



## Interaction Rescaled: How Monastic Debate Became a Diasporic Pedagogy

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*Rather than assume the relevance of a priori scalar distinctions (micro-, macro-, meso-), this article examines scale as an emergent dimension of sociospatial practice in educational institutions. Focusing on Buddhist debate at Tibetan monasteries in India, I describe how this educational practice has been placed as a rite of institution within the perimeter of Sera Monastery in India and rescaled into a more expansive diasporic pedagogy by reformers like the Dalai Lama. [interaction, scale, language, religious education, reproduction]*

### Does Interaction Have a Scale?

There is a damning phrase Erving Goffman used in the twilight of his career that confirmed, for his critics at least, just how blinkered his whole project was. That phrase, “the interaction order,” was the title of his 1982 presidential address to the American Sociological Association and was proposed as a distillation of decades of writing on face-to-face encounters, encounters that transpire in “environments in which two or more individuals are physically in one another’s response presence” (Goffman 1983:3). In this deliberately cribbed *micro*-sociology, scale was used conceptually and rhetorically to separate interaction from mainstream sociology, to constitute it as an object—not unlike the way many disciplines have tried to carve out a distinctive domain by purifying their object of knowledge from competing disciplinary logics (cf. Latour 1993b; e.g., Saussure’s [1983] efforts to define *la langue* as the core of language and foundation for disciplinary linguistics against encroaching fields like psychology, history, and sociology). Whatever disciplinary motivations may have inspired this downscaling of interaction—this was, after all, an address to his field in his role as president—and apart from any analytic purchase this rhetoric of scaling may have had for audiences in the early 1980s, it is now clear that this has had unfortunate consequences, both conceptual and empirical.

Although it is still a reflex to speak of and even celebrate the “local,” “situated” nature of face-to-face interaction, many have been troubled by these qualities and are no longer content to treat “the interaction order” as if it were some watertight chamber of activity insulated from macrosocial dynamics and pressures.

So what do they do? Some marvel at what they take to be the scalar hybridity and heterogeneity of discursive interaction, like the way resources and materials associated with distinct spatial and temporal scales converge and are melded in the crucible of face-to-face encounters. In face-to-face interaction they discover sherds of larger structures—discourses, language ideologies, categories of identity, master tropes and narratives. Others, working more from the inside out, concede that interaction is micro but then add up tokens of it, charting “larger-scale” trajectories of interaction—like the way identity seems to crystallize and sediment longitudinally over lots of discrete, situated events. Still others have tired of the coarse “micro–macro” distinction and propose what they believe to be finer, middle-range—“meso”-level—distinctions. And when writers of all dispositions try to link the levels or scales they construct, moving from the relatively small to the relatively large, they rely on remarkably few connection types, all rather wooden. There is, for instance, the methodological commonplace that interaction should be set “in” some larger context (institutional site, sociocultural matrix, state regime, global

flows), which ferries in contextual information to participants, making the interaction meaningful and pragmatically consequential in some respect or capacity. Some, unsure of the precise directionality of these relations (whether uni- or bidirectional, whether one level causally influences the other more), throw up their hands and declare the relationship a “dialectic,” which often just means that no side is responsible and that no further explanation is needed.

All inherit the sense of interaction’s diminutive scale.

Bruno Latour (2005) takes apart this axiom. “People are only too ready to accept that . . . abstractions like structure, context, or society should be criticized,” writes Latour, but they are convinced that there is something concrete and local and micro about the abstraction called interaction. In a characteristically mischievous exercise, a series of “gymnastics,” as he puts it, Latour picks apart intuitions about the scale of interaction until one isn’t sure how small or large, local or nonlocal, micro or macro interaction is.

No interaction is “isotopic,” because “what is acting at the same moment in any place is coming from many other places, many distant materials, and many faraway actors” (Latour 2005:200). No interaction is “synchronic,” because the pieces it comprises did not all begin at the same time. Interactions are not “synoptic” either, says Latour, in the sense that only some participants are visible and focal at any given point. Those who inhabit participant roles like “speaker” and “hearer” make up only the official roster of actors present. Nor are interactions “homogenous,” his fourth and related gymnastic. The kinds of agents that make up interactions are not necessarily the same type, and some aren’t even human. The “relays through which action is carried out,” he writes, “do not have the same material quality all along,” but instead there is a “crowd of non-human, non-subjective, non-local participants who gather to help carry out the course of action.” (This is a signature move in actor-network theory, where one stops privileging human agents [see, e.g., Latour 1993a, 1993b].) Interactions are not, finally, “isobaric”—a meteorological trope, Latour’s attempt to speak of the varied “pressures” exerted by the manifold agents of action. Taken together, these gymnastics suggest that it is “impossible to start anywhere that can be said to be ‘local’ ” (Latour 2005:200–202).

Latour would have us be “indifferent” to the scale of interaction, not because scale is illusory but because he does not want to “settle scale in advance”; he wants to provide actors “enough space,” he writes, “to deploy their own contradictory gerunds: scaling, zooming, embedding, ‘panoraming,’ individualizing, and so on” (Latour 2005:220). His negative propositions about interaction are meant as theoretical “clamps” to prevent one from prematurely jumping scale, so that the scale-jumping virtuosity of participants can become an object of empirical investigation (cf. Oppenheim 2007).

In a recent review of the literature on scale in human geography, a field wherein scale has been both a cardinal notion and object of critical reflection, Moore (2008) expresses a sentiment not unlike Latour’s. Marxist-inspired political-economic geographers in the 1970s and 1980s came to realize that hierarchically nested scales are not ontological givens, as had been presumed, but materially produced sociospatial effects of global capitalism (Marston 2000; Taylor 1982). In the 1980s, this growing sense of scale’s artifactuality began to erode confidence in scale as a heuristic—not unlike the way so many analytic staples from religion to nation to culture were interrogated during the same period. Although Moore argues that human geographers of all persuasions would now likely agree that “scale is not a fixed or given category” but “socially constructed, fluid and contingent” (Moore 2008:204), Moore rightly insists that, empirically, one still needs to explain scale as an emergent dimension of sociospatial practice (cf. Gupta and Ferguson 1992). In a move reminiscent of Latour, Moore suggests that a priori scalar distinctions often result in “procrustean research that attempts to fit complex spatial politics within the narrow confines of a handful of conceptually given scales such as the local, national or global”

(Moore 2008:211), but this does not mean one can jettison scale any more than one can disregard “religion” or “nation” or “culture” as sociohistorical facts; one just needs to avoid conflating scale as an analytic category from scale as a category of practice, argues Moore.<sup>1</sup>

None of this critical reflection on scale bodes well for the micro–macro binary, a distinction that invites us to think of scale as hierarchically nested spatiotemporal levels.<sup>2</sup> It is difficult to imagine a productive anthropological future for this binary, even with the addition of intermediate distinctions like *meso-*, although some have tried to push the envelope of received scalar discourse. In a string of influential essays on scale politics, Neil Smith added plot and character to scale, writing, for instance, of scale-“jumping” (1992) and scale-“bending” (2004), and a few linguistic anthropologists and sociolinguists of late have experimented with similar tropes (e.g., Agha 2011; Blommaert 2007; Briggs 2004). Latour (2005) has offered a panoply of colorful, gerundive descriptors for scalar practices and effects, from “embedding” to “zooming” to “panoraming.” As productive as this experimentation has been, when it comes to the discursive and semiotic mediation of scaling practices, Latour, like others, has little to say (but see, e.g., Blommaert 2007; Collins and Slembrouck 2005; Collins et al. 2009; Irvine and Gal 2000 for suggestive beginnings).

