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Transitions in Transitivity

The Complexity of Effort, Effortlessness, and Agency in Tibetan Great Perfection Contemplative Practices

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ABSTRACT The Seminal Heart (*snying thig*) variant of the Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*) tradition in Tibet is marked by a complex array of contemplative practices that have also changed considerably over its fourteen century history dating. back to the eighth century. A central organizing principle, and a hallmark of their innovative character, is the shifting roles of volitional effort and loci of agency at play in each contemplative practice's procedures, as well as in the manifest appearances, sensations, and dynamics that constitute the unfolding processes and experiences therein. In addition, subtle and dramatic shifts in transitivity—the directional transfer of energy and locus of agency amongst various agents and patients—can occur throughout any given practice, so understanding these questions of effort and agency requires close attention to the contemplative lexicon of elements and the grammar of contemplation, including moments when there are scripted shifts from procedural techniques to the unfolding logic of experience. This article will focus on the most important formative period of the tradition—from the eleventh through fourteenth centuries—and offer speculative thoughts about how these contemplative issues were crucial factors in the tradition's dynamic changes over time.

KEYWORDS contemplation, Contemplative Studies, Tibetan Studies, Tibetan Buddhism, Dzokchen/Dzogchen/Great Perfection/Atiyoga, tantric meditation, effort, effortlessness

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Introduction

I will explore how valorized contemplative practices characterized as effortless involve dynamically shifting roles of volitional effort and changing loci of agency at play in each practice's procedures, as well as in the manifest appearances, sensations, and dynamics that constitute the unfolding processes and experiences therein. In addition, subtle and dramatic shifts in transitivity—the directional transfer of energy and locus of agency amongst various agents and patients—can occur throughout any given practice, so understanding these questions of effort and agency requires giving close attention to the contemplative lexicon of gestures and the grammars of contemplation, including moments when there are scripted shifts from procedural techniques to the unfolding logic of experience. I will thus analyze how these transitions are choreographed within individual practices, as well as in curricular arcs of multiple practices, towards illuminating the deeper significance of effort and effortlessness in contemplative practices within the Great Perfection. In particular, I will focus on the Seminal Heart (*snying thig*), which stands out from amidst the many variants of the Great Perfection as the most influential and innovative in developing highly distinctive sets of complex contemplative practices even while maintaining the overall tradition's rhetorical adherence of the norms of naturalness, letting go, spontaneity, non-conceptuality, and effortlessness. The Seminal Heart first emerged in Tibet in the eleventh century and came to be the most influential of all variants of the Great Perfection tradition, pervasively influential whether or not its rubric is explicitly invoked (Germano 1994, 2005). It was particularly influential for its strong adherence to rhetorics of naturalism, spontaneity, and effortlessness even while creating a broad range of innovative contemplative practices that transformed Buddhist meditation, and especially practices drawn from the tantric tradition, in alignment with those rhetorical norms (Germano 1997a, 1997b, 2007, 2023). [1]

Background

Tibetan Buddhism and Bön religious traditions are famous for the extraordinary diversity and density of their meditative practices, as well as their equally extensive efforts to inventory, model, and theorize those practices. We thus find not only an endless litany of specific practices and their variations, but also an array of categories intended to index meditative practices by generic type. Regardless of the type of meditation, it is normative to consider them as practices (*lag len, nyams len*; all non-English terms parenthetically indicated are Tibetan, unless explicitly indicated otherwise) involving techniques (*thabs*) aimed at stimulating deep experiences (*nyams*) that are monitored for progress to milestones, as well as for potential pitfalls (*gol sa*), according to explicitly delineated signs and measures (*rtags tshad*). These practices are typically done in formal sessions (*thun*) with clearly demarcated beginnings (*sngon 'gro*), middles (*dngos gzhi*), and ends (*rjes*), as well as involving extended immersive retreats (*mtshams*) that can range from days to years in duration. In addition, it is expected that traditions will detail curricular schemes (*lam rim, sgom rim*) that specify sequences of practices to be done over an extended period of time in particular orders within broader curricular arcs, as well as offer theorizations of practice that rank them by function, efficacy, and value in relationship to the overarching liberatory goal of achieving enlightenment (*byang chub*) and thus becoming a Buddha (*sangs rgyas*). Meditation, then, is typically associated with effort (*brtson 'grus, 'bad rtsol, yang dag pa'i rtsol ba*), discipline (*'dul ba, tshul khrims, dge sbyong, bslab khrims*), [2]

and intentionality (*dgongs pa, sems pa, yang dag pa'i rtog pa*), as one deliberately establishes temporal and spatial boundaries for the practice in question, carefully follows procedural instructions and even scripts in executing that practice, performs a variety of often complex actions requiring close focus and effort, and self-consciously monitors a series of milestones marking progress towards clear final objectives.

[3] In a series of publications about Indian and Theravāda Buddhist meditative practices and their theorization in the 1980s and 1990s (Griffiths 1995, 1986, 1983b, 1983a, 1983c, 1981), Paul Griffiths suggested that the best way to understand meditative practice in those contexts is by means of two dominant models—the enstatic methods or techniques and observational analytic methods or techniques. Enstatic methods (literally 'standing into' in contrast to ecstasy, 'standing outside oneself') involve withdrawal or isolation as the meditator withdraws sensory experience and cognitive activity from engagement with the external world, and ultimately results in bringing all affective and cognitive activity of the mind to a halt. Observational-analytic methods, in contrast, involve "close observation of the practitioner's psychophysical processes (of which the paradigm case is mindfulness…), or at the repeated contemplation and internalization of key items of Buddhist doctrine" (Griffiths 1995, 44) with the goal of "to transform[ing] one's cognitive and perceptual faculties in accordance with Buddhist philosophical doctrine." (Griffiths 1995, 37). Along with other scholars such as Bronkhorst (1986, and 2012), Griffiths thus suggests that meditation in early Indian Buddhist circles was characterized by a tension between cultivation of deep states of static interior concentration on the one hand, and perceptual and analytical modes of practice on the other hand. The former category is associated with such key Indian terms as *śamatha* (*zhi gnas*, 'calm') *samadhi* (*ting nge 'dzin, 'concentration'*), and *dhyāna* (*bsam gtan*, 'contemplative state') while the latter is associated with contrasting key terms such as *vipaśyāna* (*lhag mthong*, 'insight') and *smṛti* (*dran pa*, 'mindfulness'). There are important insights in such a dichotomization, and indeed a version surfaces clearly in Tibetan categorization of meditation as involving stabilizing forms of meditation (*'jog sgom*) and analytical forms (*dpyad sgom*), though the very nomenclature indicates that enstatic methods have been regulated and controlled to be in service of stabilizing and deepening the analytical.

[4] Both of these types of meditations involve repetition and indeed the very notion of meditation and its formal sessions entails repetition, familiarization, and formal procedures at some level. The intransitive form of 'to meditate' in Tibetan (*sgom*; Skt. *bhāvanā*) is 'to become habituated to', 'accustomed to', 'used to', 'familiar with', 'internalized', or 'intimate with' (*goms*). This verbal pair thus has an interesting range of meanings in the context of meditation that revolve around becoming well acquainted with a dimension, process, object, or person through repeated exposure. A dominant model of meditation in Tibetan Buddhism, not surprisingly, is doing a series of activities repeatedly over time with intense focus and dedicated effort. The character and function of such meditative repetition, however, exhibits extreme variance in effects depending on the nature of the activities, the objects of focus, the specific techniques, and the overall contexts in which it is transmitted and done. The actual procedure being repeated can dramatically vary from analytical meditations focused on reasoning processes and doctrine, to detailed and complex iconic visualizations, to the fostering and nuancing of affective states, to cultivating deep states of concentration and absorption, and much more. Depending on these variables, the impact could be to habituate, internalize, or recondition specific ways of viewing the world so that they become instinctual (whether one considers that to be becoming conditioned by Buddhist doctrine or seeing the truth of

things) or a self-visualization as a Buddhist deity. Alternatively, it might be a profoundly unsettling experience of deconditioning whereby the act of repetition, such as intense focus on a single object, displaces and eventually deconstructs habituated ways of perceiving and constructing ones experience, clearing the space for new emergent experiences and ways of being (Levin 1988, 233–50). Meditative familiarization can thus run the gamut from the ongoing experience of deep, intimate relationships that have a dynamic and fluid character, to constant repetition leading to habituation and scripted automatic perceptions. Indeed, one of the most fascinating dynamics of Buddhist meditation over time is the emergence of visual signs (*rtags*; Skt. *nimitta*) as an effect of deep concentration, as well as other types of signs that are aural, tactile, olfactory, gustatory, or affective in character. These signs are unpredictable, self-emergent in origin and self-organizing in their details and dynamics, with meditative practices wildly varying in terms of ignoring, noting, and actually pursuing their emergent logics.

[5] As helpful as the dichotomy between enstatic and observational analytical methods of meditation may be in some Buddhist contexts, it is overly simplistic and thus limited in value for understanding the long and diverse history of meditation in Buddhist traditions, and especially so for Tibet. An important theorization and categorization of meditation that such a dualism obscures is connected to the value of emergent experiences for guiding practices, which are related to critiques of (i) over reliance upon prescribed techniques, (ii) scripted procedures, habituation, (iii) intentional and deliberate control of meditative processes, (iv) conceptualization and analysis as driving forces of meditation, (v) focus on deeply interior meditations, and (vi) adherence to forceful effort in technique. Traditions giving voice to such critiques typically strongly voice rhetorical claims of being effortless, involving no action, and even at times going beyond meditative practice itself with its techniques and formal sessions, though the reality of such rhetoric was, as generally is the case, far more complex than a simple rejection of the value and cogency of meditative practice as such. While certainly some traditions given to such rhetoric may very well have eschewed meditative practice itself in specific instances, more typically in Tibet we find these traditions pervaded by practices involving techniques, effort, thought, and discipline.

[6] Our challenge is thus to understand the interrelationship of rhetoric and lived reality on the contemplative grounds of these texts, communities, and traditions in appraising the true significance of claims of effortlessness in contemplative practice. As we shall see, it turns out that certain types of effort, practice, and thought considered to be normative and problematic are rejected, while other types are embraced as understood to facilitate self-emergent processes linked to aesthetic experiences.

[7] In the long history of Buddhism across Asia, the most famous, or infamous, of such traditions valorizing no effort, thought, or practice are the Great Seal (*phyag rgya chen po*; Skt. *Mahāmudrā*) tradition that originated in India and then developed in Tibet (Jackson 2011, 2019, 220), the Great Perfection (*rdzogs pa chen po*) tradition in Tibet (Germano 1994, 2005), and the Meditation (Skt. *Dhyana*, Chinese *chán*, Japanese *zen*) tradition originating in China and then further developing in Vietnam, Korea, and Japan (Welter, Heine, and Park 2022). Like the other two, the Great Perfection is preoccupied with the problem of effort, and the allure of effortlessness, from its origins, and in all of its long complex arcs of exploration over fourteen centuries. Effort (*'bad rtsol*) is viewed as a central problem in religious practice and philosophical thought in its portrayal as the very root of saṃsāra's cyclic existence (*'khor ba*), and as an active impediment to liberatory progress down the pathway to nirvāṇa's tran-

scendence (*’das pa*). Correlated strongly with conceptuality (*rnam rtog*), duality (*gnyis ’dzin*), contrivance (*bcos pa*), emotional distortions (*nyon mongs*; Skt. *kleśa*), and belief in self (*bdag tu lta ba*), effort is defined paradigmatically in terms of physical, verbal, and mental actions (*las*; Skt. *karma*) that characterize life and which focus on patterns of acceptance and rejection (*blang dor*). Indeed, in the early years of the Great Perfection, it at times seems to equate religious practice (*lag len*) itself with effort, and as such rhetorically dismiss ritual procedures (*cho ga*), meditation (*sgom*), and ethical practices (*tshul khrims*) as not only irrelevant, but even as constituting active impediments. In later forms from at least the eleventh century, it tends to use the rhetoric of effort to critique the contemplative practices of other traditions as focused on habituation, forceful control, regulation, and manipulation, or as an index to rank some of its own practices as inferior to others which are more given over to effortlessness. In contrast, effortlessness is both portrayed as the nature of a Buddha, as well as characterizing the best types of contemplative practice.

