**SEEING WITH EYES CLOSED: THE WORK OF TANTRIC MEDITATION**

**Abstract**

This paper explores Buddhist meditation as a course of practical action, the work of meditation. The data on which the report is based comes from within the Tibetan Mahãyãna tradition. The paper explores forms of Vajrayãna Tantric meditation practices that include visualizations. Meditation practice is introduced as a mental technique by which one can work with the mind and learn from that experience. Meditation practice offers a controlled, purposeful, imaginative, exploration of states of consciousness. Within meditation visualization practices comprise a means of exploring certain meditative objects. This paper fashions a case study of a meditation practice that employs visualization and certain analytic conclusions are drawn. The results of this study of visualization in meditation are placed in the context of the broader academic literature on visualization practices in other contexts.

**Key Words**

**Visualisation. Meditation. Ethnomethodology. Mind. Practical Action. Phenomenology.**

**Introduction**

The paper commences by introducing directions in the theory / philosophy of mind. A brief comparative overview of “Western” and “Eastern” philosophical approaches to mind is fashioned. The ideas of Descartes are examined in the context of the insights provided by Phenomenology and the later Wittgenstein. Phenomenology and Wittgenstein are sensitive to the study of consciousness (Smith, Larkin and Flowers 2009). Significantly, each exhibit certain practical similarities to ideas in the “Eastern” philosophies of Hinduism and Buddhism (Harvey 1990). Following in a tradition from Hinduism, Buddhism has fashioned a practical philosophically informed treatment of how mind works that includes at its center meditation practice. The principle of learning by doing is given centre stage. Meditation practice is a device by which the practitioner works with mind and learns from that experience. In this fully empirical sense the meditator’s knowledge of mind, their mind, is so until counter evidence. The paper then goes on to outline the research methods employed for data collection, fieldwork and the comparative method. The paper also fashions a comparative account of the process of visualization from within a broader academic literature that explores visualization practices in other empirical contexts.

The empirical data for this paper comes from within the Tibetan Buddhist Mahãyãna tradition. Forms of Vajrayãna Tantric meditation practices are examined and our analytic focus is particularly on those that include visualizations. Buddhist scholarship employs concepts from within the languages of Pali and Sanskrit., ancient "dead” languages from the Indian sub-continent (Harvey 1990). In this paper, in the first instance when Pali and Sanskrit concepts are employed, a translation is offered and the concept is shown in italics. Analytic directions from within Phenomenology and Ethnomethodology are employed in the study of visualizations within meditation. The paper concludes with certain proposals for future research.

**Approaches to Mind: Theory and Practice.**

Within Buddhist and Hindu scholarship, "Eastern” approaches to mind, there is a practical focus. They are based around the experience of working with mind in meditation. A practical exploration of how mind works (, Harvey 1990). Competence in meditation practice is a practical accomplishment that is contingent upon a linguistically mediated pedagogic system and practical reasoning. In its fundamentals, meditation comprises a part of what Eglin has termed the corpus of occult sciences (Eglin 1986). In Buddhism, meditation involves learning how to explore states of mind, and work with meditative mental objects in order to modify consciousness. The task of meditation involves empirically based, concrete practical investigative work with meditative objects. Through the practical courses of action that comprise meditation, the meditator can seek to work with, gain insight into and even by degrees master aspects of consciousness. Within Buddhist and Hindu scholarship mind is treated as fundamentally mercurial in character, but through meditation practice, working with mind in an organized systematic manner, the “just how” of its functioning can be glimpsed. Aspects of mental processes can be understood more clearly. This work comprises an evolving knowledge and practical competence.

Buddhist Meditation practice offers the insight that all minds probably work in a fundamentally common natural biological manner. At a basic level, as beings with minds we are natural and biological, but through the employment of artfully and carefully fashioned cultural practices of meditation, we can embark upon understanding and transforming our mind. Through meditation practice, practitioners can seek to work with, gain insight into and even by degrees master aspects of their consciousness of existence, which is registered in their mind. Elements from within this insight are explored within this paper.

Consciousness is a fundamental attribute of being human. Being human is an accomplishment that is contingent upon processes of practical reasoning in a social world. We experience consciousness in the unfolding of time, we live time.

“Western” orientation’s to consciousness and related matters find a focus in the legacy of Descartes. (Descartes 1641 /1986; Haldane and Ross 1967). Husserl emphasised the sense in which consciousness is always directed, consciousness is always consciousness of something (Smith, Larkin and Flowers 2009). Mind always has a content or object (Husserl 1960). The works of Wittgenstein are illuminating in so far as they are relevant for the study of consciousness and language. For Wittgenstein, language is a fundamental mental content, a mode of representation for the experience of consciousness. (Wittgenstein 1953, 1961). As he suggests “When I think in language, there aren’t ‘meanings’ going through my mind in addition to the verbal expressions: the language itself is the vehicle of thought.” (Wittgenstein 1953, p.329) Through language and other practical symbolic devices including visual images and visualization, we are able to communicate our experience of consciousness.