It is in this spirit of exploring the semiotic and discursive dimensions of scaling practices that I turn to the production of educated persons at Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in India. I focus on a kind of face-to-face argumentation, Buddhist ‘debate’ (*rtsod pa*). Debate looks anchored in the here-and-now, and in a sense it is, but as an educational rite of institution (Bourdieu 1996:102–115) it offers participants the potential for a kind of scale-jumping performativity, where patterns acted out in the space-time envelope of the here-and-now seem to exemplify something larger. This potential, typical of ritual, may seem concentrated within the event’s perimeter, as if it were stored within its semiotic properties, but this scale-jumping potential would be unstable without debate’s institutional “placement,” its embeddedness within a highly distributed assemblage of discursive practices. And the more one inspects this assemblage, the more indistinct the edges of the interaction order become.

### **Buddhist Debate as an Educational Rite of Institution**

Debate had clear, unmistakable edges when I first approached it at Sera monastery. Founded in the early 1970s in Bylakuppe, Karnataka State, Sera is one of the largest exile monasteries of the dominant Geluk sect and is renowned for rigorous debate-based philosophical study. India’s Sera presents itself as an avatar and legitimate heir of its namesake, Tibet’s Sera, founded in 1419 on Lhasa’s outskirts. (Tibet’s Sera still exists, but as Sera monks in India would often insist, its curriculum pales compared to India’s Sera.) Stylistically, debate grates on the senses. It is loud, brash, and agonistic, and I was curious about the fate of this style of wrangling in a period in which liberal-democratic principles were being used by agents like the Dalai Lama to reimagine exile governance and Tibet’s religious patrimony, Buddhism (Lempert 2012a). Because it was a discursive practice that drew me to Sera, this may have predisposed me to see debate as a discrete object of study with clear boundaries, but debate does much to encourage this impression.

Debate distinguishes itself from its surround in myriad ways. It does not look or sound anything like the way Tibetans ordinarily deliberate and argue. In debate monks use a specialized lexical repertoire and a formal method of argumentation called “consequences” (*thal ‘gyur*) that takes a couple of years to master. Consequences have been compared to enthymemes, syllogisms with an unstated premise held by the addressee but not (necessarily) the speaker. “Formally,” summarizes Dreyfus, “consequences are set

apart from arguments by their use of the format ‘it follows . . . because’ (*thal phyir*) instead of ‘it is . . . because’ ” (2003:47). More striking than debate’s lexical register and method of reasoning is the comportment monks adopt when they wrangle. Monks who play the challenger role act in ways that would look boorish and even violent off the debating courtyard. When challengers make points they shout and stomp their feet and fire piercing open-palmed claps that explode in the direction of the seated defendant’s face. They hurl taunts, too, some of which, such as ‘shame [on you]!’ (*o tsha*), belong to debate’s lexical register. Before I set foot on the debating courtyard, a senior monk warned me about what I would see and hear, and when I asked monks to recount what it was like when they first caught sight of debate, they would usually laugh and confess that it looked like a this-worldly brawl. They were shocked. Debate is conspicuously *unlike* quotidian communicative behavior among monks, for the practice suspends—flouts, really—monastic etiquette. Noisy and visually arresting, debate steals attention and gathers crowds; it invites observers to think that everything of interest is unfolding “within” its proscenium, as if debate had a clear inside and outside. If ever there were a neatly circumscribed “speech event” (see Agha and Wortham 2005), it would surely be found among the ranks of rituals like debate. (This will come as no surprise to students of ritual, because it has long been noted that ritual generally, whether of the Goffmanian [1967] “interaction ritual” sort or the more official, elaborated, public varieties [Silverstein 2004], tends to separate itself from its surround [Keane 1997].)

Spatially, debate is also perimeterized. It cannot happen anywhere but only in designated places, especially in each college’s debating ‘courtyard’ (*chos rwa*). Temporally, debate is scheduled, set to time. At Sera Mey in south India, my primary field site, twice-daily, two-hour-long debate sessions convene during fixed times, and then there are the innumerable formal debate ‘defenses’ (*dam bca*) that occur on set dates in the monastic calendar.

And so: a distinctive lexical register and mode of argumentation; a “violent” comportment exhibited by challengers that flouts ordinary monastic etiquette; the practice’s spatial and temporal regimentation. All this digs a channel around the practice, giving it its boundaries. Add to this the apparatus and methods for recording and transcribing interaction, through which one transduces sound and image into a text-artifactual trace—the prized and oft-fetishized “transcript”—and it is little wonder that debate should have appeared to me to have sharp, unmistakable edges.

As circumscribed as debate seems, and is, it is a commonplace for the Durkheimian tradition that rituals are also axiological (value-setting) sites of macrosocial relevance—thrumming engines of social and cultural “reproduction,” as Durkheim and Mauss (1963:11) once imagined (for schools, cf. Althusser 1994; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Levinson et al. 1996; Willis 1977, 1981, 1983). How strange that a practice so bounded should also be so far reaching, capable of operating at a scale far beyond its self-styled immanence.

Before tracing debate’s reach, let us consider what occurs within its perimeter. Debate features two speech-event roles that may be glossed as *challenger* and *defendant*. The challenger, who stands while the defendant sits cross-legged before him, tries to induce inconsistencies in claims the defendant makes about Buddhist doctrine. He problematizes relentlessly, no matter what he may personally think about the philosophical issue at hand and no matter how he may feel about the defendant. The defendant is the challenger’s mirror image, for he is expected to have a thesis and be committed to what he says, and his task is to defend doctrine against the challenger’s attacks. The defendant is obliged to restore consistency among philosophical claims and is judged competent to the extent that he does this. Monks take turns playing these roles in daily courtyard debate. They spend some of the time as defendant, some of the time as challenger.

As for debate's flow, it begins slowly and placidly. At first the challenger may even seem helpful and deferential. He leaves doctrinal integrity intact and treats the defendant with a modicum of respect. By default the defendant is presumed to be knowledgeable, so he sits accordingly. In formal debate defenses, he typically enjoys the highest seat in the room, and in all debates, he sits cross-legged on a cushion and retains that pose for the whole debate, while the challenger paces about frenetically. Rather than disturb the presumption that the defendant knows doctrine well, the challenger at first asks seemingly innocuous questions, questions that elicit things already known and shared between them—such as definitions and divisions found in doctrinal texts, material they have both committed to memory. (Of course, should the defendant's memory fail him, taunts will come sooner, rather than later, as we shall see.)