Philosophically, the tradition speaks of two forms of knowing and experiencing in human being (Higgins 2013). Awareness (*rig pa*; Skt. *vidyā*) or primordial knowing (*ye shes*; Skt. *jñāna*) is valued as expressive of a Buddha’s wisdom, viewed as the primary creative agent of existence, and characterized as ‘effortless’ in its non-conceptual and spontaneous dynamism. Awareness is then contrasted to the ordinary mind (*sems*), which is denigrated as the driving agent behind the cyclic existence of suffering, viewed as a secondary epiphenomenon that dissolves away in enlightenment, and characterized as ‘effortful’ in its tendencies to strive, manipulate, conceptualize, and contrive. Thus effort also has strong correlations with attention, such that both effortful action and effortful attention are central targets of critique, while effortless action and attention are valorized as contemplative pathways to liberation. The dyad of action and attention are intertwined in the pervasive philosophical distinction between action (*las*; Skt. *karma*) and primordial knowing (karmic vs. gnostic orders), with the former—itself the paradigmatic vernacular word for action in Tibetan—associated with effort and ordinary life and the latter—which incorporates one of the main Tibetan words for cognition and knowing (*shes pa*)—with effortlessness and liberation. These dichotomies are also brought to bear in classifying a special type of human action, namely religious practice and contemplation, into a category of practices classified as ‘effortful’ with a variety of forceful actions constituting scripted techniques and guided activity involving intention and modulation involving the ordinary mind, and into a contrasting category of practices classified as ‘effortless’ with a focus on letting-go and self-emergence that elicit the agency of primordial knowing coming to the fore. [8]

I would suggest that opacity—epistemological obscurations to vision and understanding—is a key problem being addressed by these types of meditative practices, though admittedly linguistically this is not thematized as centrally as it might be. In general, darkness (*mun pa*) is a standard Buddhist term to evoke ignorance or unawareness (*ma rig pa*; Skt. *avidyā*), and by extension is explicitly used to designate a time period of an ‘eon’ (*bskal pa*; Skt. *kalpa*) or a entire world in which the Buddha’s teachings, imaged as luminous ‘lamps’ (*sgron ma*), are not available to illuminate that darkness. Opacity, however, extends beyond mere ignorance to the epistemological opacities of one’s own near impossible to glimpse complex karmic history of entangled causes and conditions that have shaped who and where one is today, of the body’s interior, of one’s embodied unconsciousness, of the darkness of the night, and of contrived reality construction that obscures the underlying natural reality. The liberatory goal of enlightenment (*byang chub*; Skt. *bodhi*) requires that such opacity be illuminated (*mun sel*), [9]

while the post-enlightenment pedagogical arcs of a Buddha entail offering illuminating lamps of teachings to dispel that darkness for others. The tradition thus evokes the contemplative transformation of suffering human beings as grounded in the deep radiance and clarity of the mind's final nature, as well as illuminated bodily interiors in which previously unknown interior divine lamps (*sgron ma*) of awareness (*rig pa*; Skt. *vidyā*) activate in contemplative practice to flow into space, foster experiences of deep entanglement with luminous Buddhas, and offer luminosity to dispel the darkness of ignorance. This contrast of darkness (*mun pa*) and the luminosity (*'od gsal*) of self-emergent visions is even more clear in the variant of the Seminal Heart's central practice of direct transcendence (*thod rgal*) that uses the environment of pitch black darkness to inculcate these visionary experiences.

Generative Contemplation and Contemplative Fluency

[10] I will reflect on this question of effort in the Great Perfection by focusing on the minutiae of its meditative practices in the context of an interpretative framework of my own devising which I term 'generative contemplation'. Rather than focusing on contemplation as a series of discrete practice detailed in traditional procedural instructions, the framework proposes understanding contemplation as a human capacity for designing, creating, and constantly modifying an infinite variety of deeply embodied and contextualized practices. Such generativity—the capacity to generate diverse forms and variants of practices depending upon contexts, audience, and needs in an ongoing fashion—is based upon deep fluency or literacy in a finite body of elements, rules, and contexts that are both explicit and implicit in nature. Analogically, it is similar to fluency in a language that allows us to generate new forms of speech constantly throughout the day as we talk to different people in different contexts; mastery of speech is thus not in memorizing a body of set speeches, but in fluency in underlying lexicons, grammars, and so forth which allow such generativity. In this regard, using linguistic generativity and fluency as an analogy, we can analyze specific contemplative practices to discern distinctive lexicons, grammatical structures, semantics, experiential aspects, and communicative contexts in any given tradition.

[11] In this way, procedural instructions that spell out the various steps for a given contemplative practice play crucial functions in allowing the results of such generativity to be replicable by others, perhaps analogous to learning a song through its lyrics and score, or a play through its script. But in general, such instructions for a contemplative practice are generally quite inadequate, because they are short hand without many details that are transmitted in embodied presence and oral detail, customization that tailors the practice of an individual in their personal constitution as well as ongoing experience, and the extraordinary infinity of constituitive contexts within a given community or culture present in associated philosophical frameworks, cosmologies, habits of the body, physical environment, and so much more. In addition, the procedural instructions, even just as we find the in the written literature, are extremely varied for the same practice, often even for a single author, much less across time and tradition. Thus even to understand a given practice at a basic level, we have to go well beyond just reviewing a single instance of procedural instructions. But if we want to also understand the underlying processes of collection of practices that constitute a tradition, we need to analytically and interpretatively discern, assess, and interpret the underlying processes, dynamics, and mechanisms of each practice in their own right, and then comparatively. In this way we can begin to understand the distinctive lexicons, grammars, semantics,

experiences, and communicative contexts of the tradition as a whole, such that we can begin to understand the nature of contemplative fluency in that specific tradition. That then allows us to begin to consider how such fluency is transmitted and acquired across generations, and understand the boundaries and possibilities of variation in that tradition.

Firstly, we need to analyze practices into their lexicons of constituent elements or terms that constitute the basic building blocks of any given contemplative practice. This includes basic contemplative gestures, procedures, experiences, philosophical ideas, physical postures, gazes, experiences, entire practices modularized into components inserted into other practices, considerations, images, breathing sequences, figures, and much more. [12]

Secondly, we need to determine the grammatical principles and forms that govern how these contemplative elements can be combined into meaningful wholes and then contextualized so as to constitute a tremendous variety of individual practices, which themselves typically exist in equally diverse variations, whether in canonized literary form, established oral and embodied traditions, or in on the spot individuated customizations. This includes the syntax or order of elements, connectors that link the elements together into phrases, clauses, and sentences, qualities and facets of actions that offer partial analogies to tense and aspect, determiners that qualify and give shape to the elements, and punctuation in terms of the equivalent of pauses, stresses, and intonations that govern a practice's rhythm and pacing. [13]

Thirdly, there is the semantics of contemplative practice which focuses on how they reflect and articulate meaning in their processes and details. This begins with the literal language in which the practice is expressed, through examining the diction, rhetorical devices, images, and metaphors that are evoked therein. It then extends to the philosophical and cosmological meanings and frameworks that the practice articulates and engages through its processes and elements. [14]

Fourthly, the experiential dimensions of the practice require phenomenological exploration to investigate how the engaged and evoked experiences themselves constitute a separate strand of meaning-making. Fifthly, there are the complex communicative and experiential contexts in which those combined elements are deployed and situated to constitute a fuller system, including genres by which they are grouped together and thus combined into larger wholes consisting of multiple practices, and the hermeneutical schemes and contexts through which they are interpreted. Just as the communicative power of language is intimately bound up with the actual contexts in which utterances take place—facial expressions, body language, relationship with audience, social contexts, spatial settings, temporal contexts, and much more—a contemplative practice can only be understood through a full analysis and appreciation of the constitutive roles of its many contexts. [15]

The Linguistic Principle of Transitivity

The analogical basis of this comparison between contemplation and language does not necessitate any precise correlation between the two, such as looking for correlates for specific linguistic phenomena and principles in our analysis and interpretation of contemplative practices. Rather, the focus of the framework is on considering contemplation as a generative capacity with deep levels of fluency enabling endless variation within implicit constraints and possibilities that can be understood with deep analysis. That said, given that the study of language is a far more sophisticated academic endeavor than the study of contemplation, and that the same individuals theorizing and creating linguistic utterances in Tibet were also [16]

potentially theorizing and creating contemplative practices, there may very well be benefit to exploring such correlations as a heuristic device. In addition, centuries of Tibetan creators and theorists of contemplation have used Tibetan language in describing and analyzing those practices, and their granular actions, such that the nuances of language in Tibet must be understood in how they are being used to point to nuances of contemplative actions and experience. And of course, many contemplative practices are explicitly interwoven with spoken and written language as such, ranging from complex visualizations of the alphabet, to visualized processes and intonation of mantric syllables, to liturgy. Finally, language is embedded within cognition, and cognition within language, including the cognitive ability to build sentences by combining lexical items following specific syntactical principles. In the present context, I will explore precisely these possibilities by looking at a single grammatical aspect, namely transitivity, in Tibetan language *and* Tibetan contemplation in exploring effort and effortlessness within Great Perfection meditation.

Transitivity in linguistics is usually understood as a verbal clause involving an exchange between an agent and a patient, or someone doing something on an object. Thus an activity is ‘carried over’ or ‘transferred’ from an agent (A) to a patient (P) or object (O), such that generally two participants are necessary and the action in question must be *effective* in some way (Hopper and Thompson 1980, 251). The ‘patient’ *receives* some degree of action in a transitive clause. A classic example of a transitive verbal clause would be “Tashi hit the ball,” while an intransitive verbal clause would be “Tashi fell down.” Although people sometimes consider this as a binary phenomenon—a verbal clause is either transitive or intransitive—in fact transitivity is a scalar phenomenon that can be present in greater or lesser degree in any given case on a continuum. The intensity of transitivity, simply, is contextually determined by (i) the degree of intentionality and involvement on the part of the agent in relation to the action in question, (ii) the degree of energy involved in the action, and (iii) the degree to which the recipient of that action is transformed in the process. It has also been argued that transitivity is modular in the sense that the collective effect of a series of modular components constitutes what we think of as transitivity. Each component focuses on a different facet of how action is transferred from the agent to the patient. Many of these diverse modular components that constitute transitivity are themselves scalar, such that their combined effect itself constitutes a scale that determines a verb’s degree of transitivity; this could also be expressed as transitivity being treated as a gradable and multi-factorial notion (Malchukov and de Swart 2008, 339). [17]

In their 1980 landmark study on transitivity, Hopper and Thompson (1980, 251–53) suggests there are ten parameters (what I term above ‘modular components’) of transitivity, and also analyze the scalar character of transitivity. My discussion here is indebted to this framework, particularly in its presentation of transitivity as a modular and scalar phenomena.[1] In the present context, I can only offer a brief summary: [18]

(1) *Participants*: points to at least two participants being required to have any transfer of activity at all. [19]

1 The framework has been discussed extensively over the years with many proposed adaptions (such as Tsunoda 1985; or Malchukov and de Swart 2008). In addition, many languages, including Tibetan, have different linguistic features from English and related languages, such as not having syntactically determined subjects and objects, which complicates the discussion of transitivity (Kittilä 2002). However, this paper is not predicated upon a strict correlation between linguistic structures and processes, and contemplative structures and processes, much less a deterministic relationship; instead, I use the linguistic scheme in question as a point of departure for a quite different approach in a different domain (Contemplative Studies).

(2) *Kinesis*: refers to actions being transferrable from one participant to another, but not states such as 'like' and so forth. [20]

(3) *Aspect*: signifies whether the action in question has been completed, or not, with completed actions involving more transfer of activity since the action has been completely carried out. [21]

(4) *Punctuality*: points to whether the action is inherently on-going, such as to carry, or has no obvious transition between its beginning and its completion, such as to kick; the former has more transitivity since its duration is potentially longer. That said, it would seem this is debatable, since a singular act might be particularly intense and impactful, compared to a continuing act of low intensity [22]

(5) *Volitionality*: refers to whether the agent is acting purposively or not, with volitional or intentional verbs of purposive action showing more effect on the patient. [23]

(6) *Affirmation*: covers whether the verb is affirmative or negative, with transitivity being higher with the affirmative. [24]

(7) *Mode*: signifies the degree to which the action actually appears in the real world, in contrast to not occurring at all, or occurring in a non-real world; the more it occurs in the real world, the more transitivity. [25]

(8) *Agency*: points to whether the participants are high or low in agency, with higher agency involving greater transfer of activity. [26]

(9) *Affectedness of Object*: involves how completely the patient or object is affected, such as "I drank up the milk" or "I drank up some of the milk," with greater transitivity correlated to more complete affect. [27]

(10) *Individuation of Object*: refers to the distinctness of the patient from the agent, and from its own background, with the greater degree of individuation between agent and patient pointing to greater transfer of action. This has its own set of poles between individuated and non-individuated, with the first term indicating more transitivity than the second term—proper vs. common, human/animate vs. inanimate, concrete vs. abstract, singular vs. plural, count vs. mass, and referential/definite vs. non-referential. [28]

Nr.	Modular component of transitivity
(1)	Participants
(2)	Kinesis
(3)	Aspect
(4)	Punctuality
(5)	Volitionality
(6)	Affirmation
(7)	Mode
(8)	Agency

Thus while of considerable interest, strictly speaking these issues are not absolutely necessary to review herein and space limitations prevent me from doing so.