**Fieldwork and the Comparative Method**

Ethnographic fieldwork is the basic research method employed for data collection. This is augmented by and structurally includes the comparative method. Fieldwork is a concept that anthropology borrowed from a significant academic ancestor, the biological naturalists. For biological naturalists of that era, fieldwork involved the collection, labeling and taxonomy of species, a variant of the comparative method. Within the social sciences and humanities fieldwork now serves as a gloss for variants of observational research (Atkinson et al 2001). Whilst ethnographic research methods did not originate with Malinowski, one needs to be reminded of that point (Malinowski 1922 ).Malinowski and his students popularized and systematized the ethnographic method to include the comparative study of basic social organizational institutional arrangements / patterns. These included the study of belief systems, kinship systems, political systems, economic systems etc.

The findings of this research report are the outcome of approximately eighteen months of ethnographic fieldwork in Buddhist monastic contexts. The wider organisational context from within which the data for this report were collected is not the topic of the current research. The focus of this report is the detail of a course of practical action, a meditation practice that was acquired through pedagogic instruction. An exemplar of this style of research report is Sudnow's analytic study of playing Jazz piano (Sudnow 1978; Ball and Smith 2011).

If Sudnow's work can be characterized as focusing on how to make a piano produce the sounds of jazz from combinations of musical notes and patterns of sound then our research explores how to make a mind receptive to visualizations within meditation, working with ideas. Prior to the analysis of our ethnographic data an introductory comparative framework for the data is formulated that contextualises our findings and fieldwork context. Within the social sciences, Max Weber’s corpus of studies of world religions serves as an example of the comparative method (Weber 1966).

Our research however has far more modest goals than Weber’s. Within a Buddhist context the research explores a course of practical action that involves processes of visualization and displays how this process is news-worthy. It seeks a purposeful exploration of visualization within consciousness. Processes of visualization as a means of exploring certain meditative objects. The empirical focus of this paper is a structured context in which reflection and refinement of consciousness takes place through visualization. In common with Sudnow's research the consciousness of a course of practical social action is the analytic object of enquiry. An ethnographically discovered practice is analytically explored by reference to certain themes within the philosophy of mind.

**A Comparative Framework for Visualization**

The works of Harvey Sacks served as my introduction to a wonderful book by Francis Yates that explores amongst other matters medieval monastic visualisation practices **(** Sacks1992 Yates 1966).Yates’s book ‘The Art of Memory’ explores how mental objects can be employed for mnemonic purposes. Starting with the pre Socratic classical Greek world of Simonides, Yates sketches how mnemonic techniques developed and were adapted in classical Latinised Roman scholarship through to Latinised Mediaeval monasticism and other contexts including the enlightenment and the formulation of ‘the’ scientific method. Mnemonics as fine detailed work that can be undertaken by employing the ‘minds eye’. Cognitive meditations.

Meditative visualizations have a basis in the employment of a fine grained and detailed memory which arises from their grounding in an occult tradition of great antiquity. Memory is fundamental for assembling courses of practical action, including meditation practices. As Yates quoting Quintilian reminds us about visualization as a foundation of the art of memory, “We require therefore places, either real or imaginary, and images or simulacra which must be invented. Images are as words by which we note the things we have to learn, so that as Cicero says, ‘we use places as wax and images as letters’.” (Yates 1966, p.22). The notion of simulacra is useful, in so far as this can serve as a description of the meditative journey, a reality “as if” (Vaitkus 2000, p.51). It needs to be emphasized that the Schutzian position of reality “as if” is not an epistemological problem for Buddhist scholarship. Indeed, within Buddhist scholarship we engage with the external world at a very fundamental level through our consciousness of it, with our mind. From this vantage, the employment of meditative objects, working with imagination, a simulacra is in certain of its particulars analogous to say a physicist’s model of the cosmos, or the same physicist’s model of their university department, their family relationships, their preference for a certain type of food, person or whatever, all are fundamentally anchored in the domain of ideas.

There is now a cumulative academic literature that explores practices of visualization within the natural and social sciences, (Garfinkel et. al. 1981, Lynch 1985, Latour 1986, Lynch 1991, Goodwin 1994). These studies are concerned with how courses of practical action serve to render work relevant objects understandable and visible, including optically discovered pulsars, sociological theories, instructed viewing in the courtroom, and the like.. In such contexts, visualization serves as a practical description for how work relevant objects are rendered visible for all practical purposes. In a study of police work and archaeological fieldwork, Goodwin has characterized this process as “professional vision”, as he has argued the matter, “All vision is perspectival and lodged within endogenous communities of practice. An archaeologist and a farmer see quite different phenomena in the same patch of dirt” (Goodwin 1994, p.606).