Debates thus begin with a phase of consensus building, and this can be seen most dramatically in formal debate defenses (*dam bca'*). After approaching the defendant and delivering an open-palmed hand-clap—a clap that is quieter and milder than the claps that come when the debate really gets underway—the challenger utters an auspicious line used to start all debates. The line invokes Mañjuśrī, a deity who embodies Buddha's insight into the nature of reality. In the annual Sera Mey Rigchung preliminary debates, the monk challenger, as is customary, follows this invocation with a fragmentary quote. He lobs at the seated defendant a cryptic, trisyllabic fragment drawn from a line in a text. The challenger selects the fragment in advance and takes it from the chapter on which the debate is to be focused.

The defendant's first task? To identify the line from which the three syllables were taken and cite the whole sentence accurately. In the debate segment illustrated next, the text under discussion is Khedrup Denpa Dhargye's (1995) *General Meaning Commentary* on Maitreya's *Clear Ornament of Realization* (mkhas-grub, dge-'dun bstan-pa dar-rgyas 1995), a philosophical textbook used during the Perfection of Wisdom course of studies. The debate is trained on one topic in the book, '[altruistic] mind generation' (*sems bskyed*). This refers to the way Buddhists cultivate a bodhisattva's single-minded devotion to the welfare of all sentient beings, a devotion that should gird all spiritual and meditative pursuits. The textbook's source clause that houses the trisyllabic fragment reads—

... bdag gi bde dge thams cad dang gzhan gyi sdug bsngal brje ba'i tshul gyis sbyong bar byed pa'i phyir

... because of doing training through the method of exchanging all of one's happiness for other's suffering. (mkhas-grub, dge-'dun bstan-pa dar-rgyas 1995:132, trisyllabic fragment underlined)

Trouble is, the defendant can't seem to figure out the fragment's source.<sup>3</sup>

- |   |   |  |   |
|---|---|--|---|
| 1 | C |  | <<open-palmed hand clap>>                                   |
|   |   | <i>dhī::ḥ</i> <i>ji ltar chos can zer</i> [-s] (3.8) | " <i>Dhīḥ</i> , the subject, just as Mañjuśrī [debated it]" |
|   |   | [mantra]                      just as subject-QT     |   |
| 2 |   | byed pa'i    phyir zer [-s]                          | [it says] "because of doing"                                |
|   |   | do-NZR.GEN because-QT                                |   |
| 3 | D | °byed pa'i    phyir°                                 | <b>because of doing?</b>                                    |
|   |   | do-NZR.GEN because                                   |   |
| 4 | C | 'm (2.9)   | mm  |
|   |   | (backchannel response)                               |   |
| 5 | D | byed pa'i    phyir    yang na                        | <b>because of doing, or</b>                                 |
|   |   | do-NZR.GEN because or                                |   |
|   |   | bskyes pa'i    phyir                                 | <b>because of generating?</b>                               |
|   |   | generate-NZR.GEN because                             |   |

6	C	byed byed do do	do, do
7	D	<b>byed pa'i phyir</b> do-NZR.GEN because	<b>because of doing?</b>
8	C	byad pa po byed (4.4) doer do	"do" [as in the word] "doer"
9	D	<b>°byed pa'i phyir° (1)</b> do-NZR.GEN because	<b>because of doing</b>
10	C	ya phyir (1.3) (taunt)	<i>ya phyir</i> [taunt] <sup>4</sup>
11	Cs	YO::: PHYI:::R (taunt)	[taunt chanted by all but defendant]

The challenger suspects that it was the fragment's first syllable that has tripped the defendant up, so he generously enunciates it for him twice in line 6, /ceè ceè/ (orthographic form: *byed*). The challenger distinguishes this syllable from a similar sounding one, /cɛɛ/ [*byas*]<sup>4</sup>—an important distinction, because several other lines in the same part of the book do end in *byas* [/cɛɛ/] *pa'i phyir*, rather than *byed* [/ceè/] *pa'i phyir*). Even with the first syllable clarified, the defendant doesn't have it easy, because there are still *several* lines that end in *byed pa'i phyir*, any of which could be a candidate for the right source clause, the one the challenger has in mind. The defendant can't seem to recall *any* of them, though, which leaves the challenger no other choice but to fire off the evening's first taunt. In line 10, the challenger cues all the monks in the room to deliver a booming *yo phyir*—a canonical taunt that belongs to debate's register. (In terms of this taunt's stereotypic pragmatic function, it is used for failures of memory and tends to be hurled when the defendant dithers or delays too long [see Lempert 2012a].)

The taunt doesn't help. The defendant remains stumped, so the challenger feeds him another morsel, a hint consisting of two more syllables: "*sbyong bar byed pa'i phyir*" (because of doing the training . . .). Twice the defendant thinks he's got the right line and rattles it off, but each time the challenger bats down his guess, then calls in another booming *yo phyir* taunt from the crowd. *Still* stumped, the defendant, who now sounds frustrated, asks the challenger a confirmation-seeking question: The line *is* drawn—as it ought to be drawn—from the *General Commentary*, right? (*spyi don red pa*). Indeed, it is, the challenger reassures him, and then offers another hint, this one more substantial: "through the method of exchanging" (*brje ba'i tshul gyis* [*sbyong bar byed pa'i phyir*]). This jogs the defendant's memory. At last he cites the source clause correctly.

The test of the defendant's memory is not over, however. Once the source clause has been identified and quoted, the challenger then asks him to name the section title that houses that line, and once that is named, he asks for all the other, lateral section titles (so that if there are, for example, four sections and the defendant has just named one, he would need to name the other three). The challenger continues to drive the defendant "upward" through the book's hierarchically dense outline: "From where does [that] stem?" (*ga nas 'phros pa*), he asks repeatedly, in this way goading the defendant to climb "up" the textbook's scaffolding. The defendant names the superordinate section that houses those subsections, moves up to the next higher tier of sections, and so on, until he summits the text, assuming a high ground from which he can stare down upon the source fragment that started the debate.

In this initial phase of debate, then, the challenger spurs on the defendant and taunts him when he delays or slips up. Still, he tends to remain collegial and even helps the defendant from time to time. The whole tenor of the interaction at the outset of debate differs from that of the argument phase, when consensus ends and debate proper begins.

A glimpse at debates on the other end of the age and formality spectrum reveals a similar concern with painstaking but collegial consensus building at the outset. Below is a snippet of a daily courtyard debate between two monks at Namgyal monastery in Dharamsala, India. The defendant is a plucky preadolescent monk who could not have been older than ten, and the challenger was about two years his senior.