Nr.	Modular component of transitivity
(9)	Affectedness of Object
(10)	Individuation of Object

[29] When we turn to the Tibetan languages family (*The Tibetic Languages: An Introduction to the Family of Languages Derived from Old Tibetan* 2023), the fact that they are ergative language (Tournadre 1996) entails that it is without syntactically determined subjects and objects, and that the agents of transitive and intransitive clauses are marked differently in terms of case in transitive and intransitive verb pairs. The agents for transitive verbs are explicitly marked as such by use of the agentive case marker (variant forms include *gyis, kyis, gis, 'is, yis*), while the agents in intransitive clauses are marked identically with the objects in the transitive clause, namely with zero marking by the absolutive case. The Tibetan terms for transitive and intransitive translate as 'different' or 'differentiative' (*tha dad*) and 'not different' or 'differentiative' (*tha mi dad*) respectively, which points to whether or not there is difference between the agent and recipient for a given verb. Such verbal pairs classically share a common stem, and their morphology varies in predictable ways, such as *grub*, 'to take form' or 'become' vs. *bsgrub*, 'to accomplish' or 'practice', or *skye*, 'to be born' vs. *bskyed*, 'to generate', or *goms* 'to become used to, to have a habit', vs. *sgom*, 'to meditate, to acquire a habit'. This also can be seen in the distinction between "The vase broke" (*bum pa chag song*) and "I broke the vase" (*ngas bum pa bcag pa red*), where the pair is *chag* and *gcog*. Such verb pairs involve transitivity and intransitivity, but also address causativity—the transitive verbs are causative, and the intransitive verbs are anti-causative or resultative. The basic distinction is that a causative verb involves *causing* something to happen such that an agent additional to what is happening or being impacted is performing an action, while the resultative verb deals with something happening by itself, which usually implies no additional agent. In linguistics, syntactical causality is when one says, "The pharaoh made the workers build the pyramid," whereby a specific agent causes something to happen. In contrast, the category of 'causative' is not usually applied to verbs like eat, or look, since even if there is an agent, the agent doesn't trigger a process to happen in the same way. Thus we say "I ate the salad," or "She looked at the bird," where "I" or "she" are each solitary agents in the sentences.

[30] In fact, while causative verbs are always transitive, since they add a causative agent to the process being described, resultative verbs are only usually intransitive, but with exceptions (Tournadre 2003, 352–55). For example, the syntactical structure could indicate explicitly that the process described by the resultative verb in fact is a result achieved by virtue of a transitive process: "The tantric master *sent* (*phabs*) hail and the hail really *fell* (*babs*)." The second part in isolation implies no agent and thus an intransitive process (*fell*), but when it appears as preceded by the causative verbal phrase (*send*), it implies clearly that the *falling* is a result of the *sending*, such that it becomes transitive in function. It is thus like moving a camera around where the focus is on the result instead of the agent, but it is still transitive.

[31] However, not all transitive verbs are causative, and there are also pairs of verbs classified by Tibetan grammarians as transitive/intransitive, but which don't share a stem or root, and do not involve differentials in causativity. Examples include the well-known sensory pairs of 'see' and 'look' (*lta* and *mthong*), or 'listen' and 'hear', (*go* or *thos* and *nyan*). In either case, verbs classified as transitive will typically have different tenses, including the imperative, while the intransitive does not. In such contexts, the modern Tibetan grammarian Kalsang Gyurmé has famously critiqued this traditional Tibetan model of transitivity as confusing two competing

aspects, namely controllability and volitionality (Gyurmé 1992, 356–77, 1994 (same text translated into French, pp. 245–261; Tournadre 2003, 141–47).

[32] The pair of *lta* and *mthong* are thus both transitive, while the distinction between the two is instead on the basis of the former being 'voluntary' and controllable, and the latter being 'involuntary' and uncontrollable. The traditional Tibetan model in this way confuses transitivity with controllability (or volitionality). For this reason, in the passage cited above, Gyurmé coined a terminological distinction between 'under its own power' (*rang dbang*) and 'under other power' (*gzhan dbang*), or voluntary and involuntary. In an activity the agent can have control potentially or in reality over that process so that there is an intentionality to it, or the agent can have no such control, such that their intentionality is not at stake. The distinction of tha dad and tha mi dad in this context is not about transitivity—both verbs in each pair involve transitivity in the sense of an agent sensing and object being sensed—but instead shows how the Tibetan verb system is sensitive to controllability and intentionality. 'To look' (*lta*) is intentional and controllable, such that it has an imperative form, while 'to see' (*mthong*) is unintentional and uncontrollable, and for that reason has no imperative.

[33] I would also note the distinction between active and passive voice. For example, in the distinction between "I broke the vase" and "The vase broke," the latter, which corresponds to an anticausative verb, potentially signifies a purely passive process in which no agent was involved and thus has no transitivity. In contrast, saying "The thief robbed the bank" vs. "The bank was robbed by the thief," or "The bank was robbed," the activity and its violence are unchanged. Rather the difference between active and passive voice here has to do with the latter's demotion of the agent and promotion of the patient. This simply shifts the focus from the agent to the patient in terms of what is most important, rather than entailing that the activity is different or changed in any way, or that there is not an agent doing that activity. In the example, in the first case the agent (the thief) is focused on by being the subject in the active voice, while in the second the agent is demoted to a peripheral position and rendered less important in order to focus on the patient (the bank), which becomes the subject. In the third case, the agent (thief) is eliminated without changing the verb, such that reference is only made to the patient (bank). Just like with the case wherein a resultative verb can acquire a transitive significance, it is as if a camera moves within these different linguistic forms to highlight now the agent, and then the patient. In addition, there is the mediopassive voice, which is when both the agent and patient are identical, e.g., "I wash myself."

Scales of Transitivity in Contemplation

[34] Transitivity in modern linguistics, as well as in Tibetan grammar, is thus deeply intertwined with issues of agency, transference, intentionality, impact, volitionality, individuation, and effort. When we turn to Tibetan contemplative practice and experience, we find a similar range of phenomena constellated around considerations of the presence, role, and limits of effort (*'bad rtsol, rtsol, 'bad, brtson 'grus*) in such contexts. This is hardly surprising given the very notion of transitivity is centrally grounded in an analysis of how effortful activity transfers from an agent to a recipient which is impacted. The focus in transitivity on there being at least two participants may at first seem in tension with the often solitary nature of contemplative effort, in which a practitioner conducts formal meditative sessions often in isolation. However, in fact Tibetan theorizations of contemplation and the self of the practitioner alike—theoretically and practically—deconstruct the apparently uniform contemplative who

engages in these practices into a variety of elements, processes, and presences that allow for agents, patients, and objects to exist in abundance within a single, multiplicitous self. Attention can thus be directed to parts of the body as its object, the conventional mind can manipulate winds within the body, internal Buddhas can awaken in the heart and trigger the movement of light, and so forth.

[35] The nature of effort within contemplation varies in general type in Tibetan literature, but most generally is detailed as mental, physical, and verbal. For example, we have *mental* efforts at creating visualizations, considering complex reasonings, contemplating narrations or envisioning scenarios, focusing different senses on objects, actively deconstructing a conceptual edifice or habituated patterns of behavior, shifting attentional modality, or stilling the mind; *verbal* efforts at chanting a syllable or mantra, reciting a liturgy that guides and informs the practice being conducted, remaining completely silent, or conversely verbally expressing whatever comes to mind; and *physical* efforts at settling into postures, changing one's breathing pattern, making symbolic gestures with the hands ('seals'), or making movements called 'magical devices' (*'phrul 'khor*).

[36] Effort in relationship to contemplation in the Great Perfection literature is clearly portrayed as a scalar phenomenon in which it can be present to lesser or greater degrees, even if at times some practices are identified in binary fashion as 'effortless' (*'bad med, 'bad rtsol ma byas*) or 'effortful'. Effort is implicitly treated as a modular phenomenon consisting of a series of interwoven strands, or components, each of which is potentially scalar in its own right, and which as an aggregate results in an assessment of an overall practice, or a module or specific action in a contemplative practice, in regards to how much effort it does or does not involve. However the details are far from clear, such that I think it is useful to articulate a set of parameters for contemplative effort inspired in part by the ten parameters for transitivity detailed above. What causes a contemplative practice to be classified as more or less effortful, or effortless? The following set of twelve parameters are highly provisional hypotheses for an analytical scale of transitivity in contemplation, with transitivity understood in this context as the degree to which deliberate and intentional effort directed by consciousness awareness is being deployed in a contemplative practice. This scheme is articulated in reference to contemplative practices and theorizations drawn from the Tibetan Great Perfection tradition in the sources cited in the ensuing sections.

[37] The first item in each scalar pair represents the pole of effort, and the second item the pole of effortlessness (see table below for an overview).

(1) *Intentionality/Self-Emergence*: the greater degree to which the practice is guided by the practitioner's intentionality (*dmigs pa, dgongs pa, dgongs pa dmigs pa, bsam bzhin du, rkang btsugs nas, ched du, dmigs su bkar ba, 'dun pa*), the greater the effort; the more the practice consists of self-emergent (*rang snang, rang byung*) processes and events outside of that intentionality, the less the effort. [38]

(2) *Scriptedness/Spontaneity*: the greater degree to which the practice is scripted (*bsgrigs, bcos ma, ched du bya ba, yi ge bzhin du*), the greater the effort; the more the practice is spontaneous (*lhun* (*gyis*) *grub* (*pa*), *lhun gyis, glo bur*, *rang shar du byung ba*, *rang shugs* (*gyis*), *rang babs su*, *rang byung gyis* (*grub pa*), *rang bzhin gyis*, *shugs* (*las*) *'byung, ma bsgrigs*) and unscripted, the less the effort. This also relates to how determinate or indeterminate the details of a contemplative practice are prior to its initiation. [39]

(3) *Agency/Receptivity*: the higher the practitioner has agency (*byed po, byed po'i nus pa,* [40]

dbang) and volitionality (*rang dbang*) over the details and directional control of the contemplative actions and events, the greater the effort; the more the practitioner is the recipient or witness (*byed yul, rag mkhan*) of such actions and events not under their control (*gzhan dbang*), the less the effort.

(4) *Force/Naturalness*: the more the practitioner has to exercise force (*drag tu, btsan shugs, stobs*) in contemplative actions that goes against what is natural (*rang bzhin, gnyug ma*), the greater the effort; the more the actions involve letting be (*cog bzhag, bzhag*) and natural processes (*rang bzhin gyi, rang babs su, gnyug ma, rnal ma*) not requiring force to alter (*bcos*) them, the less the effort. [41]

(5) *Conceptuality/Non-Conceptuality*: the more the practice involves conceptual contrivances (*bcos ma*), abstract considerations (*rtog bcas*), and imagined activity (*bsam, dmigs, gsal 'debs*), the greater the effort; the more it does not and involves non-conceptual (*mi rtog pa*), concrete (*dngos*), and autonomous processes (*rang dbang, rang skyong*), the less the effort. This dyad also aligns sensory experience (*dbang shes*) with the non-conceptual. [42]

(6) *Individuation/Entanglement*: the greater degree to which the practitioner in the contemplative practice is individuated (*bdag nyid, gcig po*) from others, reality, and their background, the more effort is involved; the more they are entangled (*drwa ba*) and unified (*zung 'jug, mnyam 'brel, gcig gyur*) with others, reality (*chos nyid*), and their background, the less the effort. [43]

(7) *Boundedness/Fluidity*: the greater degree to which the practice consists of discrete steps (*rim pa*) and entities (*dngos po*), including bounded meditative sessions (*thun*) with specific beginnings (*thog ma*) and ends (*mtha' ma*), the greater the effort; the more the practice is a fluid (*rgyun, rgyud*) set of processes and relationships, including being diffused into ongoing life (*thun mtshams las 'das pa'i sgom, mnyam rjes 'dres pa, mnyam rjes med par gyur, nyin mtshan med pa*), the less the effort. [44]

(8) *Kinesis/Stasis*: the degree to which a high degree of movement (*'gul ba, g.yo ba, 'gyu ba*) on any level is involved within the practitioner's being, the greater the effort; the more the practitioner's body, mind, and speech is still (*mi 'gul ba, mi g.yo ba, mi 'gyu ba*), the less the effort. [45]

(9) *Affirmation/Negation*: the degree to which the activity or process is described positively (*sgrub pa, yod pa*), the greater the effort; the more the process is described negatively (*dgag pa, med pa*), the less the effort. [46]

(10) *Evocation/Dissolution*: the degree to which the contemplative activity involves the evocation (*sgrub*) or creation of structure or activity (*las*), the greater the effort; the degree to which it involves the dissolution (*thim pa*) of structure or activity, the less the effort. [47]

(11) *Object/Subject*: the degree to which the activity involves external objects (*phyi yul, gzung yul*), the greater the effort; the degree to which the activity involves the subject (*nang yul can, gang zag*), the less the effort. [48]

(12) *Gradual/Instantaneous*: the degree to which the activity involves a series of gradually implemented steps (*rim pa, rim gyis*), the greater the effort; the degree to which it involves instantaneous processes (*cig car, skad gcig*), the less the effort. [49]

Nr.	Pole of Effort	Pole of Effortlessness
(1)	Intentionality	Self-Emergence
(2)	Scriptedness	Spontaneity
(3)	Agency	Receptivity
(4)	Force	Naturalness
(5)	Conceptuality	Non-Conceptuality
(6)	Individuation	Entanglement
(7)	Boundedness	Fluidity
(8)	Kinesis	Stasis
(9)	Affirmation	Negation
(10)	Evocation	Dissolution
(11)	Object	Subject
(12)	Gradual	Instantaneous

