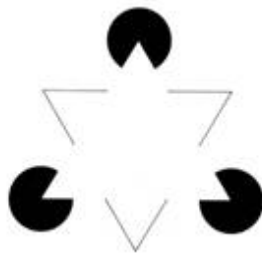


Orientation Week 2 Reading: LOK Ch. 16, Modeling Self-Constructs, pp. 129-134

In our first phone call, on January 17, I made a distinction between the stories we tell, based on description and explanation, and the stories we live (or inhabit), in the same way that a character in a movie inhabits the world of that movie. The lived world is the world that we experience directly. As we discussed, we generally aim for that kind of immediacy; for instance, through meditation, or relationships, or specific kinds of experiences such as skiing or dancing that somehow go ‘beneath’ our described world to something that seems more fundamental. Lived experience, as Lois suggested, has a timeless quality. When we focus on timing and linear temporality (“this, then that”), it suggests that descriptive knowledge is at work.

Despite our wish for immediacy, much of the time we in fact relate to the world through our descriptions. As Rinpoche writes on p. 129, it’s like trying to feel a fur coat with gloves on. We are looking right now at how this is so. This chapter refines the analysis by showing how descriptions become models, and also how models give rise to further descriptions. Descriptions, constructs, concepts, models: all of these are related.

Take a look at this well-known optical illusion, known as a Kanisza triangle:



The illusion, of course, comes from seeing a clearly defined white triangle in the center of the image. Is this the outcome of a model? If so, it is a model that we apply at a very deep perceptual level. That is interesting in itself, because it shows that models do not depend on language. Then is the white triangle part of our lived experience, our lived story?

The example here is not all that relevant to our usual experience. The models we typically care about are models about other people, ourselves, or the way the world works. For instance, being paranoid involves adopting a model of the way things are that then shapes our inhabited, lived world. Or is the other way around: we have a lived version of reality (“people are out to get me”) that gives rise to a model? But where does the lived story come from? Does it emerge out of a model? Models and lived stories interact in subtle ways, one influencing the other.

Just as in the last chapter, Rinpoche takes up the question of whether we really need to question our models. Perhaps, he says, they work ‘well enough’. Take a close look at his discussion of why this is not so: his description of the kinds of knowledge that models allow for or privilege, as well as the kinds of knowledge they leave out. What do models—not this model or that model, but our fundamental reliance on models—commit us to in advance?