- |    |   |   |  |
|----|---|---|--|
| 1  | C | kha dog la dbye na ga tshad yod<br>color-LOC/DAT divide-COND how many AUX   | if [you] divide colors, how many are there?  |
| 2  | D | <b>KHA DOG LA DBYE NA GNYIS YOD ZER [-s]</b><br>color-LOC/DAT divide-COND two AUX-QT  | <b>if [you] divide colors, it is said there are two</b>  |
| 3  | C | gnyis med par thal<br>two AUX-NZR.LOC/DAT follows<br><br>gnyis zhog<br>two posit.IMP  | it follows that there are <i>not</i> two.<br><br>posit the two!  |
| 4  | D | <b>a:: gnyis-</b><br>(filled pause) two-<br><br>gnyis med par thal<br>two AUX-NZR.LOC/DAT follows<br><br>gnyis po de bzhag rgyu med pa'i phyir lab dgos red<br>the two-DET posit-NZR AUX-NZR.GEN because say need AUX | <b>uh two-</b><br><br><i>[you] need to say, "It follows that there are not two, because there is no positing of those two [in the text]"</i> |
| 5  | C | bzhag rgyu med pa'i phyir<br>posit-NZR AUX-NZR.GEN because  | because there is no positing   |
| 6  | D | <b>rta:::gs ma grub</b><br>reason NEG-established   | <b>[that] reason [is] not established</b>  |
| 7  | C | bzhag rgyu yod par thal<br>posit-NZR AUX-NZR.LOC/DAT follows  | it follows the positing [of those two] <i>does</i> exist   |
| 8  | D | <b>'do::d zer [-s]<sup>5</sup></b><br>accept-QT   | <b>[I] agree</b>   |
| 9  | C | gnyis po de zhog<br>the two-DET posit IMP   | posit the two!   |
| 10 | D | <b>rtsa ba'i kha dog dang</b><br>root-NZR.GEN color and<br><br><b>yan lag gi kha dog gnyis chos can</b><br>branch-GEN color two subject   | <b>the subject, primary colors and secondary colors</b>  |

Monks in the early stages of the curriculum begin debates by reviewing key definitions and divisions found in the texts, material they have committed to memory. It is only review, but the challenger—and this is typical—treats it superficially like an argument. He makes it seem like an argument by using the consequence idiom of argumentation when he asks the defendant to recount material from the book. The challenger first argues that such-and-such a textual definition or division *doesn't* exist—which of course is patently false, since they both know it's in the text; they should already know it by heart. (In turn [4], the defendant reminds the challenger that he needs to do this.<sup>6</sup>) The challenger's denial prompts the defendant to disagree. Which spurs the challenger to then reverse his position, which the challenger does by then asking the defendant to confirm that such-and-such definition or division *does* exist (In 5). Now the defendant can agree with this proposition, and does (In 6). The challenger then asks the defendant to state the definition or division (In 7)—a test of his memory. The defendant does this, and while the challenger does not do it here, it is common to repeat back what the defendant just said. In this manner, the monks get a chance to practice the consequence idiom of argumentation while reviewing memorized material. Whatever the pedagogical motivations for this phase of debate may be—to

test the defendant's memory, to give monks a chance to improve their fluency in the consequence mode of argumentation—in effect, this initial phase works in a manner analogous to formal debate defenses: Challenger and defendant dialogically recall what both share and hold dear. They coconstruct consensus on doctrinal tradition. The first phase of debate, brief though it often is, thus consists of a phase in which challenger and defendant join hands in paying deference to what both should revere and accept: the college's textbook and its warren of definitions and divisions—material that they memorize and are tested on in other contexts. The 'textbook' (*yig cha*) literature consists of Tibetan sub-subcommentaries on canonical Indian Buddhist works but are enormously important in the Geluk curriculum (Cabezón 1994; Dreyfus 1997; Dreyfus 2003).

Once consensus is established, debate's plot takes a tragic turn. Tragic, in the sense of "peripety," the chiasmic, counterdirectional turn that Aristotle counted as an ingredient of tragedy. The challenger turns against doctrine, shattering the coherence he just helped create. He threatens doctrinal integrity and holds the defendant responsible for any harm done to it. As the defendant tries to mend text, the challenger does not extend a hand or encourage him. Instead, he hurls taunts and fires open-palmed hand-claps that resemble stylized physical strikes. In a detailed case study of a debate defense from Sera Mey (Lempert 2005, 2012a), I tracked proxemic shifts (how far challengers stand from the defendant) in relation to taunt density and other cross-modal patterns, to show how, after the initial phase of consensus building, challengers problematize what the defendant says and drop any attempt to appear polite or cooperative. Deference never resumes, and debates end without compromise or a return to consensus. Biphasic in structure, debates thus move from consensus to dissensus. As for the defendant's handling of this tragic turn, he looks—or should look, anyway—majestically unflappable, a demeanor projected through such methods as a conspicuously nonresponsive uptake when provoked, and through such prosodic moves as speech-rate "decelerations" when responding to the challenger.

### Debate Redistributed

Debate's drama—its plotline of consensus building and deference toward doctrine and defendant, the way that collapses tragically, the defendant's unflappability—seemed familiar to me, reminiscent of tensions I sensed outside debate's perimeter. As fieldwork progressed, I wondered whether this practice might involve, to some degree, a condensation of tensions around me, tensions that concern attachments to a monk's college.

Sera has two 'monastic-colleges' (*grwa tshang*), Sera Jey and Sera Mey, and in many respects the two seem equal and solidary. If one takes the words for Sera's "parts," the names for its major administrative units, it is easy to imagine the monastery as if it were one neat hierarchically nested whole: Jey and Mey are both glossed as 'colleges' (*grwa tshang*), after all, colleges that fit within Sera, the 'monastic seat' (*gdan sa*) that houses them, and this makes it easy to think that the colleges are kin and get along. Sera's visual landscape and built environment seemed to confirm this. I could see little signage distinguishing the two colleges and no conspicuous fences or walls to separate them. The debating courtyards are located rather far from each other, but many Jey and Mey buildings are hard to tell apart and often neighbor each other. A general assembly hall (*lha spyi*) draws together monks of both colleges from time to time, for special events, and it is not as if monks broadcast their ties to Jey or Mey through legible clothing or other emblems of group identity. Plus, Sera has just one main circumambulation route that monks of both colleges follow, murmuring mantras while clicking off their prayerbeads, accumulating merit as they walk along it.



The colleges often seemed to me like equal members of a single, harmonious corporate body, Sera, but I quickly learned that the monastery is just as riven by division. Administratively, each college has its own abbot (*mkhan po*), disciplinarian (*dge skos*), financial officer (*phyag mdzod*), and so forth. Each has its own debating courtyard, assembly hall, set of regional hostels where monks live, library, publishing house, secular schoolhouse, general store, restaurant, and telephone center. Despite being under the same roof, the colleges seem at pains to be autonomous, so much so that Dreyfus (2003) has suggested that the English gloss of *grwa tshang* as 'college' is misleading, that it is better to call Jey and Mey "monasteries" in their own right.

A monk's allegiance to his college matters. I chose to conduct research at Mey and felt the consequences immediately. On my first visit I casually dropped news to a senior Mey monk that I planned to visit Jey's library. It would be a "sin" were I to go there. Mey's library is "better," I was told flatly. As for consumption, food is to be eaten at one's own restaurants, goods purchased from one's own general store, and so on, so that there is little doubt about where the best *momo* (steamed meat dumplings, a traditional delicacy) are to be found—a question I once posed to a ten-year-old Mey monk, who gave me the name of a Mey restaurant and stood nonplussed when I asked whether this meant that Jey lacked good *momo*. An adolescent monk next to him responded on his behalf: "There's no need to go to Jey restaurants. There are [already] Mey restaurants" (*byes kyi za khang 'gro dgos ma red / smad za khang yog red*). In a phone center I frequented, I wondered why I kept bumping into people I knew from Mey until I realized the obvious: this was a Mey center.