Based upon the linguistic sense of transitivity, I thus propose the exercise of classifying contemplative activities and processes in the Great Perfection tradition as transitive or intransitive to varying degrees, as assessed by the degree of effort involved, with effort defined in intensity and nature in terms of the above twelve parameters. This is clearly not identical with the linguistic notion of transitivity with its focus on the exchange of activity between a subject/agent and object/patient, but it is clearly deeply intertwined with it. I am also particularly interested in dramatic shifts in contemplative transitivity, when specific processes and/or moments in a contemplative practice entail significant shifts in the degree and nature of effort, as well as in the character of the agent and patient. Despite the tradition's own rhetoric at times suggesting practices are either effortful or effortless, as if effort is a fixed and static quantity that is present or absent, these practices are more typically engaged in dynamic and ongoing shifts across a spectrum of intensities of effort. Efforts are asserted, then released; a whirlwind of effort crescendos, and then results in a collapse in which all effort dissipates; the locus of agency shifts from one's mind wherein effort is experienced in one's own intentions manifesting in action, to sensations surging from within one's body outside of one's direction, or a vision autonomously taking shape in the space in front of one, or the details of a sensory experience unfolding according to its own logic. It is in this context that an adapted concept of transitivity can be illuminating to account for these transfers and transformations of effort over the course of a contemplative practice. How do transitive processes switch over into intransitive processes, and how does the level of transitivity fluctuate in intensity, degree, and character over the course of a meditative session? Indeed, the degree of transitivity could remain the same, but the precise mix of components and their individual degrees could still shift in marked ways. [50]

The most paradigmatic of these transitions are abrupt shifts from highly transitive activities to highly intransitive activities. However, based upon the scalar and modular notion of effort outlined above in the twelve parameter framework, these shifts are best viewed in terms of degrees of transitivity, which equally pertains for shifts in the opposite direction of intransitive to transitive. Of particular importance are (i) shifts involving the locus of agency and (ii) the degree to which the practitioner is consciously and intentionally initiating and guiding a given practice and the details of what happens within it. In addition, there is (iii) the degree to which the practitioner is having the subjective experience of effort or effortlessness, which arguably correlates to the overall intensity of effort according to the twelve parameters. In practice, [51]

these three elements are deeply intertwined, since subjective sense of effort is strongly correlated with the sense of agency in a process belonging to one's intentional, deliberate efforts expending resources or energy, while the locus of agency fluctuates in relationship to one's sense of the degree to which the meditative activities and events are a direct result of one's own immediate actions and thus effort. For example, one's own self-aware mind can be the locus of agency for a given contemplative activity, such as painstakingly visualizing a deity, or holding one's breath in the abdominal region, or many other such actions that are executed according to a script articulated in procedural instructions. Conversely, the activity can be outside of one's own control or intentions, such as the processes of an autonomous vision, or the shifting occurrence of lights, shapes, and sounds triggered by contemplative actions, and instead involve dynamically changing specificities which are self-emergent and thus indeterminate in character prior to their emergence. These can be interblended, such that one may first self-consciously visualize a figure or figures or processes, but then they may take on a life of their own outside of one's conscious intention. Or the action might be one that is from the force of deep habituation, which may have at one point been intentionally cultivated, but now enjoys an automated emergence without having to intend it or expend conscious effort on guiding it.

Six Notable Transfers in Transitivity within Meditations

Such shifts in contemplative transitivity can thus involve often abrupt shifting from transitive processes in which the practitioner—in terms of their conscious sense of self and intention—is the agent acting with deliberation, direction, voluntary control, and effort to spontaneous, involuntary, automatic, and effortless processes to which the practitioner is patient, witness, or recipient. The directionality can also be in the opposite direction from intransitive to transitive. In addition, there can be moments where agency and effort are released, but not replaced by, reversed into, or transferred into some other active process, beyond a quiet sitting or empty dissolution. There are a range of possibilities or styles of significant transitioning between transitivity and intransitivity in contemplation, and I will here sketch six types of particularly important types of transition, and then examine them within actual meditative practices in the Seminal Heart tradition. [52]

1. Habituation

Firstly, there is the most normative model of Buddhist meditation in India and Tibet, namely repetitive activity in formal procedures that result in a deep internalization and automaticity (*goms*). This involves a practitioner doing a certain practice—a sequence of actions, a visualization, a consideration, a perceptual alignment—repeatedly, to the point that it becomes second nature, arising effortlessly as a visualization becomes a vision, an intention becomes an automatic perception, and a philosophical reflection becomes how one immediately and instinctively experiences the world. Experientially, one begins the practice as a deliberate set of effortful activities executed according to a contemplative script, but over time the phenomena in question—the body's interior as subtle channels and wheels, a richly detailed image of a Buddha, the perception of phenomena as suffering, impermanent, and devoid of self, to name just a few—become automatic reflexes or seemingly spontaneous self-emergent experiences no longer experienced as a product of deliberate intention and contrived effort. While [53]

their provenance may be repetition and deep conditioning, the results in the moment are experienced as being effortless, easeful, and self-emergent, and in some cases, can also have autonomous dynamics that begin to stir in motion with unpredictable details. The visualization segues into a vision which begins to talk, while the visualized energy flowing through the channels and wheels may come to be felt viscerally as moving in emergent and unpredictable manners. On the other hand, habituation more often leads to inflexible automaticity, rather than emergent dynamism, in which the practitioner's automatic reflexes inhibit seeing or experiencing things in different ways, such that overall adaptability declines.

2. Dissolution

[54] A second type of contemplative transition between transitivity and intransitivity is the gesture of *dissolution*, which is ubiquitous in Buddhist meditation. In its paradigmatic form, it is an intentional but largely intransitive gesture of release or letting go following a flurry of meditative activity. After complex visualizations of deity yoga, the visualizations are surrendered and the practitioner rests quietly for a period in emptiness or the nature of the mind; or an intense set of analytical considerations aimed at understanding reality are released, following which the practitioner rests in a non-conceptual state. In its purest form in terms of intransitivity, it is triggered indirectly as an automatic consequence of other activities or processes, rather than constituting an intentional gesture. Examples are the automatic fading of appearances in the fourth and final vision of 'reality's exhaustion' (*chos nyid zad pa'i snang ba*) in direct transcendence meditation (*thod rgal*), or the dissolution of somatic winds and their accompanying conceptuality triggered as a consequence of holding the breath in a 'vase' within one's lower abdominal region (*rlung bum pa can*), and other meditative actions. Such dissolution is understood to be a reflection of the ordinary dissolution of physical processes and associated consciousness occurring every night in the process of falling asleep, as well as at the end of life in dying. Additionally, the dissolution can be more forceful in character, and hence more transitive and effortful, such as analytical meditation (*dpyad sgom*) on emptiness which is actively deconstructive, or visualizations aimed at dynamically perforating phenomena towards radical dissolution, such as the use of *hūṃ* syllables in the direct transcendence preliminary practice of speech (Germano 1997b, 322–25, 334). However, regardless of the degree of effort involved in how the transition itself is elicited, the transition involves a marked shift from structured activity and processes with guiding intentionality to the subsiding of such and immersion in fluid process, as well as often quiet and stillness. As we shall see, such dissolution can be the entire practice, such as in some forms of emptiness meditation (*stong sgom*) or the Seminal Heart practice of breakthrough (*khregs chod*), or it can be interwoven with its paradigmatic contemplative twin, ritual evocation with complex visualizations, such as in deity yoga (*lha'i rnal 'byor*).

3. Exhaustion

[55] A third type of transition between transitivity and intransitivity in contemplative practices is in *exhaustion* (*zad pa*) or encountering, and exceeding, limits (*mtha'*), which is closely linked to dissolution. This can involve triggering physical, verbal, or mental exhaustion either by doing something repetitively, or performing activities that are overwhelming due to their chaotic or shocking character. This includes experiences of dramatic shifts that disrupt or exceed one's usual frameworks and reality, such as experiences of awe, radical deconstruction,

or shock. Such experiences push one to and beyond limiting thresholds, whether physical, verbal, emotional, or cognitive, such as in the contemplative experimentation with death, sexuality, radical emptiness, and sleeping. This leads to a temporary involuntary and unintentional cessation of ordinary physical, verbal, and/or mental activity, which the Seminal Heart tradition terms 'settling into naturalness" (*rnal du dbab pa*), 'relaxation' (*ngal gso*), or 'release' (*lhod lhod*). This cessation can also occur through other means, such as cultivated experiences of awe, intense experiences like bliss in sexual practices, and radical deconstruction through reasoning, inquiry, or visualizations of perforation. Thus there is a dramatic escalation or intensification of either effort or specific experiences, which then have a cumulative impact of overwhelming one's system. Within the Seminal Heart tradition, this is most famously expressed in its preliminary meditation for direct transcendence termed 'the differentiation of cyclic existence and transcendence' (*'khor 'das ru shan*), in which one does whatever mental, verbal, and physical actions surge to mind, speech, and body for lengthy periods, until completely exhausted, at which point one collapses into an experience of naturalness (Longchenpa 1983b, 370.3–374.3; Germano 1997b, 317–21, 331–34). Another of its preliminary practices, the 'preliminaries of body', involve holding a pose in which the body is made to resemble an upright vajra, a type of ritual scepter functioning as an emblem of power, until the body involuntarily collapses to the ground (Longchenpa 1983b, 374.3–375.1; Germano 1997b, 321–22, 334).

4. Evocation

[56] A fourth type of transition is *evocation* (*sgrub*), which is at the heart of the most normative meditative practice in Tibetan Buddhism, deity yoga (*lha yi rnal 'byor*), the ritual evocation of self-as-Buddha. Such evocation is highly transitive and is typically intentional, gradual, structured in detail, scripted, and so forth, while the overall process is marked by dramatic shifts in transitivity on either side. It typically begins with a reduction or dissolution of the ordinary world to emptiness, such that the evocation itself is an abrupt spin up of transitive activity, while it concludes with a dissolution back to emptiness. Similar shifts apply to the myriad other meditations entailing structured visualizations of the body's interior, syllables, or many other phenomena, though they do not necessarily all involve the stark framing of radical dissolution into emptiness on either end. The modeling of meditation as habituation and this modeling of meditation as evocation framed by dissolution are perhaps the most normative models of meditation in Tibetan Buddhism; both are paradigmatically transitive activities. An interesting variant is restoration or renewal (*sor zhug*), a term and process found in the Seminal Heart's differentiation of cyclic existence and transcendence, in which chaotic and intense activity leads to exhaustion and collapse, which is then followed by a renewal or restoration of one's energies that is deliberately cultivated through gazes, postures, and intonations (Longchenpa 1971c, 349.4–352.3; Germano 1997b, 326–27). This practice is addressed in detail below.

5. Exchanges

[57] A fifth type of transition between transitivity and intransitivity in contemplative practices is *relational exchanges*, whether with physical beings such as other humans, animals, and insects, or with metaphysical beings such as Buddhas, deities, and Land-based spirits, or even such things as statues, amulets, and relics. For example, there are exchanges between teachers and

disciples where the disciple acts, but then becomes the recipient of the actions by the teacher. At the most basic level, a teacher creates a learning environment, as well as providing teachings, ritual exchanges, and instructions in that context, and the student's reception can trigger a variety of insights and epiphanies. This includes transmissions, initiatory rites called empowerments (*dbang*), or introductions (*ngo sprod*) where a transitive introduction (*ngo sprod*) delivered by the teacher gives rise to an intransitive encounter (*ngo 'phrod*) for the student. *sProd* is a transitive verb meaning to give or to aim at, such that *ngo sprod* literally means 'give the face', i.e. introduce; *'phrod* is an intransitive verb meaning 'to receive' or 'to obtain', thus 'receive the face', i.e. 'to meet' or 'to encounter'. This pair thus literally means 'to give and to receive'. This category also includes visualizations of configurations of spiritual agents in a tradition that then trigger a feeling of the lineage's blessings being bestowed on one, or the central contemplative practice of deity yoga in which one visualizes oneself as a Buddha in what is known as a commitment being (*dam tshig sems dpa'*), but which is then animated and inspired by the felt descent of the actual Buddha's reality to transform that commitment into a gnostic being (*ye shes sems dpa'*) in and as oneself (Beyer 1973, 100–108). In all of these contemplative practices involving relational exchanges, we find actions by the practitioner as agent triggering actions in turn by embodied and spiritual figures, that the practitioner then experiences as something received, and thus unpredictable and unscripted in its details. These types of transitions also are inextricably connected to boundaries of self and other, which are negotiated, punctured, intertwined, dissolved, and more exposed through such processes.

6. Self-Emergence

[58] A sixth type of transition involves engaging in practices and environments to elicit experiences or visions, and then, once they have emerged, contemplatively focusing on their *self-emergence*, namely the unfolding logic of those experiences or visions which are self-guiding and self-emerging beyond one's conscious plans and intentions. In contrast to relational transitions, there is no discrete agent driving the process with self-conscious awareness, while it is unlike habituation in that the processes in question are dynamic and unpredictable, and have not been rehearsed in any way; it differs from exhaustion in that it focuses on dynamic expression rather than collapse. We thus have a process of self-emergence (*rang byung*), which yields self-appearances (*rang snang*) as its result, while appearances or visions (*snang ba*) have an autonomy that contrasts sharply to considerations or intentional referents (*dmigs pa*) cultivated in other forms of contemplative practice. This type of transition is at the heart of Seminal Heart contemplation, such as in the yoga of the sound of the four elements (*'byung ba bzhi sgra yi rnal 'byor*). Here a variety of voices from diverse types of metaphysical beings self-emerge from deep, immersive listening to the naturally occurring sounds of the fundamental elements of earth, water, fire, wind, and space. It is most fully expressed in the spontaneous self-configuration of rainbow-colored sunlight into iconic images over a period of time in a series of gradated phases within direct transcendence meditation (*thod rgal* is a transitive compound literally meaning 'crest-crossing'). A somewhat different form is found in the tradition's breakthrough meditation (*khregs chod*): the term is an intransitive compound literally meaning 'hardness cut off', though at times it is spelled with a transitive form (*khregs gcod*), 'cutting through hardness'. This highly intransitive practice involves simply witnessing one's experiences without modification, rather than eliciting special experiences, and encountering them with a resolute consideration of letting-be and different modalities of freedom—self-freedom, naked freedom, freedom from extremes, and so forth. While devoid of the stark

transitions in transitivity found in so many other Tibetan practices, an echo can be located in the dynamism of appearances and experiences arising, and then simultaneously recognized as free and dissolving, such as reflected in the classic image of a snowflake contacting water. While direct transcendence and breakthrough are together generally understood as the bivalent 'main practice' (*dngos gzhi*) of contemplation in the tradition, they are also understood to be complementary practices that have quite different relationships with effort, the former being effortful and the latter being effortless.