Visualization thus serves as a form of shorthand or gloss for a collection of practices for rendering an object accountable in the sense of it being intelligible and visible for presentational and other professional purposes. From the above examples, it is clear that processes of visualization are context, task, and work relevant and in that sense are not homogeneous. Our empirical materials of visualization within meditation practice extend the phenomenon in the direction of the consciousness of meditative objects. The distinguishing characteristic of meditative visualization is the level of control over the image or mental object. Control of the mental object of the meditation, is consequently an ongoing contingent course of practical action and is the hallmark of this type of visualization. Constructing mental objects in the mind’s eye and working with them is a practical accomplishment involving finely organized, focused and controlled work with memory and imagination. Minds trained to work with meditative objects are to varying degrees disciplined, concentrated and focused on the task of purposefully manipulating internal images and the feel of consciousness offered by such internal images . In this context, visualization serves as a descriptive gloss for directed and focused mental work with meditative objects, constructing and controlling internal images in the mind’s eye (Harvey 1990).

**Seeing Meditative Objects: Visualizations**

Buddhism comprises a collection of traditions. Within these traditions there are a range of forms of meditation practice, and variations around these forms. There are meditation practices that include visualization either as the principle meditative activity or as an optional component within a broader practice. For example, there are meditations that explore the transitory impermanence of embodied existence. Living through time in a body that ages and dies. The physical body as an assembly of parts, one’s own body. The impermanent nature of physical existence and the gradual transformation of the body in time. In time, young live bodies become old dead ones. We live time and experience the “now you see it now you don’t” of our existence, matters which can be fashioned into meditative objects, including visualizations (Garfinkel 1974, p.16). The artful employment of imagination and concentration whilst working with particular meditative objects such as ones transitory existence in a body, a form of reality “as if” ( Vaitkus 2000, p.51).

Within the Theravãdan tradition there is Samatha meditation practice in which visualization is at one level optional. Samatha meditation is designed to encourage calm mental states to arise ( Ball 2000). Within Tibetan Mahãyãna Buddhism with its Tantric influences, there are a number of practices which employ visualizations, including variants of kasina practices. For example, “pure land” visualizations that involve employing the setting sun as a mental object . A meditation that requires competence in the use of “the mind’s eye,” to concentrate on and hold an image of a setting sun, and to allow the mind to become gently but powerfully absorbed in working with that image. Working with the products of memory, mnemonic work (Yates 1966). A focused and directed mind, working with a mental object. (Beyer 1978, Harvey 1990, Hopkins 1984) Another Mahãyãna practice involves working with the images and deities depicted on a Thang-ka painting / scroll, visualization, internalization and memory, which provide a palpable visual object to work with. This is the meditation practice that serve as the data in this paper.

The sense in which acquiring competence in the above Buddhist meditation practices comprises a practical activity needs to be emphasized. Each of the practices is acquired by a form of situated pedagogic learning that is locally organized. The teacher student relationship is a central structural arrangement for acquiring knowledge of Buddhist meditation. In part, these are the processes Garfinkel indexed when he referred to “ the praxeological validity of instructed action ” (Garfinkel 1996, p.9). Each of the practices introduced above with its meditative objects are acquired in pedagogic contexts that involve cultivating the powers of visualization and memory.

**Altered States of Consciousness: A Comparative Overview**

Being human and having a mind is to be Conscious of existence in time and space. Throughout human history there have however been possibilities for altered states of consciousness. These are areas that tend now to be within the academic domain of the philosophy of mind, anthropology, psychology, pharmacology and neural science etc. Altered states of consciousness are various in nature and include those that occur from forms of psychological disorder, religious experience and the like, and those that occur as a result of consuming substances such as drugs or narcotics.

There are a range of psychological disorders that result in modifications of consciousness. For example, hearing voices in the head /mind, as can occur in certain types of mental disorders including schizophrenia (Leuder & Thomas 2000). Also, significant personal transformative religious “experiences” can include visions and inner voices. The mythical narratives within the monotheistic traditions of Christianity and Islam furnish numerous examples of such experiences occurring to their prophets and the devout. For instance, the Protestant John Bunyan’s reported experience, “But the same day, as I was in the midst of a game of Cat, ……..wherefore leaving my Cat upon the ground, I looked up to heaven, and was as if I had with the eyes of my understanding, seen the Lord Jesus looking down upon me, as being very hotly displeased with me” (Bunyan 1666, in Strachniewski and Pacheco 1998 pp. 1).

One of the most elementary forms of belief system is shamanism. Shamanic systems and practices include rituals symbols and ceremonies (Eliade 1974) Shaman’s are useful for our analytic purposes as when considering altered states of consciousness they serve as a bridge between psychological disorders, religious experiences and the use of substances such as drugs and narcotics. A global survey of shamanic cultures offers the overview that amongst Latin American indigenous shamanic cultures powerful mind altering substances tend to be employed to enter the shamanic trance whereas in European/ Asian shamanic cultures such substances are not employed ( Humphrey1999, Castenada 1968 ). In Communist China and the now defunct Soviet Union, geographical regions that had prior to communism included significant areas where shamanism was widespread, both adopted a common policy /approach to the phenomena. They defined the shaman as being mentally ill and in need of rehabilitation and treatment, frequently including drug treatment. As for the monotheistic prophets Christ and Mohammed who heard voices and experienced visions, might they have been mentally troubled when they fashioned their opiate’s for the masses? There are certainly developments in neural science that point in this direction.

