#THENEWMYTHOLOGY

BY

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Submitted to the graduate degree program in Art & Design and the Graduate Faculty of the

University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Date Defended: April 18, 2014

The Thesis Committee for Daniel Lowe certifies that this is the approved version of the

following thesis:

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Date Approved: April 18, 2014

ABSTRACT

Through a combination of existing philosophies, including that of Martin Heidegger and Joseph Campbell, with the mythologies of Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Buddhism, I have created a structural basis for the exhibition #THENEWMYTHOLOGY. This structure attempts to deconstruct the traditions of contemporary life, focusing on digital interactions mediated primarily through social media sites. This deconstruction of tradition opens up the possibility of a more authentic understanding and way of Being.

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I. Martin Heidegger and the Deconstruction of Tradition

"When tradition thus becomes master, it does so in such a way that what it 'transmits' is made so inaccessible, proximally and for the most part, that it rather becomes concealed."
Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 44

A main influence in my creative practice is the 1927 book by Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*. Heidegger argues that we are *thrown* into a world we don't understand. Because of this thrownness we often rely on previous understandings of the world, which manifests as traditions. Traditions are a part of our everyday, ordinary and often mundane existence, so much so that they become overlooked and unexamined. However, since we are entities that wonder about our own Being, our *Being-in-the-world* is complicated by these traditions and we tend to *fall from authenticity*. We become absorbed in communities and embrace what Heidegger calls the *they-self*, an inauthentic way of Being. One of the first steps in changing this way of Being is the destruction of traditions. By using my artistic practice to deconstruct my experiences, I am attempting to destroy tradition, turn away from the they-self and create a more *authentic* understanding and way of Being.

II. Social Media as Tradition

"When, in our everyday Being-with-one-another, we encounter the sort of thing, which is accessible to everyone, and about which anyone can say anything, it soon becomes impossible to decide what is disclosed in a genuine understanding, and what is not."

Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 173

This body of work focuses on my interests in our culture's digital and internet based experiences. These experiences are mediated primarily through interactions on social media sites and other forms of instant communication. This shift from analog or real life interactions to digital interactions has shifted our way of Being. Social media satisfies our constant need to connect and feel connected with. We have become 'users' of digital intermediaries meant to ease interactions by distancing us from the analog. In our technologically augmented world we feel connected but remain isolated. We create digital identities, the they-self, and connect with the assumed digital identities of other users. We become absorbed in these identities, their histories and personal mythologies. They become part of our everyday existence, they become tradition.

Conversation has turned into 140 characters and a "like" button. Trending hashtags and posts aimed to gain more comments, more likes and more reblogs becomes the quest of the user and a major component in individual mythology. Social media sites like Instagram and Vine encourages the user to capture and collect unique experiences to share with their communities instead of actually experiencing them in real life. Often these experiences are not unique but come from the they-self. Posting selfies to Instagram, detailing personal moments on Facebook or making twerk videos on Vine all come from a need to connect but do so by following the

already understood and previously proven format for their chosen identities; traditions held in assumed regard by their followers while fulfilling the users personal mythology.

III. Wikipedia and the Deconstruction of Tradition

"Wikipedia is a collaboratively edited, multilingual, free Internet encyclopedia that is supported by the non-profit Wikimedia Foundation. Volunteers worldwide collaboratively write Wikipedia's 30 million articles in 287 languages, including over 4.4 million in the English Wikipedia. Anyone who can access the site can edit almost any of its articles, which on the Internet comprise the largest and most popular general reference work."

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia

Wikipedia is a social media site where information is collected in vast quantities. It has been a pivotal resource in my research for #THENEWMYTHOLOGY. Through its hyperlinked and thoroughly referenced articles, any user is able to use the prosthetic brain of Wikipedia to make connections between various different ideas, philosophies and belief structures. By opening one entry, the user has access to 30 million intensely intertwined and linked trains of thought, research and discoveries. In this collection and encyclopedic deconstruction of structures, I found our technological augmentations beginning to destroy traditions and create a new understanding of the world around us. These traditions, meant to guide their followers towards an authentic understanding of the world, are beginning to change with this easy access to information.

IV. Mythology and the Fall from Authenticity

"In the long view of the history of mankind, four essential functions of mythology can be discerned. The first...is that of eliciting and supporting a sense of awe before the mystery of being...The second...is to render a cosmology, an image of the universe that will support and be supported by this sense of the presence of a mystery...A third function of

mythology is to support the current social order, to integrate the individual organically with his group...The fourth function of mythology is to initiate the individual into the order of realities of his own psyche, guiding him towards his own spiritual enrichment and realization."

<div align="right">Joseph Campbell, *Occidental Mythology*, p. 519-521</div>

Myths have been around since humans began wondering about the unknown. Throughout history, myths have expanded and encircled the world. Their spread can be documented by their influence over various cultures through time. The great origin myths, hero's quests, myths about the afterlife and death are now regarded as legends or lost traditions. Joseph Campbell pointed out that mythology affects our understanding of the world and our place in it. I believe our absorption in social media and embrace of the digital has become increasingly prevalent through the user's struggle to build a personal myth that creates this understanding. But to build a myth in this manner is to continually fall towards social media and the inauthentic they-self and turn away from the user's authentic self. This fall from authenticity, as Heidegger described it, is a part of Being, one that must be examined if we are to be able to turn towards authenticity.