[59] In these ways, habituation, dissolution, exhaustion, evocation, relational exchanges, and self-emergence constitute six distinct styles of contemplative transitions on the fluid scale between intense transitivity and strong intransitivity. Our primary interest in the present context is self-emergence, namely contemplative practices that focus on emerging experiences or visions, whether spontaneous or partially stimulated and shaped by earlier contemplative actions.

Lexical Explorations

[60] Before proceeding to review Seminal Heart meditative practices in greater detail, it may be helpful to consider the myriad Tibetan terms that are crucial for understanding these concepts and practices within their own contexts. My use of the term contemplation as a general rubric derived from the emergent field of Contemplative Studies (Komjathy 2018) does not semantically correspond to any one Tibetan term, while the overarching term for formal contemplative practices is, literally, 'taking into experience' (*nyams su len pa*, see Gyatso (1999) for a detailed exploration of 'experience' in Tibetan Buddhism), while other terms point to subsets of such practices, whether more abstract terms such as conduct (*spyod*), meditation (*sgom*), contemplative state (*bsam gtan*), deep absorption (*ting nge 'dzin*), tuning into naturalness (*rnal 'byor*; Skt. *yoga*; note the translation literally renders the Tibetan), visualization (*gsal 'debs*), and spiritual practice (*dge 'byor*). There are also more specific traditional categories of practices such as calming (*zhi gnas*; Skt. *śamatha*), insight (*lhag mthong*; Skt. *vipaśyanā*), focusing the mind (*sems 'dzin*), creation stage (*bskyed rim*; Skt. *utpattikrama*), perfection phase (*rdzogs rim*; Skt. *utpannakrama*, *nispannakrama*), channels and winds (*rtsa rlung*), channels yoga (*rtsa'i rnal 'byor*), winds yoga (*rlung gi rnal 'byor*), nuclei yoga (*thig le'i rnal 'byor*), compassion practices (*snying rje sgom*), magical wheel (*'phrul 'khor*; Skt. *yantra*), dream yoga (*rmi lam rnal 'byor*), and alchemy (*bcud len*; Skt. *rasāyana*). Then of course there are the specific names of practices not subordinated into any of these general or specific categories per se, such as in the Seminal Heart, the main practices of breakthrough and direct transcendence, and preliminary practices such as the yoga of the sound of the four elements, the differentiation of cyclic existence and transcendence, and many other practices not even given a label. At stake in all these terms, categories, and particulars is the nature of the religious practice which leads down the path to transcendence (*'das*) and the fruit of Buddhahood: what are the models of contemplative practice which the Seminal Heart tradition is working with to theorize and order their own valorized sets of practices, as well as critique contemplative models and practices in other traditions?

[61] Before we address this question directly in the final section, we should consider the semantics of the Tibetan word rendering the Sanskrit *karma*, namely the common word for 'action' (*las*), which includes general actions of all types, as well as specifically religious practices. It is typically glossed in the Buddhist context as 'adoption and rejection' (*blang dor*) and

'cause and effect' (*rgyu 'bras*). I would argue that, at least within the Great Perfection tradition, karma represents human action as centrally about constituting boundaries—of selves, others, things, spaces, times—through complex patterns of adopting certain things to incorporate within those boundaries and rejecting other things to the exterior of those boundaries. These patterns then constitute causes, which in linear ways produce effects, and above all else the outcome of dualistic experience dominated by bounded selves that desire, hate, and are ignorant, three emotional poisons which are again centrally about boundary creation, maintenance, and negotiation. This also relates to the aforementioned problems of opacity, since these karmic boundaries and the boundedness of selves, others, and things they constitute, are also epistemological barriers to fluid exchange and understanding. Certainly Tibetan Buddhism in general strongly correlates action with effort in general, including a focus on how actions expending resources are driven by underlying unconscious predispositions and biases, as well as by emotional patterns of aversion, desire, and ignorance buttressed by dualism and a belief in selves. The tradition does classify such actions into 'virtuous' actions (*dge ba*) one is encouraged to adopt, and 'non-virtuous' actions (*mi dge ba*) one is encouraged to reject. However, the Great Perfection dismisses all of these actions as equally problematic due to being rooted in the boundedness of selves, and the dualistic grasping that underlies them with its attendant tendencies towards conceptualization, objectification, and reification.

[62] This intense critique of effort and karma goes hand in hand with a valorization of its opposite, namely effortlessness—effortless action and effortless attention. There are thus action-based terms like effortless (*'bad pa med pa* or *'bad rtsol med pa*), non-striving (*rtsol sgrub med pa*), and beyond action (*bya bral ba*), and a variety of cognitive terms such as beyond attention (*dran med*), non-conceptual (*mi rtog pa*), and inconceivable (*bsam med*), both of which can describe the core processes *and* outcomes of the contemplative path. Doing and thinking are thus inextricably associated with effort and how effort fetters one into cyclic existence; not-doing and not-thinking are instead the foundation of the purest form of the contemplative path, as well as the way of being that characterizes its outcome and a Buddha. here are also many other associated privative terms such as non-dual (*gnyis su med pa*), aimless (*gtad med*), unpolarized (*phyogs med*), and non-referential (*dmigs pa med pa*). While one is thus told to go beyond action (*bya bral*), and beyond attention (*dran med*), there is also an entire web of terms that create parallels which point to what effortless action and effortless attention might be like in positive terms. These parallel terms are typically associated with Buddhas, the description of which involve entirely different terms for almost everything related to them, which is far more straightforward in Tibetan with its pervasive system of honorifics even in ordinary parlance. Thus a Buddha's activity is *phrin las* (or *'phrin las*), which prefixes *(')phrin* to the standard word for action (*las*), a syllable that conventionally means message. I am not familiar with explicit etymologies of the term, but it may signify a Buddha's actions carry or are informed by the message of the Buddhist teachings, or are generally rich with such meaning and import rather than being random or driven by self-serving goals. Likewise, for the Great Perfection, a Buddha has no mind (*sems*) or body (*lus*), but they do have a Mind (*thugs*) and Body (*sku*), the standard honorific terms in Tibetan for each. This is immediately relevant in the present context, because to go beyond conventional or ordinary *action* (*las*) is not to be inert or static, but to instead find one's way into the 'Enlightened Actions' (*phrin las*) of a Buddha.

[63] We are thus called to consider the nature of a Buddha's Actions and Awareness, where we find a tension between different models for how they take place. For example, there is

what we might term a karmic model in which a Buddha's activity is driven by relatively conventional actions taken prior to becoming a Buddha, such as vows or commitments, and the associated relational model in which a Buddha stirs due to the needs of others. Are Buddhas highly regulated beings in whom intention and action are totally aligned, or are they autopoietic beings guided by self-emergent processes? The Seminal Heart focuses on a model in which Buddhas are intrinsically efflorescent and self-emergent as they dynamically and intrinsically transition back and forth between uncoiling manifestations best expressed by the term 'spontaneity' (*lhun grub*), and spiraling dissolutions (*thim tshul*). 'Spontaneity' literally means 'present or formed (*grub pa*) by its own nature (*lhun gyis*), and is typically glossed as 'naturally formed or accomplished without effort' (*'bad med rang bzhin gyis grub pa*). In modern Tibetan it can mean 'natural' or 'naturally occurring', such as a 'natural forest' or 'natural beauty' (Goldstein, Shelling, and Surkhang 2001, 1183). It contrasts with ordinary verbs meaning to create, to form, and to manufacture (*byed/byas, bzo*). As with the term 'effortless' itself, spontaneity is inextricably interwoven with the central notions of self-emergence (*rang byung*), self-manifestation (*rang snang*), self-awareness (*rang rig*), self-recognition (*rang ngo shes pa*), and 'natural' (*rang bzhin*) itself. The occurrence of *rang* in all these key terms can be simultaneously understood as 'self' (*rang*), 'through self' (*rang gis*), 'natural' (*rang bzhin*), and 'naturally' (*rang bzhin gyis*), signifying without intervention or modification (*bcos med*) by some extrinsic agent. Indeed, the modern term for man-made or synthetic is literally 'effort-emerged' (*rtsol byung*) while 'self-emergent' (*rang byung*) means 'natural' in contrast. Self-emergent is commonly used to talk about visual images or forms of deities believed to naturally emerge in a rock, for example, without any human agency, as well as other sensory manifestations in the material world whose form points to some sacred correlate. In addition, terms connoting release are dominant—letting things be (*cog gzhag*), letting go (*bzhag, 'jog, gzhag, zhog*), relaxing (*ngal gso, lhod lhod*), and becoming free (*grol tshul*). That said, letting go and relaxation are not ends in their own rights, but rather ways to elicit and allow innate dynamics to self-emerge.

Types of Meditative Practices

Against this background, I would like to survey contemplative practices in the Seminal Heart tradition to explore these questions of effort, effortlessness, and shifts in transitivity therein. In the present context, I can only sketch out initial broad observations, though I am working on far more detailed and granular analyses of specific meditations in a follow-up study. [64]

A Dichotomization of Meditative Practices

Longchenpa (1308–1363, Klong chen pa), acknowledged as the central architect of the systematization of Seminal Heart thought and practice, provides in his overall corpus multiple detailed presentations of well-organized anthologies of meditative practices in the Seminal Heart tradition that are structured into recommended paths of practice over extended periods of time. While often differing in details, they are largely similar in general structure and content, with the lengthy eighth chapter of his famed *Tshig don mdzod* (The Treasury of Words and Meanings) providing what is probably the most influential of such presentations (Longchenpa 1983b, 295.1–411.4). He there classifies contemplative practices into two types (Longchenpa 1983b, 313.1): (i) "for those whose minds are wrapped up in objective reference points (*dmigs pa yul gyi blo can*)" and (ii) "for those to whose minds awareness is self-presencing" (*rig pa rang* [65]

snang ba'i blo can). The first set of practices is an organized path-anthology of very diverse types of Buddhist practices largely recognizable from other Indian and Tibetan traditions. In contrast, the second set of practices are at the heart of Seminal Heart—breakthrough and direct transcendence, as well as preliminaries explicitly linked to direct transcendence. While the text itself seems to present these two sets of practices as aimed at different types of people, elsewhere Longchenpa points to the first set of practices, or some subset of them, as also functioning as preliminaries for breakthrough meditation. As we shall see, a fundamental characteristic of this division is a contrast between technique (*thabs*; Skt. *upāya*) and experiences (*nyams*) as divergent driving forces behind meditative practice, such that in terms of our scale of contemplative transitivity, the first set is comprised of highly transitive and effortful meditations while the second set is dominated by intransitive and effortless processes.

Referential Meditations on Objects

[66] The first broad category of meditations—for those with intellects wrapped up in objective reference points—are more conventional practices presented in an adapted anthology ranging over the long history of Buddhist meditation (Longchenpa 1983b, 313.1–337.7). They stress practices which have detailed techniques (*thabs*) involving procedural instructions specifying actions to take with one's body (postures, breathing, movements, ingesting edible items, etc.), speech (chanting, liturgy, silence, etc.), and mind (visualization, analytical considerations, deconstruction, focusing, quieting, etc.). The term rendered as objective reference points (*dmigs pa*; Skt. *ālambana*) as a noun signifies reference points in the sense of considerations, observations, perceptual objects, visualized objects, targets, and so forth—in short the various objects that one may focus on or entertain during a meditative practice, whether this be a material thing, a visualized image, an analytical consideration, or some other type of object. As a verb, the same term points to the verbal processes thus involved, such as to focus upon, meditate upon, visualize, consider, and so forth. The diversity, significance, and impact of meditative objects is a long and rich topic in Buddhist meditation. The strong sense of dualistic referentiality further connotes in this context deliberate and highly intentional acts of producing or procuring those objects, as well as the concordant deliberate acts of attention focusing on those objects.