Hallucination is a related form of inner vision, that can occur with or without drugs and can adopt an aural, visual or other sensory form including feelings on the flesh and so forth (Slade and Bentall 1988). Dreams also comprise a form of inner vision which most people experience, and there are a range of interpretations of their content, symbolism and relation to the “subconscious”, mythology etc. An area of study popularized in the twentieth century by Freud (Freud 1955). In the context of meditation, it is notable that there exist practices for remembering /recalling the detail of dreams, such that competent practitioners have the ability to run them through almost like video tapes. There are also practices for controlling developments within the course of a dream, as it is dreamt. Such meditation practices are most common in the Tibetan Mahãyãna tradition of Buddhism with its Tantric roots (Hopkins 1984, Waddell 1972).

Daydreams or phantasies which comprise part of Schutz’s “multiple realities” with their foundation in imagination bear some relationship to processes of visualization as the term is employed and developed in this paper (Schutz 1973, Vaitkus 2000). Daydreams/phantasies can involve eidetic practices and the manipulation of images in the mind. As Vaitkus following Gurwitsch suggests, states of mind which are based in phantasy can be linked into the phenomenological eidetic method, which involves “free variation in imagination” concerning the exploration of some phenomena or other (Vaitkus 2000, p.48, Gurwitsch 1964). Following on from Schutz’s analysis of “multiple realities” and the subjective character of experience in the context of his treatment of phantasy, Vaitkus reminds us that for Schutz, “It would be more correct to say that one has ‘modified realities’, realities ‘as if’.” (Vaitkus 2000, p.51). This notion of “modified realities”, realities “as if” serves as a useful departure point and characterization for meditative states involving purposefully controlled visualization.

This paper presents a brief consideration of a meditation practice that involves forms of visualization. As has already been implied, a mind trained to work with the objects of meditation is a disciplined mind, a finely powerful mind. The sense in which visualization is employed in this paper, as a description of a controlled mind working with certain mental meditative objects, requires to be distinguished from other forms of mental activity as outlined above. Namely, examples of psychological disorders, religious experiences, and those that occur as a result of consuming substances such as drugs or narcotics as these are not controlled in the same sense.

**An Introductory Comparative Framework for the Data**

This paper fashions a study of meditation visualisation as a course of practical action. Given this purposely narrow and technical analytic focus, a further brief comparative dimension operates as our departure point. Given the empirical context from within which the data for this paper is drawn it is pertinent to note that there has been and still is more than some variation in established belief systems and their orientation to the visual. For instance, within the established Christian traditions there exist variants of Eastern Orthodoxy with a clear emphasis on iconography and a purposeful visual dimension to religious practice and experience. Roman Catholicism also exhibits a powerful visual dimension with its statues of saints, artistic images, elaborate stained glass windows that depict religious scenes in cathedrals and churches etc. In this sense, both Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism encourage and incorporate a palpable visual dimension to religious practice. In contrast, Protestantism particularly in its most austere forms does not encourage a visual dimension to religious practice. Indeed, one of the notable features of the reformation was the protestant destruction / desecration of Catholic statues in particular and other forms of visual representation and imagery. This included a systematic attack on Catholicism’s organisational hierarchy and its embedded ritual, ceremony and symbols.

Continuing the theme of schism within a belief system, an analogy is palpably apparent within Islam (Farah 1970). Islam is a monotheistic variant, and Muslims share with Jews and Christians the common tradition of people of ‘the book.’ Within Islam there are Shi’ites, Sunnis, Wahhabis and the more mystical minority Suffi groups. Sunni and Wahhabi Muslims tend to be far less pre disposed towards imagery than are certain Shi’ite sects who engage in forms of visual representation and the shamanic informed Suffis who work with ecstatic states of consciousness including visualisations. This is a schism that has many of its origins in kinship and lineage disputes emanating from the death of the prophet Mohammad.

Within contemporary Islam, a dominant form of ‘Jihad’ has been practiced against the ‘enemies’ of Islam, Sunni and Wahhabi influenced fundamentalist groups that include the Taliban, Isis and others have established austere regimes that stand ideologically against western influences. For example, what is conventionally treated within western traditions as music, audio and visual representations and the like are deemed non Islamic.

The post Soviet Taliban regime in Afghanistan serves as an example of these austere fundamentalist practices. For example, under the Taliban, women were expected to dress in a modest manner that involved following certain traditional styles of dress. In this male dominated culture education for females was frowned upon. Also frowned upon was music and visual representations as routinely experienced in pre Taliban Afghanistan through media such as radio, television, cinema, newspapers books and the like.

For students of comparative religion there is an interesting candidate parallel to consider between the protestant fundamentalism and excesses of the reformation including the destruction of religious statues and other imagery and recent Islamic fundamentalism of the Taliban and Isis (Hinnels 1985). The fundamentalist Taliban repression of visual imagery found a focus in the now internationally infamous destruction of Buddha Rupa’s (statues) in Buddhist retreats along the silk road in Afghanistan. These were visual representations of great antiquity dating back to approximately 300 BC long before Christ or later Mohammed.

