Buddhist reflections against the possibility of private and yet "articulate" contents, see Roy Tzohar, *A Yogācāra Buddhist Theory of Metaphor* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 187–8.

67 We should note, perhaps, that the use *The Descent Into Lanka* in making such cases might go against the use suggested by *The Teaching of Vimalakirti*: that is, it might be that we are being asked to recognize in the latter work that training, and being disciplined in a normative way, might involve something other than the internalization of true propositions, for which reason, other media can serve the same function as linguistic utterances. (Such a view might support the provocative suggestion made by Mark Siderits, "Buddhism and Techno-Physicalism: Is The Eightfold Path A Program?" *Philosophy East and West* 51, no. 3, [2001]: 307–14.) I put that to one side here, for *The Descent Into Lanka* seems to want to say that it is *thought* and not the non-cognitive nature of training that is being illustrated by communication in other worlds.

68 On the eminently practical reasons for cultivating the disciplined interpretation of physical gesture (*iṅgita*), looks (*ākāra*), and signs (*liṅga*), see Daud Ali, *Courtly Culture and Political Life in Early Medieval India* (Cambridge Studies in Indian History and Society. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 183–201, and his discussion of *Nītisāra* 5.34; on the notion of gesture (*abhinaya*) in the performing arts as an essentially non-linguistic and yet communicative medium, see the explanation of the word in *The Mirror of Gesture* (*Abhinayadarpana*) in Anand Coomaraswamy and G. K. Duggirala, *The Mirror of Gesture, Being The Abhinayadarpana of Nandikesvara* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1917), 17. For a non-South Asian premodern context, see J. A. Burrow, *Gestures and Looks in Medieval Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

69 Though I cannot be sure of this, it would seem that such a historical experience would cut against attempts today to point to non-human cases of sentience, and our continuity with these, as prima facie reasons counting against the likelihood of conceptuality "going all the way down." For, as this experiment suggests, some Buddhists would have some such constructed background for conceptuality be precisely what we have in common with them.

70 See John Searle, *Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 143–4. The Deep Background is composed of biological skills and universal human capacities, such as eating, walking, and seeing given patterns of perceptual stimuli as discrete objects. The Local Background, by contrast, is composed of culture-bound skills and capacities, such as knowing what culturally specific objects are for or recognizing culturally specific situations as appropriate or inappropriate for certain types of behavior.

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71 Loïc Wacquant, "A Concise Genealogy and Anatomy of Habitus," *The Oxford Handbook Of Pierre Bourdieu*, ed. Thomas Medvetz and Jeffrey L. Sallaz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Dermot Moran, "Edmund Husserl's Phenomenology of Habituality and Habitus," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 42, No. 1, (2011): 53–77; for Erwin Panofsky's idea of "habits of mind," see William F. Hanks, "Pierre Bourdieu and the Practices of Language," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 34, (2005): 67–83.

72 "*tathā hi, vividhā kalpanā vividhatvena ca śaṅkitasya kalpo 'nyavyavacchedanaṃ vikalpaḥ*" (introducing 1.6.2); K. A. Subramania Iyer and K. C. Pandey, *Īśvara-pratyabhijñā-vimarśinī of Abhinavagupta. Doctrine of Divine Recognition. Volume I: Sanskrit Text With the Commentary Bhāskarī* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986), 303–4; cf. K. C. Pandey, *Īśvara-pratyabhijñā-vimarśinī of Abhinavagupta. Doctrine of Divine Recognition.* Volume III: Translation (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986), 87–8; see also Isabelle Ratié**,** *Le Soi et l'Autre Identité, différence et altérité dans la philosophie de la Pratyabhijñā* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2011), 461, n209. This is offered as the right definition (*lakṣaṇa*) of *vikalpa*, which occupies Abhinavagupta in his comments on the first and second verses of the sixth Āhnika of the first Adhikāra, with the point at issue being to distinguish *vikalpa* from the notion of a "body of speech (*vāgvapuḥ*)" which is taken to characterize the personal Absolute. My thanks to John Nemec for much helpful conversation on this and for his helpful suggestion that Abhinavagupta's criterion is also intended to give us a semantic elucidation of the word "*vikalpa*."

73 Abhinavagupta's way of making room for modality might very well also be taken as consistent with Robert Brandom's way of assessing the historically located significance an awareness of the role of modality in semantics can have: "One of the driving motors of Kant's recoil from empiricism is his realization that the framework of empirical description and explanation […] essentially involves the use of concepts whose job is not to describe or explain how things empirically are" (Robert Brandom, "Some Hegelian Ideas of Note for Contemporary Analytic Philosophy," *Hegel Bulletin* 35, no. 1, [2014]: 1–15, 4). It is unclear to me at this time whether he would also agree that there is an essential role for concepts that "make explicit necessary features of that framework that provides the context that makes possible describing and explaining" (Brandom 2014: 4).

74 Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Karen E. Fields (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 436–7.

75 "*vikalpavāsanābaddhaṃ vicitraṃ cittasaṃbhavam / bahirākhyāyate nṛṇāṃ cittamātraṃ hi laukikam // 3.32 // dṛśyaṃ na vidyate bāhyaṃ cittaṃ citraṃ hi dṛśyate / dehabhogapratiṣṭhānaṃ cittamātraṃ vadāmy aham // 3.33 //*" (Vaidya 1963: 63). Cf. Florin Giripescu Sutton, *Existence and Enlightenment in the Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra: A Study in the Ontology and Epistemology of the Yogācāra School of Mahāyāna Buddhism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), xvii.

76 In exploiting the phonetic echoes of "*citra*" in "*citta*," and linking "sensible content" to the world-like referent of words meaning something like "background awareness," it is revising, in one sense, a traditional Buddhist explanation of the use of these words. See Kachru (2015: 131-2).

77 See verses 65-66 in *Sāṃkhyakārikā*, in Gerald Larson, *Classical Sāṃkhya: An Interpretation Of Its History and Meaning* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass 1969), 279–80; on this dualism of consciousness and thought, see Paul Schweizer, "Mind/Consciousness Dualism in Sāṅkhya-Yoga Philosophy," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 53, no. 4, (1993): 845–59.

78 John McDowell, "What Myth?" *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy* 50, no. 4, (2007): 338–51, 349; John McDowell, "The Myth of the Mind As Detached," in *Mind, Reason, and Being-in-the–World: The McDowell-Dreyfus Debate*, ed. Joseph K. Schear (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 41–59, 54. See also Joseph Schear, "Are We Essentially Rational Animals?" in the same volume, page 290.

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