[67] The objective reference forms of contemplation are then presented in terms of a fourfold set of continuous *yogas* (*rgyun gyi rnal 'byor*) of conduct, meditation, view, and fruition (*lta sgom spyod 'bras*). While all of these relate to contemplation, conduct (Longchenpa 1983b, 314.1–316.6) chiefly points to behavioral and dispositional issues, while the view (Longchenpa 1983b, 334.2–336.3) and the fruition (Longchenpa 1983b, 336.3–337.7) would appear to be more meta-considerations to keep in mind regarding one's experience and understanding during and after meditative sessions. The meditation section (Longchenpa 1983b, 316.6–334.2), then, is the locus for contemplative practices in their own right, with detailed practical steps intended to be executed within formal sessions of practice. It has five sections: (i) the meditation of the intimate union of day and night; (ii) the means of letting the ocean be as its experiential precept; (iii) the wisdom of the erection of appearances and fictive worlds within the ground as the key point at that time; (iv) the sealing of emotional distortions as its fruition; and (v) the period of remaining within phenomena at that time. Technique-driven practices are all located in the first section, while the latter four focus more on an ensuing deepening of experience and realization through applying meta-considerations and a resolute orientation towards letting-go and attentional modalities based in open awareness. Indeed, the entire ac-

count is interspersed with such sections as the last four that don't offer any clear account of contemplative procedures or techniques. I would suggest these sections hearken back to the early Great Perfection's reservations about contemplative practice, and function as a constant reminder to not fixate on technique or procedure, but rather to prioritize the experiences and realizations. They thus serve to also provide overarching considerations for how to work with those emergent experiences and realizations, both during meditative sessions, but also increasingly throughout the day and night outside of the boundaries of formal practice sessions. While it is tempting to ignore such sections to focus on the technique rich account of other sections, they provide essential information for understanding the overall system as such in pointing to central intransitive processes of evolving experience made possible by the more transitive meditative activities in the meditations proper.

[68] The presentation of 'the meditation of the intimate union of day and night' (*sgom pa nyin mtshan kha sbyor*) involves four sections: (i) the meditative states of the Spiritual Heroes/Bodhisattvas (*byang chub sems dpa'i bsam gtan*), (ii) the meditations of the profound Secret Mantra (*gsang sngags zab mo'i sgom pa*), (iii) the means of concentration of gods and men (*lha dang mi'i sems 'dzin*), and (iv) the wisdom of the Blissful Buddhas (*bde bar gshegs pa'i dgongs pa*). The first three focus on specific forms of contemplation, while the fourth, again is more of an evocation of the deepening experience and insights deriving from those contemplative practices, such that "it is a meditation beyond sessions and breaks."

(1) The Meditative States of the Spiritual Heroes

[69] The first subcategory (Longchenpa 1983b, 317.7–326.5; Germano 1997a), the meditative states of the Spiritual Heroes (the literal meaning of the Tibetan translation of *bodhisattva*) involves a simple sitting in a classic seven point 'lotus posture', open eyes, and long drawn out breaths designed to help the mind settle into a non-conceptual state of equipoise. Detail is then provided in "the four sessions of meditative states as antidotes to these four types of attachments: food, clothes, dreams, and latent propensities." This fourfold set clearly relates to retreat culture, as a practitioner struggles with the realities of limited food and exposure to harsh high altitude climates, as well as then extending contemplative work into the nighttime while sleeping. The fourth category of latent propensities, again, is devoid of any external techniques and instead is focused on the deepening of realization and insight intransitively flowing out of the previous practices, so that one increasingly penetrates into the deep reaches of the embodied unconscious where karma's deep traces shape perception and behavior in an ongoing fashion.

[70] The meditative session eliminating attachment to food—also called 'the yoga of food'—outlines three different alchemical practices of transformation involving primarily the ingestion of substances: (i) "various extractions of essences" (*bcud len*; Skt. *rasāyana*), often rendered as "alchemy", which involve the ingestion of various material preparations based upon herbs, juices, or meats; (ii) "eating the winds as food" (*rlung zas su za ba*) based upon manipulation of breath with corresponding visualizations; and (iii) "preparations of ambrosial excrement" (*bdud rtsi dri chen gyi sbyor ba*) which tersely outlines boiling excrement with butter and eating it.

[71] The meditative session eliminating attachment to clothes—also called 'the yoga of clothes'—involves a dyad of practices utilizing the winds (*rlung*) and material substances referred to as profound 'supporting factors' (*rten 'brel*) respectively that generate bodily warmth. The practices with supporting factors involve preparations of diverse things such as flesh, herbs,

and juices to create a pill and a powder—one swallows the pill and rubs the power on one's stomach. The practices with winds involve crouching down and letting the winds trickle down within as one inhales, such that the stomach is filled up as one does vase-breathing. One then exhales out slowly and harmonizes with a visualization of fire. In this way, warmth arises externally in the body so that one no longer need clothes; warmth arises internally in the mind so that conceptuality gradually dies down and one remains in a non-conceptual contemplation. Longchenpa then details a third practice using ingested substances in the form of a prepared pill, breathing techniques, and visualized divine configurations representing the body's elemental energies, thereby integrating fire, earth, water, and wind into a single unified alchemical practice. The basic visualization and breathing practice seems to be a version of the normative Tibetan 'fierce woman' (*gtum mo*; Skt. *caṇḍālī*) practice of blazing fire and dripping ambrosia within a visualized interior body that simulates sexual experience.

[72] The meditative session eliminating attachments to dreams—also called 'the yoga of dreams'—begins with preliminary practices that involve massage, laying to sleep on one's right side, and then visualizing a red *Ah* syllable in order to facilitate identifying dreams as dreams, i.e. lucid dreaming. The principal meditation, then, is a series of transitive activities that center on lucid dreaming: training, transformation, cutting off, interchanging, controlling, thrusting to the key points, penning up, and reversing. This begins with day-time practices on cultivating a sense of the dream-like or illusory character of appearances, and then continuing with actively changing and manipulating dreams while lucid dreaming at night, breaking down the boundaries between waking and dreaming experience, and finally immersing oneself in emptiness with the consequent realization of the illusory character of all boundaries and identities. We can observe in this sequence initially highly transitive activities as one actively considers waking experiences as dream-like and then actively changes dreams in a highly intentional manner, but then a transition to unfolding experiences revolving around the illusory nature of appearances, and a final dissolution of all activity into emptiness. Of note is a separate meditation on radiant light (*'od gsal*) which involves focusing on awareness's clarity and lucency during the day "in accordance with the key points of the body and winds" (*rlung rig gi gnad*), though no details are offered on those techniques. At night one lays "in the manner of a lion" and rests while identifying "the radiant light of the non-conceptual cognition that occurs on the verge of falling asleep" (*?*). This results in entering a deep contemplative state that is dreamless and sleep-like, but also aware of external appearances. One sees various five colored visionary appearances and also experience the standard meditative experiences of 'bliss, clarity and non-conceptuality' (*bde gsal mi rtog*). Thus here we find modestly transitive activities segue into self-emergent experiences that are largely intransitive.

(2) The Meditations of the Profound Secret Mantra

[73] The second subcategory of meditation (Longchenpa 1983b, 326.5–327.4), the meditations of the profound Secret Mantra, is presented in terms of three types of *yogas* focused on the subtle body of deep interiority: of channels, winds, and nuclei (*rtsa dang rlung dang thig le'i rnal 'byor gsum*). For the present context, I will focus on the most important of these practices, which is the *yoga* of nuclei involving the classic tantric practice of sexual *yoga*. This practice is severely critiqued by Longchenpa in other contexts as involving excessive effort, force, and manipulation, despite consistently including it within his broader anthology of Seminal Heart meditations. The basic meditative activities begin with interaction with one's sexual partner, proceed to very directive and scripted manipulations of visualized energies within the body,

including physical actions of diverse types. While it does ultimately end in a diffusion of energy throughout the body and its dissolution, and certainly can trigger intense sensations that exceed any script, the practice overall is analyzed as primarily forceful, scripted, and technique-driven.

(3) The Means of Concentration of Gods and Men

[74] The third subcategory (Longchenpa 1983b, 327.4–331.6), the means of concentration of gods and men, concerns two sets of diverse practices involving deep states of focus and absorption. The first set involves the six senses (the mind being the sixth) interacting with a variety of material objects ranging over recipes for producing tastes and smells, to musical instruments for the production of sound, to a variety of things for visual form or tactile sensations. One is instructed to insert one's awareness fully into the sensory impression without distraction and meditating "in the space between previous and subsequent ideation" (*dran rtog snga phyi'i bar de*, 328). The second set of practices involves twenty-one 'means of concentration' (*sems 'dzin*), which all focus on a particular type of meditative object—a syllable, a chanted song, a circle between the eyebrows, the tip of the nose, the five elements, a sensation of bliss, and so forth. The practices are generally described as awareness entering the site of focus, separating from body and mind, and seeing reality. It also describes them collectively as 'settling into naturalness' (*rnal dbab*). Thus the initial practice is very much a deliberate focusing of attention on a limited objective reference, but it is understood to eventually trigger an autonomous process of experiences and realizations, which are no longer intentionally guided, and into which one is instructed to settle.

Self-Emergent Meditations on Awareness

[75] The second broad category of meditations (Longchenpa 1983b, 337.7–411.4), practices for those to whose intellects awareness is self-presencing, points to the prioritization of a dynamic unfolding of experience wherein any objects or appearances are emergent and the contemplative process is autonomous in its details and drivers, rather than products of direct intention, guidance, and contrivance. That said, *almost* all of the practices still involve techniques and specified procedural details to some degree, though techniques are focused on breaking down barriers, minimizing and restricting interference, eliciting those emergent processes, subtly influencing the details of those emergent processes, and finally contextualizing the overall experiences. The emphasis thus shifts to those emergent processes enfolded within evolving experiences, and the techniques are deemphasized.

[76] The focus is thus on the emergent logic of experience (*nyams*), whether experiences of shifting shapes and colors in the sun's rays or complete darkness, orgiastic bliss in sexual practices, states of deep absence in deconstructive practices, the changing nature of sounds in listening to natural elemental forces, or the smell of a fragrance and the experiences and associations it triggers through deep immersion. The most important general term for contemplative practice in this tradition is 'taking into experience', which gains new resonances when considered from this perspective of the unfolding experiences as constituting the self-emergent process that is the beginning, middle, and end of the contemplation in question. This goes beyond the standard reference to three meditative experiences of bliss, clarity, and non-conceptuality, as well as the central Buddhist focus on monitoring one's experience during meditation. After all, in some sense all experiences in meditative practice are self-emergent in one sense, un-

predictable in both when they occur and how they occur. The difference here is that those experiences have an emergent dynamism all of their own which begins to drive and shape the core of the contemplative practice and outstrips any direct correlation to executed techniques and scripts with their outputs.

[77] The two main meditative practices are breakthrough and direct transcendence. These practices together are described as superior to the first category of meditations according to seven points (Longchenpa 1983b, 338.1–338.5), and then they are contrasted to each other (Longchenpa 1983b, 338.5–339.2). Breakthrough is characterized as involving "natural freedom without effort on the path: taking into experience naked awareness without dependence on appearances, the lazy can thus awaken into Buddhahood without meditation. It is thus the key point for (those with) sharp faculties" [Longchenpa (1983b), pp. 338.7–339.1; *khregs chod ni lam 'bad med du rang grol ba snang ba la ltos par rig pa rjen pa nyams su len pa le lo can ma bsgoms par 'tshang rgya bad bang po rnon po'i ngad yin la*]. In contrast, direct transcendence involves "freedom achieved with effort: in dependence upon the luminously radiant visions, those who are diligent in this very life purify their corporeality into a luminous body, and thus awaken into Buddhahood" [Longchenpa (1983b), pp. 339.1; *thod rgal ni 'bad bcas su grol ba 'od gsal gyi snang ba la ltos nas brtson 'grus can tshe 'di nyid du rdos bcas 'od lus su dag nas 'tshang rgya ba ste*]. While this contrast of 'effortless' to 'effortful' might suggest that breakthrough meditation is superior, in fact the discussion of the direct transcendence opens with a clear account of seven special features which entail the superiority of direct transcendence to breakthrough (Longchenpa 1983b, 365.4–368.7). This is hardly surprising, since direct transcendence contemplation represents Seminal Heart's most distinctive innovation in practice as well as thought, while breakthrough contemplation is essentially a repackaged version of the earliest form of Great Perfection contemplation. The essential point is that for the very rare individual who is, from a Buddhist point of view, karmically ripe due to past lives of contemplative work, breakthrough contemplation could be the occasion for near instantaneous realization. But for everyone else, direct transcendence is the more powerful form of contemplation, even if it does involve the hard work of formal meditative sessions and working with perceptual faculties and content. This clearly points then to a valorization of meditation involving complex interplays of technique and experience, intention and self-emergence, effort and effortlessness, over meditation which fully embraces the latter of each pair over the former.

[78] **(1) Breakthrough** Longchenpa's account of Breakthrough has no procedural details at all, nor any account of what a formal meditative session might be like (Longchenpa 1983b, 339.2–365.3). He instead structures the account into three aphoristic rubrics based upon Śrīsiṃha's *Khyung chen nam mkha' lding* (The Great Sky Soaring Khyung) (Śrīsiṃha 1971): (i) revealing everything within the great original purity of phenomena's exhaustion, (ii) confining them within the naked unimpededness beyond action, and (iii) chaining them within the great sameness of total freedom. Of note is the first section's presentation of "the twelve adamantine laughs" (*rdo rje'i gad mo bcu gnyis*) and "the seven marvelous esoteric words" (*ngo mtshar gyi gsang tshig rnam pa bdun*), as well as the third section's structuration into five modalities of freedom—primordial freedom, natural freedom, freedom of naked vision, freedom from limitations, and freedom as one. The lengthy presentation interweaves prose with evocative poetic citations to meditate upon attachment, appearances, the nature of mind, awareness, illusion, emptiness, purity, bondage, and various forms of freedom. While there is considerable

content, there is simply nothing at all that resembles instructions for how one might formally engage in a meditative practice. The presumption, clearly, is that the practitioner already has considerable experience with technique-driven contemplation as well as deconditioning, and that one is now working aesthetically with unfolding experience outside of any technique-driven procedures as one immerses oneself in a deconditioned experience of the world. It revolves around the deep entanglement of aphoristic poetry and certain types of contemplation, as well as spiritual insight. This meditation is thus highly intransitive in character, and hence its classification as 'effortless'. It is no surprise, then, that Longchenpa's greatest work on the subject is *The Treasury of Reality's Expanse*, which is an exquisitely beautiful work of poetic philosophy that is often memorized and recited before or during meditative sessions on breakthrough (Longchenpa 1983a).