Whilst the Taliban’s destruction of Buddha Rupa’s shares something in common with the Protestant destruction of Catholic statues and imagery then this is the limit of the similarity. Protestants and Catholics are both strands of Christianity and this is an internal doctrinal conflict. In the case of the Taliban’s destruction of Buddha Rupa’s however this is to make a public statement of their Islamic fundamentalist beliefs by imposing them on a different more ancient belief system and its palpable visual artefacts. In short it is desecration of an iconography that is completely outside of the Islamic tradition. Whilst the Taliban may be able to lay claim to some form of Islamic rational for the destruction of what they might regard as visual manifestations of ‘idolatry,’ Buddha Rupa’s, they are non the less Muslims desecrating artefacts that are outside of their belief system and culture. With the obvious exception of Judaism, the major monotheistic belief systems of Christianity and Islam engage in more than some proselytizing.

Buddha Rupa’s come in various styles and sizes, they are sacred visual statue like representations of meditative positions, ideas and symbolism (Snellgrove ed. 1978). Buddha lived from about 566 BC to 486 BC in what is now Northern India and Nepal., but dependant upon the scholarly source his birth, life and death may have been slightly later. Since his Death within Buddhism there have been a range of traditions that spread initially largely within Asia.

Significant traditions are Theravãdan and Mahãyãna Buddhism. The data on which this paper is based is a Tibetan Mahãyãna meditation practice. Tibetan Mahãyãna Buddhism is notable for its rich visual iconography including art forms and artifacts, a plethora of visual representations and symbolism. Part of the data for this paper is visual images that are found on Thang-ka paintings or scrolls. Thang-ka’s can be simple in structure or immensely complex. The image / images and symbolism depicted within a thang-ka can be employed for meditative purposes within a structured pedagogic context. The image and associated ideas displayed within a thang-ka can serve as a palpable visual object to work with, internalize, visualize and memorise for meditative purposes.

**Tantric inspired Mahãyãna Meditation: Elements within a practical tradition** In an historical review of the occult foundations of The Art of Memory, Yates informs us that “The classical sources seem to be describing inner techniques which depend on visual impressions of almost incredible intensity.” (Yates 1966 P.4.) This serves as a useful departure point for our consideration of a form of meditative visualisation within the Tibetan Mahãyãna tradition. The practice is assembled from the foundations of a powerful focused mind and memory employing “visual impressions of almost incredible intensity”. Tibetan Buddhism is organised around a pedagogic system in which a neophyte has a teacher. The teacher is referred to as a Lama. In Vajrayãna Tantric meditation practices with visualisations, the Lama carries out the practical decision making that establishes appropriate meditative objects for the student. The Lama’s task specific wisdom, intuition and practical competence guide them to choose appropriate subject matter for their students progress. A progress that is achieved by working with suitable meditative objects. The Lama’s deliberations and decisions concerning the appropriateness of subject matter and meditative objects for a particular student are in part structured by their interpretation / understanding of the students nature, and of what might prove most beneficial for their meditative development (Blofeld 1970, Coleman 1993 ed., Gethin 1998 Cuevas 2003 ).

There are a collection of potential stages within these Lama designed meditation practices for this student. The stages / elements can include a visualisation of a chosen deity, a yi-dam, the incantation of sounds that are suitable for the selected deity, mantras and a visualisation of a sacred space, a mandala. A further stage can involve the incorporation of the embodied particulars of ritualised bodily gestures, mudrãs. Examples of mudrãs can be clearly seen as part of the bodily architecture of various Buddha Rupa’s.

In this tradition, the cultivation of a powerful concentration and memory is pivotal for working with the images and ideas / visualisations the student is directed towards by their teacher. These are the meditative objects (Dasgupta 1974). A focused and directed mind that works with the selected mental objects. In part, these are the processes Garfinkel indexed when referring to “ the praxeological validity of instructed action ” (Garfinkel 1996 P.9. ).

**Selecting a yi-dam as a course of practical action** The Lama suggests to their student an appropriate deity, a yi-dam that is relevant for this particular students meditative development. In common with the pantheon of male and female Hindu deities, each Tibetan deity has a distinct nature. each Buddha and Bodhisattva. As a system, the yi-dam’s are organised into five groups referred to as jinas. The Vajrayãna Buddhas, are structured around accessing/ being relevant for the range of imperfections exhibited by humans. Each yi-dam , deity has its unique characteristics encompassing a range of positive and negative attributes, and it is these which they are selected for. From this vantage, just as people in everyday life have natures, in the profane world, so to do deities in the sacred domain (Durkheim 1915). In this sense, a Lama chooses a deity that in certain of its aspects is useful for this students meditative development.