<div align="center">V. Dante's Mythology and the Path to Authenticity</div>

<div align="center">"Try not our strength, so easily subdued,
against the ancient foe, but set it free
from him who goads it to perversity."</div>

<div align="right">Dante Alighieri, *Purgatorio*, Canto XI, Lines 19-21</div>

In his poem *The Divine Comedy,* Dante Alighieri travels through the three areas of the afterlife, which are based on Christian mythologies. They are *Inferno* (Hell), *Purgatorio* (Purgatory) and *Paradisio* (Heaven). Each area is further categorized by the motives and/or actions that caused

the dead to find themselves in each of these places. In Dante's myth, Purgatory lies in between Heaven, which is reserved for the dead who have achieved authenticity, and Hell, where the dead who fell from authenticity land. Purgatory itself is a mountain created by the fall of Satan to Hell, a fall that represents Dante's ultimate manifestation of inauthenticity.

Before entering the mountain of Purgatory, Dante passes through Peter's Gate, where he is readied for Purgatory. Peter marks Dante and opens the gates with two keys, one silver, representing remorse and redemption, and one gold, representing reconciliation and salvation. Under the light of God, the souls of Purgatory climb the mountain, reaching several terraces along the way. On each terrace Dante meets a soul and hears their story relating to the themes of that terrace. At the top is Earthly Paradise, or the Garden of Eden. Upon his arrival, Dante is presented with a ritualistic procession of mythic symbols, allegories connected to the Bible and Christian beliefs, before being allowed into Heaven to find his version of authenticity.

VI. Buddhism and the Path to Authenticity

"Clear knowing is the leader in the attainment of skillful qualities, followed by conscience and concern. In a knowledgeable person, immersed in clear knowing, right view arises. In one of right view, right resolve arises. In one of right resolve, right speech... In one of right speech, right action... In one of right action, right livelihood... In one of right livelihood, right effort... In one of right effort, right mindfulness... In one of right mindfulness, right concentration arises."

Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Avijja Sutta: Ignorance*

The basic structure in Buddhism is Buddha's Four Noble Truths, also referred to as The Middle Path. The fourth of the Four Noble Truths is called The Noble Eight-Fold Path. This path is

meant to show its followers the 'right way', an authentic understanding of reality. Through eight preparatory wisdoms, beginning with 'right view', each fold of the path leads into the next until you have reached 'right concentration'. The Mandala is a point of concentration for followers of Buddhism. It symbolizes the Buddhist mythology of being in the universe, *Being-in-the-world*, where we reside between confusion and clarity, chaos and peace. A prayer wheel is a Buddhist tool used in prayer and meditation. Prayer wheels are often decorated with the 8 auspicious symbols, each representing a different part of the experience of being in the universe. Inside the prayer wheel, followers place mantras or important texts. The spinning of this wheel has the same effect as saying the mantra or text out loud, the repetition of which leads the follower further along the path towards enlightenment or authenticity.

Similar themes of traveling a path towards authenticity and of being between two places begin to emerge from vastly different cultures. The places between right and wrong, authentic and inauthentic, digital and analog. We never find ourselves fully in one place or the other, but always in purgatory, always between two.

VII. The Exhibition of #THENEWMYTHOLOGY

In an effort to find an authentic understanding and way of Being, I have assumed the task of creating a modern myth that is grounded in the here and now. #THENEWMYTHOLOGY blends my concerns about social media and digital identities with established mythological and philosophical structures in order to deconstruct what it means to 'Be' in our digital era.

The exhibition of #THENEWMYTHOLOGY presents itself as a temple to this new understanding. Ritualistic elements pulled from *Purgatorio* are infiltrated with elements of social media, Heideggerian interpretations and Buddhist symbology. In #THENEWMYTHOLOGY, the user enters a new Purgatory, somewhere between digital and analog. Light is shone down onto the temple through a video projection based on a Buddhist mandala, constructed with six-second video loops from Vine. Body parts collected from Instagram pictures are organized into mandalas behind reflective plexiglass. Embedded in a partial octagonal wall, they tell the stories of the user. In the middle stands an eight-sided experience wheel, based on the Buddhist prayer wheel. As it spins, it presents its surroundings back to itself, an experience experiencing itself. The user stands in front of the wheel and sees their reflection projected in the same way as everything else. Much as the keys to passing Peter's Gate represent reconciliation and salvation, the keys to this gate are reflection and authenticity. On the opposite wall is a wooden construction in the shape of a ziggurat or a terraced mountain. Eight unsteady stairs lead to the top of this mountain, upon which social media stares back at us from that place between digital and analog, the middle path. The user is reflected here through a computer screen as a stream of selfies covers their face. Through the use of a Kinect, the selfie stream finds, covers and follows the user's face, forcing the user to see their self through the selves of other users, the they-self. This interaction becomes a procession of mythic symbols where the user comes face to face with the possibility of authenticity.

VIII. Pictures of #THENEWMYTHOLOGY