(2) Direct Transcendence Preliminaries

[79] Direct transcendence meditation (Longchenpa 1983b, 370.2–375.1) has, most famously, three specific sets of practices that are associated with it as its preliminaries. The technical terms are (a) the yoga of the four elements' sounds (*'byung ba bzhi sgra'i rnal 'byor*), (b) the conduct of differentiating between the domains of cyclic existence and transcendence (*'khor 'das ru shan*), and (c) the preliminaries of body, speech and mind (*lus ngag sems kyi sngon 'gro*).

[80] **(a) The Sounds of the Four Elements** The *yoga* of the four elements' sounds (Longchenpa 1983b, 370.3–372.4; Germano 1997b, 316–17, 328–31) involves listening intently for extended lengths of time to the naturally occurring sound of earth, water, fire, and wind—a waterfall, a crackling fire, the wind blowing through a ramshackle hut. The meditation involves a type of calming technique utilizing the natural sounds of the Buddhist fivefold classification of material elements into water, earth, fire, wind, and space as the object of concentration. As preliminaries to the practice, one goes to a secluded spot where one can remain in solitude without distraction, relaxes one's body, speech, and mind, makes a fire, presents a ritual feast offering and sacrificial cakes (*gtor ma*) to the Sky Dancer female spirits (*mkha' 'gro*; Skt. *ḍākinī*), and then examines the fire's shapes and colors for omens. The actual practice, then, is done in any posture that maintains the upper torso's straightness, since it is essential that there is no distortion in its subtle channels and the psycho-physical energy flowing through them; thus the classical lotus posture is particularly useful, though other postures can be equally effective in this case. The initial phases are deliberate activities—going to an appropriate site, and in the case of fire and earth actively creating the context, directing one's attention to one's hearing, and intently focusing on the sounds in question for hours and days. However, the actual specifics of those sounds soon become the dominant driver of the practice, and they begin to take specific and self-emergent shapes reflecting cosmological voices attributed to a variety of non-material agents completely outside of any transitive, directed activity.

[81] **(b) The Differentiation of Cyclic Existence and Transcendence** 'The differentiation of cyclic existence and transcendence' (*'khor 'das ru shan*; Longchenpa 1983b, 370.3–374.3; Germano 1997b, 317–21, 331–34) involves an extended period of time during which the practitioner gives physical, verbal, and mental expression to anything that comes to mind without any regulation, until finally they collapse in total exhaustion. This collapse is termed 'settling into exhaustion' (*rnal dbab*), with *dbab* as the future form of *'bebs*, a transitive verb meaning

'to bring down', or 'cause to descend' (*'bab pa* is the corresponding intransitive verb signifying 'to fall' or 'to descend'). However, in the present context it would appear the idea is that the practitioner's intentional actions to allow spontaneous impulses to be immediately expressed lead to an involuntary collapse, such that the descent into naturalness is not guided, but rather an automatic consequence of the previous intentions to engage in this practice. I would suggest that the transitive use signifies the overall intentionality and agency behind the wild activity leading to the collapse, since it does not appear to apply to the moment of collapse itself, which is intransitive and involuntary as it happens. This settling into naturalness can be done in whatever position is physically comfortable, though in general a classic position in the Great Perfection involves lying on the right side with the right cheek resting on one's right palm, and the right elbow tucked into the right side (lying on one's face, in contrast, is said to lead to ignorance, lying on the left side to hatred and lying on one's back to desire).

[82] However, while in theory the moment for settling into naturalness should be guided by one's emergent insight and/or exhaustion, in practice it seems that it may at times be somewhat prestructured, which would also make sense of the transitive verb: one can do it for three days following uninterrupted practice of the 'craziness' for a number of days; alternatively, during the day or morning one can do the impulsive activity and then settle into naturalness at night. In *Bla ma yang thig* (The Seminal Quintessence of the Spiritual Master) (Longchenpa 1971b, 165.1, 166.3, 168.2), Longchenpa indicates one does the practice of 'conduct' during the day, while at night one lays down on a comfortable bed to settle into naturalness: following physical conduct the body should be perfectly still, following verbal conduct one should be perfectly silent, and following mental conduct one's mind should be perfectly non-conceptual. Either way, the settling into naturalness is done for a number of hours at a time. The commentary (Garab Dorjé 1971, 182.2–182.6) on *bsTan pa bug cig gi rgyud gi rgyud* (The Tantra of the Self Emerging Teaching) passage quoted in *The Treasury of Words and Meanings* passage cited above (Longchenpa 1983b, 372.5–373.4) provides a more programmed twelve-day schedule which one repeats once a year or as much as is possible given one's circumstances: one begins with three days of physical activity, followed by one day of relaxing the body into its natural state by lying on a comfortable mattress; intermediately one practices verbal activity for three days, followed by one day during which one relaxes speech into its natural state without talking with anyone at all, even to the extent of making a gesture; and finally for three more days one practices 'differentiation' in terms of the mind, followed by one day during which one relaxes the mind into its natural state via ceasing ordinary conceptualization. At any rate, again we find a striking combination of dynamic activity with subsequent still quietness, though at times the quietness seems involuntary, while at other times intentional.

[83] The signs of physically differentiating between cyclic existence and transcendence are without doubt self-emergent, as just about all signs and measures (*rtags tshad*) of contemplative progress are supposed to be in the tradition. This includes such things as becoming divested of any attachment to the body, feeling like one doesn't even have a body, not noticing heat or cold, not feeling hunger or thirst, never becoming fatigued, feeling as if one is flying through the sky, and blissful warmth blazing inside. The signs of verbal differentiation are such things as speaking Skt. language, coming to know many teachings one never previously knew, and melodious songs naturally welling up from within, or the experience of such things as feeling no desire to speak and experiencing the supremely blissful dimension of the ineffable. The signs of mental differentiation are that the mind is radiant and light, distorting ideation

ceases, one exults, one experiences a blissful, clear and non-conceptual contemplation, and the realization of sky-like primordial freedom dawns from within.

[84] In *The Seminal Quintessence of the Sky Dancer* (Longchenpa 1971c, 334.6–335.1), Longchenpa presents the preliminaries in three quite different phases: the 'external' combining the 'differentiation' practices with the preliminaries of body, speech, and mind, the 'internal' as a separate six syllable-realm meditation, and the 'esoteric'. The esoteric itself consists of two aspects which clearly are related to the differentiation practices (Longchenpa 1971c, 349.4–352.3; Germano 1997b, 326–27): settling into naturalness and revitalization. Following all the frenetic activity shaking up one's energy, one lies down and relaxes in a quiet state; this then must be followed by a revitalizing process allowing one's energy to reorganize into more positive configurations or patterns. Following the practice of 'differentiation', one "relaxes in one's natural state" to avoid sickness ensuing after all the agitation, as well as to rest in the experience of the mind's ultimate nature which comes to the fore following the exhaustion of ordinary physical, verbal, and mental activities. Longchenpa indicates one should lay on a comfortable bed divested of thought, speech, or movement, resting in a natural state: still in the non-wavering of the body, quiet in the lack of speech, and non-conceptual in the mind's deep calm. Subsequently settling into naturalness is said to penetrate to the fundamental dimension of breakthrough meditation (Longchenpa 1971c, 352.6).

[85] Following this relaxation, one must revitalize or rejuvenate (*sor zhugs*) one's now purified energies, and thus reengage the union of calm (*zhi gnas*; Skt. *śamatha*) and insight (*lhag mthong*; Skt. *vipaśyanā*); in this way one brings this union to the fore again, placing it in the spiritual path where it sustains the ensuing practices of breakthrough and direct transcendence. Thus, after settling into naturalness, one uses a trio of gazes in set postures to revitalize in the reintegration of stillness and movement: first the Listener (Skt. *Śrāvaka*) position stills the body, the posture of a Bodhisattva stabilizes that quiet, and then the wrathful stance frees that stabilized energy so that it can participate in dynamic enlightened movement. The Listener position refers to the classical lotus position with its seven points; the posture of the Bodhisattva refers to sitting in the lotus position with the eyes staring wide open into space; and the wrathful stance signifies a standing posture with one leg extended out front with the heel on ground and toes in the air, and the other leg drawn in with sole on ground and knee crooked, while the eyes stare wide open into space as one verbally utters *ha ha hi hi*.

[86] Overall, we see a shifting transition from deliberate intentional and highly transitive activities aimed at overwhelming habitual structures in body, speech, and mind, to a deeply intransitive collapse into a deep state of stillness, to a restoration where stillness and activity are intertwined as transitive and intransitive processes are blended.

[87] **(c) The Preliminaries of Body, Speech, and Mind** The direct transcendence preliminaries are thus at times more standard technique-driven practices, but still focus on experiences of collapse, deep relaxation, radical openness, and total immersion, which in turn allow for spontaneous dynamics of self-emergence to come to the fore. The final set of practices (Longchenpa 1983b, 374.3–375.1; Germano 1997b, 321–26, 334) is again divided into physical, verbal, and mental phases, which in this case are each quite distinct from each other. However, the principle in each reiterates the pattern of deliberate, effortful activity followed by deep relaxation and stillness characterizing the differentiation of domains (i.e. cyclic existence vs. transcendence) practices. Longchenpa says it is best if one does each phase for no less than seven days,

but it is acceptable to do each for three or five days, and at the very least each practice should be done for one day apiece, since the introduction of the main practice depends on mastery of the preliminaries (Longchenpa 1971a, 372.1).

[88] The preliminaries of the body involve standing in a posture with the heels joined and the feet on the toes, and the hands palm-to-palm raised above the head, such that the body resembles a *vajra*, or ritual scepter with its prongs on either side. Simultaneously, one visualizes one's body as a blue *vajra* with various symbolic associations. One holds this posture until finally the legs give out and one collapses helplessly to the floor. The practitioner then stays in whatever posture they fall into, and this "causes one to settle into naturalness" (*rnal du dbab pa*). This is thus a highly transitive, effortful activity yielding involuntarily to a completely intransitive release (see above for an explanation of the transitive verb *dbab* to describe the latter).

[89] The preliminaries of speech involve four sets of practices revolving around visualizing and chanting the syllable *hūṃ* (ཧཱུྃ)—(i) sealing, (ii) refining skill, (iii) seeking suppleness, and (iv) entering the path—with one's own consciousness being the implicit object of these verbs. In the briefest of terms, (i) *sealing* involves filling up the landscape with visualized *hūṃs* emerging from one's nostrils to transform everything large and small in *hūṃs*, as well as filling up one's own somatic interior. (ii) *Refining* skill then involves the same *hūṃs* perforating all of existence, exterior and interior, until all phenomena become transparent, and then eradicated. (iii) *Seeking suppleness* entails visualizing hūṃs in chains that climb up and down various objects in the environment, while (iv) *entering the path* involves one's subjectivity in the form of a *hūṃ* travelling throughout the landscape, world, and cosmos, until finally letting go and returning to one's own deepest nature. Thus, these activities are largely transitive, though there is a certain indeterminacy in the details which are emergent in performance.

[90] The preliminaries of mind consist of a famous triune practice of observing one's own mind called 'origin, abode and destination' or 'emerging, abiding, and departing' (*'byung gnas 'gro*) which revolves around the temporal structures of past, present, and future. In three successive phases, one observes each thought manifesting in the landscape of one's mind, inquiring as to where it came from, where it endures as it lingers, and to where it departs when is subsides. Eventually this sustained relentless questioning yields a realization that the mind is unborn, rootless, and empty, and awareness recedes from the foregrounded thought to the intangible background of the mind, or the emptiness of mind-as-such (*sems nyid*). This, then, is termed the introduction to the mind's nature, the Reality Body. Thus the subject of the meditation is the effortless, autonomous process of random thoughts and sensations emerging, lingering, and subsiding, but one is effortfully bringing a transitive close attention to these processes. The end result, however, is emergent deep experiences that well up from within, and which are intransitive in origin and of a very different nature than the random experiences with which the practice begins.

(3) Direct Transcendence

[91] Direct transcendence (Longchenpa 1983b, 365.3–411.4 in general, with the meditation itself detailed in 375.1–411.4) is done most often by sustained gazing off to the side of the sun, secondarily by gazing into an open sky or gazing in a specially prepared room of pitch black darkness, as well as less common variants. The practice has a series of practical considerations, including specific postures in which one holds one's body, specific gazes to employ, breathing patterns, and modes and targets of attention. There are also recommended adjustments correlated to the specifics of what visually unfolds, such as with gazing—one is told

to look upwards, or to the right side, and so forth in correlation with the details of the visual content that discloses itself (shapes, colors, etc.). With those postures, gazes, breathing, and attention, one focuses upon the sky to the side of the sun and waits. One is explicitly told not to consciously visualize anything, but rather to simply keep focused on that area of the sky, and observe what happens in terms of shapes, colors, forms, and movement. Initially, anyone will see rainbow colored light, particularly as the sunlight refracts off one's eyelashes, as well as floaters—transparent strands connecting small circles—that drift across one's visual field. The practitioner simply waits, brings their awareness to their eyes, and through their eyes, to this patch of the sky near the sun.