The chosen yi-dam exhibits an affinity with the students nature and is deemed useful for meditative practical purposes. The yi-dam comprises a suitable meditative object for this students meditations, chosen on the basis of the Lamas practical working knowledge of such matters. The yi-dam serves as a form of teacher for the student, and for the lama they comprise an occult “teaching aid”. In a very particular sense, the yi-dam serves as what Weber has termed an ideal type for the meditative purposes of the student (Weber 1947). Whilst the nature of the yi-dam is not precisely identical with the students, it mirrors certain fundamental characteristics that the student can employ and focus on in order to do meditative work.

The Lamas practical work of selecting appropriate meditative objects for this student is grounded in an occult tradition and the palpable particulars of this students situation, its “just how”. The fundamentals underlying this process of practical decision making involve what Frazer has termed “sympathetic magic.” As Frazer attempts to persuade us, “If we analyse the principles of thought on which magic is based, they will probably be found to resolve themselves into two: first, that like produces like, or that an effect resembles its cause; and, second, that things which have once been in contact with each other continue to act on each other at a distance after the physical contact has been severed”. (Frazer 1922 P.14). In this case, the practical meditative work of the student, when working with aspects of the yi-dam , “like produces like”. Through visualisation practices the student focuses upon aspects within their own nature that they might not otherwise elect to either recognise or do work upon. Significant elements within the energy located in certain of the students imperfections become transformed through insight, into a type of wisdom. An approximately equal and opposite energy revealed by doing meditative work with the yi-dam . A sympathetic ‘magical’ transformation of a form of negative energy into a positive form or correlate.

**Ideas, Images and sounds as meditative objects; working with yi-dam**  Within this tradition, ideas, the corpus and principles of tantric Vajarayãna Buddhism, and the images of the yi-dam deities alongside purposeful sounds serve as meditative objects. The sounds are referred to as mantras from the Hindu Vedic tradition. Mantras are powerful potent sounds, their incantation and resonance is analogous to the energy generated within chanting and related acts. For example, chanting in the ancient “dead” languages of Pali, Sanskrit, Latin or whatever, liturgical uses. In their fundamentals, mantras are potent phonetic assemblies of syllables of sound and amenable to the study of linguistics, particularly phonology, including the structural linguistics of Jakobson (Fudge ed. 1973). From the sacred Vedic scripts, a classic and now widely known mantra is the sound shift Om. In the Vedas Om is treated as the essence or fundamental sound of the cosmos, a powerful sound (Choudhry in Bowen ed. 1998. Blofeld 1978 ). The powerful phonemic sound of Om can be used as a meditative object in and of itself. The power of the sound resides in the way it is used, its incantation. In how the sound pattern is assembled and the phonemic sound shifts emphasised etc. Language has a distinct energy, in speech sounds, emphases, pauses and silences can be very powerful. How to do things with and without words (Malinowski 1935, Austin 1962, Sacks 1987). The energy residing in both the pronunciation and the state or attitude of mind of the utterer, careful / skilful meditative work, being mindful of words and actions, words as action (Wittgenstein 1953). In the context of a yi-dam in Vajarayãna Buddhism, the mantra is chosen / designed to focus / tune the students mind into the fundamental characteristics of the yi-dam. The mantra thus serves to tune the students mind into basic aspects of the yi-dam’s nature. A phonic course of action that assists the students meditative work setting the stage for visualisation of the deity in all its particulars. The yi-dam has an energy, that is embodied in its characteristics, and it is this energy that the student works with. The mantra provides access to parts of this energy. it summons it phonically into the meditators mind. As previously indicated, sounds have a particular energy, a mental resonance when uttered in a mindful focused way, which can serve to provide a platform for and direct the meditator towards appropriate states of mind for visualisations of the yi-dam. This order of meditative work serves to assist the practioner in internalising in their mind external abstract ideas / notions in a form which can serve as meditative objects. The external energy of the yi-dam is thereby worked with and components of it are channeled by the student for their meditative development. In this context, the mantra serves as a work object that the student employs to aurally summon the powers of the chosen yi-dam. A phonic object that is employed in the fashioning of the internal experience that is the work of meditation. As Garfinkel has argued in another context concerning such ordered phenomenal details of practical action, “These details are unmediatedly experienced and experienced evidently.” (Garfinkel 1996 P.7.).

Different yi-dam’s have different natures and associated mantras. The nature of a yi-dam can be selected by a teacher for pedagogic use by a particular student to work with. The yi-dam relates to the character of the student, and the meditative work that the student requires to carry out, as interpreted by their teacher. An example of a yi-dam is the female supernatural deity Tara, who is treated as incarnate in the Dali Lama. The bodhisattva Tara is the queen of heaven and represents in a general sense mercy. There are thang-ka’s that reveal pictorially twenty one Taras. Each of the twenty one Tara’s display different facets of the same deity. They range from Tara the completely perfect to Tara with the frowning brows, from peaceful to wrathful. Each of Tara’s facets can be worked with and employed for purposes of visualisation (Waddell 1972 P.360. Beyer 1978). Through this pedagogic system the meditator may be guided by their teacher to work with aspects of Tara in order to reveal elements within their own nature.