When I asked monks about the basis for Sera's corporate division into two colleges, the answers I got, at least from the well socialized, had to do with doctrine. The colleges exist because doctrinal differences exist. Their differences were said to be enshrined in the textbooks of Jey and Mey's respective curricula. Both colleges belong to the Geluk sect, which traces descent to Tsongkhapa (1357–1419), the sect's founder, but Sera Jey and Mey college uphold and teach monastic 'textbooks' (*yig cha*) written by different authors who were contemporaries in the mid-15th and early 16th centuries. (This commitment to different monastic textbooks across college lines is not unique to Sera. Tellingly, the same is true of each of the three major Geluk monastic seats in south India—Sera, Drepung, and Ganden. Each monastic seat has two colleges, and each of the two colleges follows different textbooks, even though some of these textbooks are shared by colleges of *different* monasteries [e.g., Sera Jey uses the same textbook as Ganden's Jangtse-college located in Mundgod, India].) So each college is said to rest on doctrinal foundations, yet these foundations are chronically threatened by a neighbor who follows a different textbook.

Within each college and outside the ritual environment of the debating courtyard, monks defer to texts in body and speech. In every modality they "care" for the textbook literature as well as for the canon of authoritative Buddhist literature. In one assembly hall, the Buddhist canon and the collected works of Tsongkhapa were set at the furthest reaches of the room and on the highest ledges. As for bodily hexis, monks handle books of such caliber with delicacy. If the books are of the traditional, long, unbounded sort, they wrap them neatly and snugly in auspiciously colored fabrics—orange, yellow, gold, or red—when not in use, and they touch them to the crown of their head when they delicately set them back on their shelves. When in use, they take care not to bend corners or mar pages, and if they must write in the pages to aid study, they prefer to use pencil and keep the marks faint. This care of texts extends to content, naturally, which monks commit to memory and often cite in debate. The ability to quote texts fluently and accurately in debate is a valued skill, for should a monk's memory fail him—should he forget a key definition or conceptual distinction—it can be perilous. Most monks begin their days with memorization and end their days reciting what they've memorized. Mnemonic practices figure prominently and memorization exams occur at all stages of the monastic curriculum.

So monks cultivate care toward books, both in terms of embodied habits toward the books' material status as text-artifacts and in terms of content—their textuality. Expectedly, there is an official hermeneutics of retrieval that applies to the content of the entire corpus of authoritative Buddhist works. This corpus includes not only one's college's textbook literature, but also doctrine attributed to the historical Buddha and to revered lineage masters like Tsongkhapa, the founder of the Geluk sect. The propositional content of all such works is frequently said to hang together. Superficial contradictions exist, sure, but these can be resolved and an underlying coherence found. This is not just an idiom of deference, a polite word monks learn to say about received doctrine. It is consistent with how they debate, because one will not hear defendants blatantly contradict their textbooks in public—especially not in formal debate defenses—and one type of taunt hurled at defendants even thematizes the departure from what the texts say. That taunt goes, “[you] contradict text, [you] contradict scripture”! (*dpe cha dang 'gal / phyag dpe dang 'gal*). As the challenger fires the taunt's first part, the back of his right hand slaps his open left palm, as if his open palm were the open page of a book. As he delivers the second part, he switches hands and repeats the gesture, the back of his left hand slapping his open right hand. This is one of the most incendiary taunts in the challenger's arsenal.

When it comes to the textbook literature, then, a literature that assumes enormous importance in each college, monks should accept what it says, although it is perfectly fine to poke at imperfections in the neighboring college's textbook. (Of course, the occasional maverick monk will risk being contrarian with his own college, but one cannot overstate the commitment expected toward a monk's own textbook.) These practices are by no means of a piece, but all this care and cultivation of attachments toward text—through bodily hexis, through mnemonic practices, exams, and citation, and through an official hermeneutics that talks as if all authoritative books were cohesive—helps sediment a kind of “textual ideology,” a caption we may use for a congeries of semiotic practices that overdetermine group-relative beliefs about text and textuality. I do not suggest that these practices “reflect” such an ideology, as if this ideology were something underneath and prior to these practices. They simply make it easy to feel as if received Buddhist doctrine has an aura of inviolable “integrity” and “wholeness.”

I could feel this aura intensely and often at Sera, because it came from a monk's habitual care of texts, but there was something unnerving about the way the monastery seemed to threaten the very textual ideology it inculcates. Curricular texts that anchor each college seemed chronically under threat by neighboring colleges that uphold a different textbook (and though I cannot delve into this here, this neighbor is a rival in respects other than just doctrine, to boot). Which means that if the textual ideology is threatened during debate—and it is, because the challenger critiques received doctrine—and if the defendant fails to save doctrine, the whole college may feel the threat. This explains why a defendant's poor performance is not only bad for him as an individual whose career very much depends on his capacity to debate well. It might even cause the college to shudder. “[T]hese scholars know,” remarks Dreyfus, “that any doubt they express publicly about the orthodoxy of their school or even of their . . . [college's] . . . manuals will be taken as attacking the overall value of these institutions and their legitimacy” (2003:319).

If we draw these observations together and relate them back to debate's design, it would seem that the textual ideology and the institutionalized threat to it posed by the division into two colleges together set up debate's performativity as a “rite of institution,” as Bourdieu might put it, a rite that in broadest terms tends to “consecrate and legitimate an *arbitrary boundary*, by fostering a misrecognition of the arbitrary nature of the limit and encouraging a recognition of it as legitimate” (Bourdieu 1991:118; cf. Bourdieu 1996:102–115). Bourdieu focused on elite schools in France and the reproduction of state nobility by means of rites like examination, training, isolation, and selection, all of which distin-

guished and naturalized stratified differences among categories of social actor. Debate does help distinguish monks from lay peers, and elite monks who study philosophy from those who do poorly in the philosophical curriculum and who end up doing monastic labor and service, yet my concern here is with what debate does for the college, and in turn for the monastic university. Sera has “placed” debate right at the center of fierce centripetal and centrifugal forces, those that try to bind the monastic-college to its curricular texts, others that divide and rend the college and hence risk undermining the integrity of the monastery as a whole. Debate’s plotline involves a biphasic movement from consensus to dissensus, which, in a way, seems to recapitulate within the ritual proscenium, at a smaller scale, tensions from debate’s surround (although I hasten to add that this is no simple case of “reproduction,” as I clarify below). By design, debate asks the defendant to act out “stability” and “reunification” in the middle of doctrinal division and dissension. In this respect, the defendant enacts in demeanor what he aspires to do in terms of text, that is, to present himself as doctrinal tradition *ought* to be: stable, immutable, whole. If successful, the defendant appears as a cross-modal figure (a figure made up of several semiotic modalities, not just of language) of and for doctrinal tradition’s “stability,” or more dynamically, its “re-unification.”