[92] At some point, with sustained attention, the visual field begins to go through a series of transformations as discernible shapes begin to emerge. There are dark patches or arcs of deep blue that are labeled as the 'expanse' (*dbyings*; Skt. *dhātu*), concentric circles of different colors labeled as 'nuclei' (*thig le*; Skt. *bindu*), and drifting eye floaters labeled as 'linked lambs' (*lu gu rgyud*). The third term doesn't have philosophical significance outside of the system, but 'expanse' and 'nuclei' are key philosophical and contemplative terms in Tibetan Buddhist discourse. The first term is understood as an abbreviation of 'the expanse of reality' (*chos dbyings*; Skt. *dharmadhātu*), which is tantamount to Buddhist emptiness modeling the ultimate reality; the second term is one of the three components, along with the 'channels' and 'winds' of the tantric Buddhist model of subtle embodiment.

[93] Various recognizable forms of indeterminate nature begin to emerge within the field of light—a weapon, a demon's head, really anything whatsoever. The most significant are the bodily forms of Buddhas, which initially may appear as an isolated head or half torso, and gradually become more dominant and fuller in form. At the same time, there are various aniconic images that are simply patterns of light, which are given names such as the weave found in yak hair-woven black tents (*re lde*), a lattice pattern (*drwa phyed*), and vertical bands (*gyen greng*). In addition, the concentric circles begin to link together from their initial isolated manifestations into clusters (*tshom bu*) of such circles, which clearly evoke classical *maṇḍalas*, with their symmetrical arrangements of Buddhas, one in the center, and one to each of the cardinal directions. One dynamic is that the floaters, which are called "the adamantine linked lambs of awareness" (*rig pa rdo rje lu gu rgyud*), initially drift across the visual field. However, though focusing on the appearances of the expanse, they gradually stabilize and become fixed. This is termed "confining the linked lambs within the corral of the expanse," which is part of a whole configuration of nomadic imagery within the tradition.

[94] Over a period of many days and contemplative sessions, the visions become more extensive in extending over the entire visual field, more complex in form, more recognizable in structure and appearance, and more stable and persistent in manifestation. In particular, the initial chaotic and volatile rainbow-colored light gradually and slowly shapes into manifestations of a specific Buddhas-centered *maṇḍala*, namely the 'one hundred peaceful and wrathful deities'. This is the classical tantric maṇḍala of the Nyingma tradition as articulated in its core scripture, *gSang ba snying po* (The Guhyagarbha Tantra) (Dorje 1987). At all points in this process, one is directed to not visualize anything, but rather allow the visions to self-emerge in whatever form they take. However, there are texts that refer to adjusting one's gaze, breathing, and posture, in response to visual details that manifest, presumably to coax the self-emergent visions along specific directions. It is said that the linked chains become the Buddhas, the nuclei become the inconceivable palaces (*gzhal yas khang*) in which the Buddhas are located,

and the expanse becomes the pure land in which they are all situated as the visions climax in visions of *maṇḍalas* and pure lands stretching across the entire sky's extent.

[95] These visions then culminate in a complete collapse and dissolution back into a vast empty sky, which is described again as 'the expanse of reality', and understood to mark the moment of the full enlightenment of a Buddha. Subsequently, though this is no longer part of the practice, it is understood that a variety of manifestations in the form of a Buddha's Bodies (*sku*; Skt. *kāya*) and primordial knowings (*ye shes*; Skt. *jñāna*) will flow forth as an intrinsically dynamic expression of that realization, as well as in response to the needs of suffering beings.

[96] While described as effortful, in contrast to breakthrough meditation, and clearly involving disciplined techniques in posture, focus, gaze, breathing, and adjustments, the central events of the meditation—the emergence and development of visual phenomena, a variety of emergent experiences, and the final dramatic collapse are all not intentional, guided, scripted, forced, individuated, bounded, or conceptual. Though there is a gradual process of unfolding at the heart of the meditation, it is very kinetic, and it intertwines subject dissolution and evocation, albeit in a self-emergent form. It is arguably the most sophisticated meditation on self-emergence in the history of Tibetan Buddhist meditation, drawing heavily upon a variety of precedents in Mahāyāna evocations of cosmological Buddhas, the eight, ten, or eleven signs emergent from interior subtle body work, deity yoga ritual evocations, emptiness meditation, and much else. The core of the practice is intransitive self-emergent processes—the unfolding, climaxing, and dissolution of the visions, as well as concordant experiences with one's body, speech, and mind—even if transitive disciplines of the body, gaze, breath, and attention help stimulate and to some degree guide that process.

Conclusion

[97] In conclusion, I would reiterate that within Longchenpa's *The Treasury of Words and Meanings* there is no discussion of doing the two main practices in conjunction with each other, such as first doing breakthrough for a sustained period and then proceeding to direct transcendence, or switching back and forth. Instead, just like the overarching division between 'objective reference' and 'awareness's self-presencing' forms of meditation, the two are presented as if they are options for different types of people. Regardless, the relationship between the two echoes the presentation of the view, conduct, meditation, and fruit, which oscillates between technique-driven descriptions of meditations with aphoristic accounts that at best could be described as meta-considerations or aesthetic prompts for interpreting and contextualizing the emergent experiences deriving from other practices.

[98] The Seminal Heart tradition ultimately views going beyond deliberate action and attention to effortless action and attention as involving a complex interplay of effort and its release as opening spaces for self-emergent autopoietic processes[2] to catalyze and come to the fore,

2 Poiesis is a term deriving from the Greek *poiēsis* and has the sense of creation, formation, or production. Etymologically linked to the English term poetry, it has been developed philosophically in interesting and relevant ways in the twentieth century to the present by Martin Heidegger and others. The term autopoiesis, literally self-creation, was coined in 1972 by Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela (Mataurana and Varela 1972) to define the self-maintaining chemistry of living cells. It went on to be extended in a wide variety of fields to understand diverse systems, with the common element being the system's capacity to sustain its own organization and identity through self-creation, such that it is not dependent on any external factors. The concepts of autopoiesis and autopoietic systems are closely linked with the notions of self-organization and self-organizing systems in terms of systems theory. At times they are distinguished by the former applying to living systems—cells, the human self, families, ecosystems species— and the latter

as well as shaping and/or contextualizing those processes while still respecting, valuing, and yielding to their autonomy. However, a deep consideration of the contemplative practices in question, and particularly a full consideration of the vast array of contexts in which they are embedded, and thus through which they are constituted, suggest complexities to this account of self-emergence. The tradition would paint such contexts as merely creating opportunities or spaces for that which is unmanifest to manifest, but it is far from clear that those same contexts don't also partially determine, structure, and shape at a deeper level the self-emergence itself. It is thus a fundamental question as to the ways in which these contextualizing factors—expectations, the physical environment, previous practices, philosophical systems, cosmologies, and so forth—may be fundamentally determinative of the character of those self-emergent phenomena, as well as the significance a practitioner attributes to them. While in the contemplative moment dominated by self-emergent processes the practitioner may not be exercising any direct agency, there are so many actions and contexts that preceded and even accompany the meditation that created the conditions or environment for these experiences and appearances to manifest and be understood. While this is not at all the same as meditations of habituation that repeatedly rehearse a sequence or set of experiences until they attain automaticity, the creation of these conditions and environments can still shape the intimate details of that which self-emerges.

[99] The Direct Transcendence practice is perhaps the ideal example of these issues as a plethora of the tradition's ideas, images, and practices shape one's expectations, while there are postures, breathing, physical environments, gazes, and considerations that create the immediate contemplative space in which the self-emergent visions manifest. Even during the visions self-emergence, postures, breathing, gazes, and considerations are maintained, while minute adjustments are made in response to the details of the visions, and with the aim of encouraging the visions' trajectory in scale, interrelation, and visual detail. The interplay between context, effort, and self-emergence thus raises complex questions as to the shifting agency in contemplative processes, and more fundamental questions about what is truly natural, and the final reality of self.

[100] In this context, the presence of self-awareness, or reflexive awareness (*rang rig*) is crucial, but its precise nature and role is not always clear. I would suggest it is not at all about creating an intensive regulatory environment in one's mind entailing hyper-awareness of every action and perfect alignment of them with values and intent, but instead that self-awareness functions as an illuminating catalyst that triggers dissolution of habituated patterns of action, perception, and reality construction, as well as identifying and dissolving remanifestations of tendencies towards abstraction, conceptualization, and reification. This allows for self-emergence out of one's own integrated being and world to come to the fore with its own autonomy and dynamic logic, to which one turns an open awareness. I would also point to some of the complexities in the notion of self-emergence (*rang snang*). The nature of the compound is ambiguous, though the various ways it can be parsed are intertwined and thus the term is fundamentally polyvalent—naturally emerging (*rang bzhin gyis snang ba*), intrinsic emergences (*rang gi snang ba*), and emerging through one's self (*rang gis snang ba*). The

focusing on understanding complex systems that are not animate life (cities, weather, stock market, etc.). In that way, autopoiesis applies to systems that can create all their components and organization by the entity itself, while self-organization applies to systems that can evolve without external input, but which do not create or maintain their own existence or organization as such. Herbert Guenther explicitly cites both terms in his interpretative studies of Great Perfection (such as Guenther 1989, 7, 34–35, 53, 215), and they are clearly linked to the central term 'self-emergence' (*rang byung*) and affiliated terms.

first indicates that the emergence has no external conditions stimulating or shaping it (*rkyen med*), the second could suggest the emergence is of the practitioner themselves as something already innately present, if not apparent, and the third might indicate that the emergence is self-guiding and self-organizing.

[101] In the present context, I have limited my examples to Longchenpa's classical systematization of the Seminal Heart tradition in the fourteenth century, and space does not permit me to exceed those constraints. However, I do believe that the above considerations are also crucial to understanding the tradition's earlier origins and its later transformations, though admittedly both involve in many ways starkly different contemplative practices. In terms of the tradition's origins, the key is examining the centrality of sensory meditations reliant upon complex procedures of preparation followed by the reception of liberatory experiences across all five senses, as well as the remarkably diverse meditations intertwined with either sound, the five elements of earth, water, fire, wind and space, or both. In later developments, we see increasing focus on visualization rather than vision, whether in the dominant eighteenth century *Klong chen snying thig* (The Seminal Heart of the Vast Matrix) revealed by Jikmé Lingpa (1730–1798,'Jigs med gling pa) (Jikmé Lingpa 1973), and its focus on mainstream ritual evocations of Buddhas, or the creative but peripheral fourteenth or fifteenth century *Yang ti nag po* (Black Ultra Pith) tradition initially revealed by Dungtso Repa Cima (fourteenth or fifteenth century, Dung mtsho ras pa phyi ma) (Dungtso Repa Cima 1979), and its interiorized somatic eyes in the context of darkness.[3]

[102] Transitivity, as a linguistic concept, illuminates how language itself articulates the nature, intensity, impact, and directionality of energetic interactions between different entities, both animate and inanimate. When considered in a more modular and scalar manner with the ten parameters outlined by Hopper and Thompson, we can see it also explores other complex issues such as agency, temporality, and individuation. Transitivity manifests differently in different languages, and I have offered above some basic reflections on how it applies to the Tibetan languages. I have then considered this framework in the context of a particular tradition of Tibetan Buddhist practices famous for their valorization of effortlessness, and derived from it a set of twelve scalar pairs explicitly operative in the tradition's presentation of these practices as it explores related issues of interaction, energy transfer, intentionality, agency, conceptuality, and individuation/entanglement. Finally, I have attempted to illuminate how such a framework can be used analytically both to gain insight into the rhetorical presentation of contemplative practices ('effortful' vs 'effortless', 'settling into naturalness', 'restoration', and so forth), and, through that, into the actual logics and dynamics of the practices themselves as they oscillate between effort-based transitive techniques and effortless intransitive experiences. As discussed above, this framework to explore effort, agency, intentionality, and structure within Great Perfection meditation does not rely on any strict correlation between the structures of language and contemplation, and yet at the same time interconnections between the two are inescapable given that Tibetans used their own distinctive language to articulate these practices and their outcomes, while their thinking about such complex issues in contemplation was and is certainly deeply influenced by the ways in which their language shaped their experience and understanding of the world.

[103] While the outlined scheme of contemplative transitivity is highly provisional even for the Great Perfection tradition, and surely inadequate for contemplative traditions more broadly

3 This has hardly been addressed in scholarship, but James Gentry and I are currently working on a series of studies concerning the *Ultra Black Pith* (*yang ti nag po*) tradition.

in Tibet, much less for beyond Tibetan Buddhism in other traditions, my hope is that even such a provisional scheme stirs dialog. It would be interesting to utilize it to consider such issues within other contemplative traditions and explore what adaptations might be necessary for it to be adequate in these new contexts, as well as how that tradition's original language(s) might affect how it thinks about such issues. Phenomenological interviewing of practitioners, as well, would potentially nuance and complicate these models. For myself, I am already working on a deeper exploration of the framework's viability within Tibetan Buddhism as I write these words of conclusion.

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