Tara’s mantra is om tãre,tuttãre ture svãha! (Harvey 1990 P.261). Mantras such as Tara’s are patterns of sound that when uttered in a careful mindful way as an incantation can resonate palpable energy. They are designed to be uttered in a manner which releases their powerful potency as a meditative object, an incantation. As potent phonemic assemblies of syllables of sound, mantras have the potential to generate meditative energy for the practioner. Mantras serve to access the nature of the yi-dam, to communicate with and tap into its energy. The power and energy of the phonemic sound pattern arises from its construction and fashioning as a verbal act, an incantation. In Wittgenstein’s sense the use of words / sounds to do things (Wittgenstein1953). Whilst at the mechanical level, mantras are assembled out of speech sounds, phonemic sound shifts, pronunciation, intonation, emphases, pauses, silences, volume, and so forth, it is the work of the speaker that breaths life into them. The speaker animates the mantra, and how they perform the meditative act, the just how of its enactment, their state of mind. Being in the moment to the exclusion of all other moments, is foundational for the outcome. Being mindful of words and actions, living purposefully in just this moment, being focused on the mantra and its potential energy. In this sense, the quality and content of a persons mind always have a significant effect on them and those they come into contact with ( Gendlin 1992). We act in the moment, and how we are qualitatively in that moment, in that here and now has subtle and sophisticated consequences for us and our interactions with others, past - present - future. It is consequently important that when reciting the mantra, the meditator is skilful, mindful, and careful of the magnitude of energy they are bringing forth, and its place within and consequence for their meditation practice. How things are done, an incantation, is significant, the energy, care and diligence with which a mantre is recited, the employment of a meditative object, effects the outcome of the meditation in very consequential ways.

**Working with ideas and images; Seeing the thoughts**

Thang-ka scrolls / paintings /images are visual compositions / representations that exhibit a particular theme, organization and style and are unavoidably sight specific. (Snellgrove ed. 1978). Examples of Thang-ka’s can be seen in many introductory books on Buddhism ( Keown 1996, Harvey 1990 Etc.). As forms of iconographic representation Thang-ka’s can be simple in structure or immensely complex. A Thang-ka can display a single portrait like image of one deity, various facets of one deity (twenty one Tara’s), a mythical narrative from within Buddhism, they can comprise a complex structure displaying within the composition numerous deities and ideas etc. ( Coleman & Jinpa eds. 2005 p.254.). The image/ images and associated ideas displayed within a thang-ka can serve as a palpable visual object to work with, internalize, visualize and memorise for meditative work. Working with a thang-ka image in this Tibetan tradition of meditation encapsulates what Yates directs us to when he observes, ‘And the ancient memories were trained by an art which reflected the art and architecture of the ancient world, which could depend on faculties of intense visual memorization which we have lost.’ (Yates 1966 p. 4.). The image / images and symbolism depicted within a thang-ka can be employed for meditative purposes within a structured pedagogic framework. For instance, the facets of the bodhisattva Tara that are displayed visually in the tang-ka of the twenty one Tara’s range from Tara the completely perfect to Tara with the frowning brows, from peaceful to wrathful. Each individual representation of Tara can comprise a meditational object in its own right (Waddell 1972 (1895) p.360).

The image of Tara with the frowning brows is interesting for our analytic purposes. In our earlier consideration of the comparative method and a comparative framework for exploring our Tibetan data we described the Taliban in Afghanistan as frowning on certain matters including most notably visual representations and imagery. In this context, frowning indicates metaphorically the Taliban’s displeasure at a range of matters that they interpret as being non Islamic. Tara’s frowning could also indicate displeasure or wrath and be contrasted with Tara the completely perfect.

Another example of a complex Thang-ka scroll is displayed in Harvey’s book. This shows a number of different Vajrayãna deities around the periphery of a central Mandala (Harvey 1990 P265). As symbolic forms, mandala’s are Vedic in origin, circular in shape and represent the cosmos. It is a shape that is replicated throughout Hindu architectural design. At the centre of the mandala is depicted a sacred deity. In Brahminical culture, mandala’s performed a significant and dynamic part in prayer and meditation, a forerunner of their place in Tibetan Buddhist Tantric practice (Elgood1999, Wayman1973). When a student is given a complex thang-ka such as this to work with, it serves to familiarise them with the cosmos which their yi-dam inhabits and the range of deities and arrangements therein. The mandala operates as a conduit to symbolically connect the sacred domain of the deities to the largely profane world of the meditation practioner. The student will be directed to work with their imagination and to visualise entering the mandala and travelling through all its particulars. The student operates with a modified form of reality, what Vaitkus following Schutz terms reality “as if” (Vaitkus 2000 P.51). This meditative exercise enables the student to become familiar with aspects of the sacred domain of their yi-dam and to gain access to its potential energies. Through this intense imaginative meditative practice the student is working with “visual impressions of almost incredible intensity.” (Yates 1966 P.4.).Trained by their teacher in the employment of a mantra , yi-dam, mandala, and mudrãs, as meditative objects, the student is in the position to develop their meditations with powerful visualisations.