Debate is thus a ritual site in which challengers threaten doctrinal integrity so that this integrity can be maintained. (In the ritual literature, this is a familiar irony. Recall Gluckman’s [1954, 1963] classic notion of “rituals of rebellion,” where ritual expressions of societal tension mitigate the risk that “real” outrage will erupt outside the ritual proscenium, thereby ironically preserving societal cohesion.) Because the texts under debate are typically—at least during the early and middle stages of the curriculum—the college-textbook literature, a literature that the monastic-college claims as its foundation, this stability has implications for the college. The defendant’s unflappability spreads by default to the college, “stabilizing” it in turn.

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What permits this “upward” movement in scale, where it seems possible to move from the defendant’s stability to doctrinal stability to the stability of the monastic college? In the Durkheimian imagination, the steps upward were remarkably few and the movement effortless. Lift your foot and you could leap to the social. In *Primitive Classification*, for instance, Durkheim and Mauss (1963:11) famously argued that the “classification of things reproduces . . . [the] . . . classification of men.” They found cultural classifications that seemed to diagram a group’s structure (diagrams, wrote Peirce, “represent the relations . . . of the parts of one thing by analogous relations in their own parts” [1932:157]), and took this to be evidence of the social. Durkheim and Mauss have been faulted on a number of grounds and the critiques of functionalism are too familiar to be repeated here. As Needham (Durkheim and Mauss 1963:xix) long ago recognized, there is no reason to assume a one-to-one correspondence between social morphology and cultural classification, and in stating that the “classification of non-social things ‘reproduces’ the classification of people,” the term *reproduces* “immediately assumes that which is to be proved by the subsequent argument, viz. the primacy of society in classification” (Needham 1963:xiv). Nor did it help that they neglected to examine the formal properties of signs, so that we are never quite sure what motivates the diagram (why *these* particular signs and not others? [see Parmentier 1997; Silverstein 1981; Urban 1991]). Contemporary scholarship on ritual in linguistic and semiotic anthropology has responded well to this last failing, often demonstrating how the formal patterning of signs in ritual events diagrammatically models features of context in a bid to reproduce or transform it (Keane 1997; Parmentier 1997; Silverstein 1981, 2004; Tambiah 1981; Urban 1990; Wortham 2001).

Seldom has adequate attention been paid to the question of how diagrammaticity is registered and stabilized for a social domain of people, however. Instead, we move brusquely from the close analysis of a ritual text to some analytic reconstruction of the ritual's "context," as if there were nothing in between. As with the old but still alluring functionalist trope of "reproduction," we are invited to imagine a scalar divide between small-scale event and larger scale context, between ritual and the social, and this trope would have us slide effortlessly from one to the other, as if no labor were required and no intermediate steps existed. Rather than be taken in by ritual's scalar magic or reject it as illusory, we need to explain what motivates this cross-scale diagrammaticity, what stabilizes the diagrammatic tie, and for whom and under what conditions diagrammaticity is felt at all. Although I cannot inventory here all the conditions that afford and stabilize debate's diagrammaticity, I have moved elliptically around the debating courtyard to identify a few prominent features of Sera's discursive landscape without which debate would have no scale-jumping ability at all.

By disaggregating the assemblage of discursive practices that make up Sera's landscape, it becomes easy to see just how distributed and heterogeneous the conditions and materials and practices that afford debate's performativity are. These range from materials like text-artifacts and built environments like courtyards, to practices like quotidian acts of deference to books and scheduled memorization exams. Debate's scale-jumping effectiveness depends on it first being perimeterized and delicately "placed" in relation to a congeries of other discursive practices that conspire to overdetermine what it does as a rite of institution. By "placement" I mean the varied efforts to set discursive practices off from and in relation to other discursive practices, to array and coordinate these practices, the very effort of which invites us to imagine some relational field *in which* these practices operate, and in relation *to which* it becomes natural to ask what some focal practice "does" with respect to this surround. Placement is as fraught an endeavor as any. There is no guarantee of success, nor should we exaggerate the cohesiveness and integrity of the relational field that results. The result is not some closed paradigmatic set of discursive practices (e.g., where discursive practices acquire meaning in contrastive opposition to other practices, like differentially defined sound distinctions in an old structuralist vein [Saussure 1983]).

Is this surveying of debate's placement at Sera simply a quotidian exercise in providing a "context," to put it colloquially, for face-to-face interaction? Indeed, this exercise in reconstruction could be as unproductive as Searle's (1975) in his classic essay on so-called indirect speech acts, "cases in which one illocutionary act is performed indirectly by way of performing another" (1975:60; see also Lempert 2012b). Searle had presented an example of a "rejection" (1975:61) that is performed but not denoted: (1) *Student X: Let's go to the movies tonight*; (2) *Student Y: I have to study for an exam*. Searle reasoned that indirect speech acts were divisible into two acts, a nonliteral "primary" act and a literal "secondary" act, and at a certain moment he decided to inventory the steps with which hearers might "derive" the primary from the secondary. Ten in all, his steps were a heterogeneous mix of things, from inferential processes to pragmatic presuppositions to "mutual background information" (Searle 1975:64). Searle never let this exercise disturb his blinkered commitment to sentence-sized units as the preeminent site for the study of linguistic performativity, but disturbing our commitment to the boundaries of interaction is precisely what I intend here. It is an exercise in redistributing the local (Latour 2005). Whatever attraction a rhetoric of scale may have had for the construction of interaction as an object, scale should remain an empirical question. Which means that there is no inherently scaled object called "the interaction order." By inverting the gestalt and foregrounding the background, the labor that goes into the placement of educational practices like debate becomes visible and the natural boundaries of interaction fade.<sup>7</sup>

Is debate's placement not just another neat case of fractally recursive "reproduction" (as Durkheim and Mauss suggested), where one set of distinctions is reiterated at a higher or lower scalar order (Irvine and Gal 2000), like the rippling out of tiered concentric circles from a pebble tossed into a pond? On inspection we can find imperfections that make debate a poor picture of its surround; or, more accurately, we can discover surplus materials in the surround that may alter a monk's sense of what debate does as a rite of institution:

- The challenger–defendant role-relation is not perfectly homologous with the Jey–Mey relationship (i.e., challenger : defendant :: Jey : Mey), because the colleges are *symmetrical* (they are structured similarly and share the same rights and obligations) while challenger and defendant are *asymmetrical* (or, rather, they are only symmetrical in the way mirror-image opposites are).
- The threat posed by a neighboring college's doctrine is periodic, not constant; it has a calendrical metricality to it, spiking especially during events like the scheduled intercollegiate *Rigchen* debates.
- Monks from each college cultivate attachment toward their college's textbook literature, especially during the foundational years of their philosophical training, but they do *share* some literature with their neighbors, like works by the sect's founder Tsongkhapa. The care of books and the hermeneutics that views these works as cohesive do not apply only to the college textbooks. This suggests that debate does not always and everywhere reproduce the distinction between Jey and Mey.
- The signs that would have monks see Sera as a solidary, corporate whole (the words for Sera's parts, the inconspicuous signage, the presence of a shared assembly hall and circumambulation route, etc.) do not necessarily exert the same force as those that incite division, which means that Sera does not feature some elegant, static equilibrium between unity and disunity.
- Not all forms of division at Sera are doctrinal, for some play out in terms of patronage and consumption, while others play out—literally—on the soccer field (quite a few monks engage in clandestine soccer matches, despite the fact that soccer is forbidden). Doctrinal grounds may be cited by the well socialized as the foundation and matrix for all other intercollegiate divisions, but monks do not always and everywhere feel this way.