Within this Tibetan tantric tradition, under the guidance of their teacher the student becomes familiar with in depth knowledge of their allocated deity, their yi-dam. They study texts and explore the fine detail of the visual images of their yi-dam within its cosmos as revealed in thang-ka representations. The mindful and concentrated study of these meditative objects taken alongside personalised instruction from their teacher cumulates towards the students ability to fashion powerful visualisations that access aspects of the deities contextual energy. This is an occult tradition in which the lama teaches and encourages this student to employ their imagination and psychic ability to build up powerful visual images of their yi-dam, as a palpable functioning deity in a sacred realm. Visualisations of the yi-dam and its sacred realm become animated and palpable for the practioner, a reality “as if”. As Yates has commented on a related tradition, ‘ This tradition was started by the author of *Ad Herennium* himself who says that the duty of an instructor in mnemonics is to teach the method of making images, give a few examples, and then encourage the student to form his own.’ (Yates 1966 P. 11). The student internalises in memory powerful and intense images and ideas which by employing their imagination they focus upon in order to intertwine with the energy of the deity to insightfully acquire, and do manipulative meditative work with aspects of its energy.

As with all Buddhist meditation practices that I am familiar with there are

standard ritual devices in order to effect the transfer from the meditation reality to the everyday reality. In his case it involves carefully and respectfully dissolving the meditative visualisation in the mind into an emptiness, into a nothing. The above account of Tibetan tantric meditation amounts to for all practical purposes a gloss. As Garfinkel reminds us concerning the dilemma of fashioning adequate descriptions of practical actions , “procedurally described, just in any actual case, it is elusive. Further, it is only discoverable. It is not imaginable. It can not be imagined, but is only actually found out, and just in any actual case. The way it is done is everything it can consist of and imagined descriptions cannot capture this detail.” (Garfinkel 1996 P.8.) In common with Garfinkel, Buddhism has an essentially empirical orientation to the acquisition of knowledge, particularly knowledge of mind through meditation practice, and would concur with Garfinkel’s observation that “ The way it is done is everything it can consist of ”. Visualisations such as those outlined above have a basis in the employment of a fine grained and detailed memory which arises from their induction into an occult tradition of great antiquity. Memory is fundamental in assembling courses of practical action, including meditation practices. Visualization employing memory is a mental skill which is used in numerous practical contexts as well as scholastic and occult traditions and its development is of great antiquity. In a consideration of mnemotechnics, Yates informs us "in the ages before printing a trained memory was vitally important; and the manipulation of images in memory must always to some extent involve the psyche as a whole" (Yates 1966, p. ix). The notion of mnemomtechnics is useful, in so far as this can serve as a description of the meditative journey in the mandala, reality “as if” (Vaitkus 2000 P.51). It needs to be emphasised however that the Schutzian position of reality “as if” is not an epistemological problem, for Buddhist scholarship. Indeed, within Buddhist scholarship we engage with the external world at a fundamental level through our consciousness of it, with our mind and ideas / thoughts about aspects of our reality / world. From this vantage, the employment of meditative objects such as the mandala, working with imagination, a simulacra is in certain of its particulars analogous to say a physicists model of the cosmos. Or, the same physicists model of their university department, their family relationships, their preference for a certain type of food, person or whatever, all are fundamentally anchored in the domain of ideas.

**Conclusion** This paper has added a further dimension, to the expanding corpus on practices of visualisation. Meditation practices offer a study in occult science, which makes extensive use of visualisation, both as a summative aspect of pedagogic practice, and for accommodating and demonstrably showing deities as iconic objects in sight specific ways as part of pedagogy. Thang-ka’s range from simple to complex images / representations that are designed to depict significant components within a theoretically arranged, metaphysical corpus, which offers a student objects to work with. Whilst in the context of social theory, Lynch is able to persuade us that incorporated images are in many instances superfluous to / illustrative of the more fundamental linguistic descriptions, in the case of Tantric Tibetan Buddhist pedagogic practice, images such as thang-ka’s serve as fundamental palpable objects for meditators to work with. (Lynch 1991) The detail incorporated in selected thang-ka’s provide a student under the tutelage of their teacher with the detailed particulars of visual meditative objects to work with. Objects that when manipulated with imagination and memory fashion the products of the singularly solitary work of practice, products that index meditative development.

The principle distinguishing characteristic of the disciplined mental work of visualisation based meditation is located in the degree of control over the image / mental work. This is a purposeful manipulation of a meditative object, visualisation as an ongoing course of practical action. Fashioning and working with visualisable meditative mental objects in consciousness as a fundamentally practical activity. Controlled delicate and precise cognitive work involving memory and imagination which gives rise to the practical accomplishments of visualisation in meditation. Constructing and controlling internal images in the minds eye. A Mind trained to work with meditative objects is disciplined, concentrated and focused on the practical work of purposefully manipulating internal images and the state of consciousness they offer.

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