This list of imperfections could be multiplied, and I list these not as empirical exceptions to an otherwise tight fit between ritual and the institutional surround into which ritual has been placed, but as reminders that we need to distinguish the impossibly clean, sharp lines of diagrammaticity as experienced by participants and as reconstructed by analysts from the ragged, uneven assemblages of practices and materials that conspire to establish a place for interaction and make it a predictable rite of institution.<sup>8</sup>

### Debate Rescaled

Debate's placement and scalar reach are not settled facts. In the decades following the Dalai Lama's dramatic flight from Lhasa to India in 1959, debate has expanded in ways that suggest its involvement in a project of diasporic subject formation, a project informed by ethnonationalist concerns and globalizing liberal ideals. When I first studied the primers on logic and dialectics in Dharamsala, where the Dalai Lama resides, I did so (as a layperson) at Ganden Choeling nunnery; a basic course had started there and I was granted permission to take it. I later discovered how extraordinary a development this

course was, for Geluk nuns had historically not pursued debate-based philosophical study. This, I learned, was part of a broader movement in which debate-based inquiry was being promoted to monasteries that never had it before. Namgyal Monastery, the Dalai Lama's personal monastery, founded by the Second Dalai Lama (1476–1542) was established anew in upper Dharamsala in Himachal Pradesh, next to the Dalai Lama's compound. Debate-based study was introduced for the first time in the early 1970s. In the southern Indian town of Hunsur, not far from Sera, stands the Lower Tantric College, and there, too, debate entered its curriculum; the Lower Tantric College's predecessor in Tibet lacked it.

Asked about the spread of debate to a neighboring Nyingma monastery, a sect that has traditionally not privileged the practice, a Geluk lama from Mey credited the Dalai Lama.

da de nas rgya gar la slebs nas rgyal ba rin po che bka' gngang pa red pa / dgon pa sgang gar mtshan nyid blta yas tog tsam tog tsam sbyong gi 'dug ga

Now, after that, after having arrived in India, the Precious Conqueror [the Dalai Lama] offered advice, right? At all monasteries, [monks] are [now] learning by studying philosophy a little bit, right?

And as he continues:

sku mdun gis ga dus yin na'i gngang gi yog red.bka' slob / dgon pa chung chung de tsho a ni mtshan nyid tog tsam sbyong dgos gi 'dug zer [/s/] / mtshan nyid sbyang yas de gdan sa'i grwa pa gcig po'i las 'gan ma red zer [/s/]

The Exalted Presence [the Dalai Lama] is constantly offering [this] advice. [He says], "These small monasteries need to study a bit of philosophy. The study of philosophy is not the responsibility of the monks of the [Geluk] monastic seats alone."

Since Geluk monks study philosophy through debate, invocations of philosophical study mean debate-based philosophical study by default. (The two are virtually inseparable for the Geluk sect, because debate in India has not been widely conceptualized as a method that can be applied to non-Buddhist content, despite periodic proposals by the Dalai Lama to do just this.) This Geluk lama went on to note that the Lower Tantric College in the town of nearby Hunsur introduced debate as well—again, because of encouragement by the Dalai Lama. And an instructor from that Nyingma monastery I interviewed echoed the same point. It had been at the Dalai Lama's urging that they adopted debate into their curriculum.

Monks credit the Dalai Lama for debate's expansion, and indeed, the spread of debate does need to be understood in relation to his refashioning of Buddhism into a religion of "reason" compatible with modern empirical science and distinct from monotheistic religions like Christianity and Hinduism, which are said to rely on faith alone (Lopez 1998, 2002, 2008). In public addresses to Tibetans in India, the Dalai Lama has argued repeatedly that Buddhism's path of reason cannot be limited to the clergy any more. As the Dalai Lama has acknowledged and harped on at times, few monasteries in Tibet taught doctrine well. Even in the renowned Geluk monastic seats of central Tibet, Sera, Drepung, and Ganden monasteries, rigorous philosophical training was pursued only by the few, perhaps as few as ten percent. The Dalai Lama has tried to counter this in exile and expand the scope of this education. In an early talk to teachers delivered in Dharamsala on 28 January 1964 (Gyatso 2000:67), for instance, he exhorted his audience to integrate religious and secular instruction. Religious instruction must mean more than parroting what scripture says. Students must think, and think critically: "In saying 'the Lama and Buddha are great sources [of truth]' and so forth, without stating any reasons whatsoever, there is the danger of stabbing ourselves at some point with our own knife."<sup>9</sup>

Buddhism is said to differ from religions like Christianity for the way it eschews 'blind faith' (*rmong dad*), and Tibetans in exile must be especially vigilant to avoid blind faith, the Dalai Lama argues, because if challenged by those with competing truth claims—which presumably happens often in exile—Tibetan refugees would be mute, unable to respond and at risk of losing their patrimony. They may end up converting. The ability to respond, to defend Buddhism as if one were a defendant testing his mettle before a challenger, is a capacity that all Tibetan refugees need to cultivate. For decades the Dalai Lama has argued that Tibetans cannot afford to rely on religious habits inherited from their parents, popular religious practices like mantra recitation, prostrations, the spinning of prayer wheels. In a talk from 1964, for instance, he conceded that difficult works of Buddhist philosophy will remain opaque to all but scholars, but elementary reasoning (e.g., the "three modes" of logical proof, which refers to the "criteria that a correct sign must satisfy" [Perdue 1992:38ff]) ought to be studied by all. The curricula of all Tibetan Buddhist centers of learning—monasteries and nunneries, and all sects, not just the Geluk—should offer at least some philosophical study; even secular Tibetans schools should introduce students to the rigors of Buddhist reasoning. This objective of mass Buddhist philosophical education has not been realized in India, but the debate-based philosophical curriculum has spread to more Buddhist educational institutions than ever before.

Debate has not merely spread or expanded, though. It has been "rescaled," in the sense that the effort has not been to reach quantitatively more of the same category of social actor but broader categories, ideally all Tibetan refugees. In this project of making educated persons, debate-based learning exemplifies Buddhism's commitment to reason and is promoted as a way to "stabilize" diasporic subjects against the challenges of exile. Debate is rescaled as a diasporic pedagogy.<sup>10</sup>

This does not mean that monks routinely experience debate as a diasporic pedagogy (any more than they routinely experience debate as a practice that stabilizes doctrinal tradition and in turn their monastic college). It means that changes in debate's placement and in accompanying discourses about critical rationality in Buddhism invite monks to envision a new upper limit for debate's performativity. These changes motivate a more expansive diagrammaticity in which debate can now be imagined to "stabilize" the defendant qua diasporic subject against the challenges of exile, steeling his identity for an eventual return to the homeland. This new framing of debate builds on, rather than replaces, debate's effect of "stabilization"; debate still stabilizes, only now the subject stabilized is a generalized diasporic subject, not a monk associated with a particular monastery or monastic college. Debate's "stabilizing," reproductive force is hence no longer trained exclusively on a college or monastery or sect, but also on Tibetan Buddhism tout court, Tibet's patrimony. This rescaling—the sense that we have zoomed out, so that debate now functions "in" a more expansive surround—is an achievement. It is an achievement motivated by discourses that talk in new ways about debate and the need for reason in exile, and by forms of placement that put debate in sites that have historically lacked it. In terms of placement, debate tries to escape the orbit of the Geluk monastic seats of old, aspiring to reach Geluk tantric colleges, nunneries, small monasteries that had previously offered just training in prayers and rituals, monasteries of other Tibetan Buddhist sects that tended to eschew debate. This attempt to cross old divides invites Tibetans to think that this discursive practice must really be meant for a *broader* category of subject, a diasporic subject. Its expansion in placement helps figure an expansion in scale.

Rescaling, in brief, is a precarious semiotic accomplishment, facilitated by reflexive activity (e.g., new ways of talking about debate) and by accompanying acts of placement (e.g., dissemination of debate to places that never had it before). Should rescaling succeed—and we should not assume success, just as we should not assume success to last—if, that is, Tibetans feel that debate *has*, indeed, become a crucible in which a diasporic

subject steels himself against the challenges of exile, then this alters the sense of what debate, as a whole, does. This explains the fluency with which a senior Mey monk I once interviewed, a renowned scholar and ex-abbot of the Mey college, told me how debate is invaluable because it makes a monk's knowledge of Buddhism 'firm' (*gtan po*), and then added that Dalai Lama has been promoting the practice in India precisely for this reason. Debate stabilizes knowledge under the unstable conditions of exile.

I close with these notes about the changing place of debate in a project of diasporic subject formation to underscore the vagaries of interaction's scale—all the more reason that scale should not be settled in advance (Latour 2005). Against Goffman's scaling of interaction, which argued that "[w]hatever is distinctive to face-to-face interaction is likely to be relatively circumscribed in space and most certainly in time" (Goffman 1983:3), many have tried to escape the limits of "the interaction order" but often in ways that continue to presume, rather than investigate, what the scale of this abstraction called interaction is.

To investigate scale as an emergent dimension of sociospatial practice is not to presume that every practice *has* a scale (or scales), just one that is emergent, rather than given, like the mercurial definition of an action that gets worked out locally and over time by participants, as interactional sociolinguists and conversation analysts like to say. Despite the inexhaustible scalar complexity that can (nb. a potential) be discovered and exploited, there is no guarantee that scale matters—in the sense of being *registered* by interactants in some respect or capacity and pragmatically *consequential* in discursive interaction. My interest here in the emergent dimension of sociospatial practice has not been with evanescent scaling practices among interactants but with highly institutionalized scaling practices, "projects of scaling," we might say. Such projects cannot be illuminated by close readings of transcripts that are then placed in some reconstructed surround, because that would leave us where we started, stuck on a see-saw that alternates between event and context, ritual and the social, interaction and society. It would preserve interaction's diminutive size and modularity and fail to make interaction's placement and scale objects of study. It would settle scale in advance.

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## Notes

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1. Here Moore rejects actor-network-inspired writers like Marston et al. (2005) who use Latour to argue that geography needs to drop its scalar, hierarchically nested spatial ontology in favor of a "flat" one. As noted above, Latour himself is not against scale per se but merely advocates "indifference" to it as a matter of method.

2. Although the scalar prefixes *micro-* and *macro-* invite us to think of scale in terms of hierarchically nested "levels," this is only one sense of scale. As the geographer Howitt (1998) has suggested, several senses need to be distinguished: "size," "level," but especially what he takes to be the oft-neglected sense of "relation." There is no place here to sort through the varied uses of a rhetoric of scale by those who study interaction. In some contexts, scalar distinctions at least purport to serve methodological ends (e.g., where one opts for longitudinal strategies of data collection or forms of sampling that cut across tiered categories of social actors, in contrast to or in conjunction with, say, forms of narrow transcription and close analysis of discourse). Some of these methodological invocations of scale seem to have a shibbolethic ring, in the sense that they appear to be designed as



responses to critics who presume that research on interaction has nothing to say about things like the state or class or political economy.

3. Tibetan orthographic transcription is presented on the left using the widely used Wylie (1959) transliteration system, while free translation appears on the right. For vocalizations such as filled pauses and backchannels, these are given rough orthographic approximations, such as *a* for [v:] and *'m* for [ʔm]. A few transcription conventions have also been added to the orthographic line to capture phenomena relevant to interactional analysis, namely: “:” = lengthening; “° . . °” = lower volume than surrounding/immediately prior talk; CAPS = increased volume; *italics* = rapid speech articulation rate; “(. . .)” = pause length; **bold** = used to set off the defendant’s speech; “[. . .]” = author comment/annotation. I use square brackets in the orthographic transcription line to indicate cases where the orthographic *zer* (‘say’) is actually a quotative clitic -s (see Lempert 2007)]. D = defendant and C = challenger. Abbreviations used for grammatical glosses are as follows: ACC = accusative; AUX = auxiliary verb; COND = conditional; CSQ = confirmation-seeking question; DAT = dative; DET = determiner; GEN = genitive; IMP = imperative; LOC = locative; NEG = negation marker; NZR = nominalizer; QT = quotative clitic. Thanks to Losang Thokmey for transcription assistance.

4. The vocalization *ya* (in *ya phyir*) is a response-cry and not a variant of *yo phyir*. For this taunt, which is designed to be chanted in unison by a crowd, the lead challenger typically leads slowly with *yo:::*, and hence cues others to join in. On this occasion, however, he cues the crowd through a response cry followed by the *phyir* of *yo phyir*.

5. For the significance of the defendant’s use of the quotative clitic on ‘[I] accept/agree’ (‘*dod*’) responses, see Lempert 2007.

6. We may note here how the defendant seems eager to show off his competence, as suggested through his increased volume in his response in line 2, lengthening in his responses “the reason [is] not established” (ln 4) and “[I] agree” (ln 6), and his lightning-fast repair leveled at the older challenger (ln 2); one doesn’t typically correct those senior to oneself. I had set up my video recorder and tripod and was standing nearby, taking notes by hand. It may be that he was performing partly for me.

7. This move has empirical and conceptual consequences that I cannot develop here. Methodologically, for instance, this expands the number of data points that demand attention. Conceptually, it adds spatial and scalar parameters to the study of interaction while raising questions about how spatially dispersed sites of interaction come to operate together, how this organization is institutionalized, how interactants perceive these associations, and so forth.

8. This is akin to the way one must distinguish “text” from “text-artifact” and “interactional text” from “discursive interaction” (Silverstein 1997; Silverstein and Urban 1996).

9. “rgyu mtshan gang yang ma brjod par bla ma dang / sangs rgyas rtsa ba chen po yin zer ba sogs byas pas nam zhig rang gri rang la ‘dzugs nyen yod” (Gyatso 2000:68).

10. This is not to suggest that this framing of debate is a direct effect of the Dalai Lama’s discourse, as if this were merely a case of discourse “circulation”—even though this kind of unidirectional model of discourse circulation is what many Tibetans seem to suggest when they defer to the Dalai Lama as the prime mover in all modernizing reforms.

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